

From the South Florida Business Journal:

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Sussman donates \$15M to kickoff expansion of Miami Jewish Health facilities

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Businessman S. Donald Sussman donated \$15 million to Miami Jewish Health to kickoff a major campus expansion.

The nonprofit has obtained approval for an expansion of its campus at 5200 N.E. 2nd Ave in the Buena Vista/Little Haiti neighborhood with 977,283 square feet of new buildings. The first part will be a parking garage to handle the growth, followed by a 99-bed, 142,708-square-foot memory care center called the S. Donald Sussman EmpathiCare Village.

Miami Jewish Health President and CEO Jeffrey Freimark said the garage will break ground in the first quarter of 2018. He'd like to raise \$50 million to build the EmpathiCare Village, and Miami Jewish Health currently has raised \$25 million for the project. Freimark said issuing tax-exempt bonds to finance the project is also an option.

He said he hopes to open the EmpathiCare Village in 2020.

"Certainly, Mr. Sussman's gift is transformational for Miami Jewish," Freimark said. "The entire goal of the master plan is for us to be able to provide the highest quality of care for seniors in what is an ever-changing health care environment and



The S. Donald Sussman EmpathiCare Village planned at Miami Jewish Health.

to service those who are most in need. There is a tsunami of baby boomers aging and many are struggling with dementia.”

A Fort Lauderdale resident who was raised in Miami Beach, Sussman is the founder and chief investment officer of Paloma Fund, a board member of Carnegie Hall, ProPublica, Emily’s List and the Center for American Progress.

Sussman said he was introduced to Miami Jewish Health by one of his mentors, Judge Irving Cypen, a major supporter of the organization. His mother, who is 100 years old, is a patient of Miami Jewish Health VP for behavioral health and clinical research Dr. Marc Agronin.

Sussman said he read Agronin’s books on empathic care for seniors with dementia and decided to help the doctor put those ideas into practice at the new EmpathiCare Village.

“It’s natural there would be a center like this in Miami,” Sussman said. “It will bring the focus of both care and research to Miami. This is a man [Agronin] with a tremendous amount of insight into the disease and how best to treat it and how to have patients live a fruitful life even while living through this.”

Agronin, who has been at Miami Jewish Health since 1999, said the EmphthiCare Village would allow people with cognitive issues to live in a homelike setting with more freedom of movement. Instead of being confined to their rooms most of the day, they could visit community settings such as a cafe, gardens, a town center, a theater and a spa.

“It is important to have a care model that enables everyone in the setting to understand not only the patients' needs and limitations but also their strengths,” Agronin said. “So we work on using empathy to improve the way we care for people.”

Agronin said Miami Jewish Health would conduct research on the empathic care model to measure its effectiveness in comparison to more traditional methods. A grant from the Wolfson Foundation is funding that research.

Other elements of Miami Jewish Health’s long-term expansion plan include:

A five-story, 140-room hotel of 104,000 square feet for relatives of patients.

A 104,000-square-foot conference center in five stories.

A five-story institute of 184,704 square feet.

An 11,638-square-foot welcome center.

A Village Bistro of 7,012 square feet.

A summer garden building of 18,512 square feet

A creative art center of 4,316 square feet.

The plan was designed by C.C. Hodgson Architectural Group. Miami Jewish Health was represented by attorney Iris Escarra in the application.

“This project is significant because it is serving an important segment of our population,” Escarra said. “With the number of aging baby boomers and the rise in diagnosis of dementia, having a research institute and a place like the Miami Jewish Health System that is state of the art will be a tremendous asset to our community. The facility has been designed so it will fit in with the surrounding community where it has been a good neighbor for 75 years.”

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