



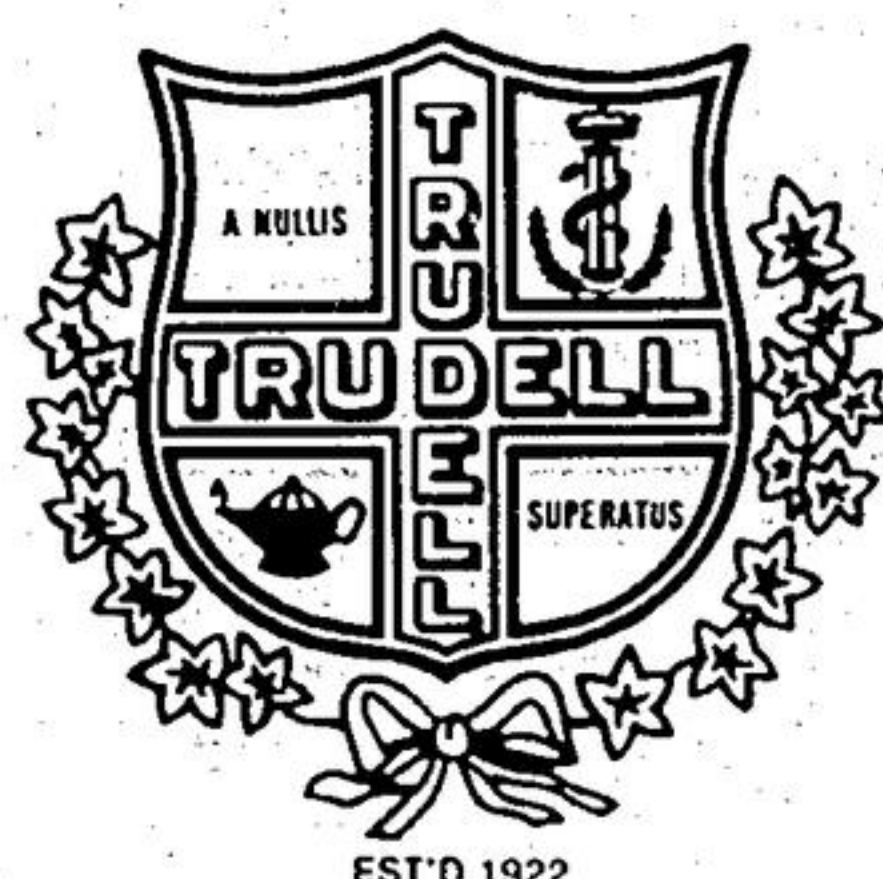
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A milestone was achieved when the Markham Stouffville Hospital opened its doors to the community.

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John Carinci, R.R.T.
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Kids check out the scene

Julie Caspersen
Staff Reporter

Children should visit a hospital first as a visitor, then as a patient.

Every Friday, through the pre-opening phase, Markham Stouffville Hospital opened its doors to local students, letting them become familiar with an environment that can be very scary for a sick youngster.

"We're providing an opportunity for our youth to become familiar with the hospital in a non-threatening way," Lisa McKeen, Director of Community Relations Department said.

Doors to labs are opened, doctors and nurses are approached with questions and equipment is touched in this hospital visit taken by a healthy child.

"Students are able to explore the entire hospital, from the kitchen to the loading docks to the emergency room, McKeen said.

Before the hospital opened, children, up to 300 every Friday, had a chance to see people out of uniform.

A cook tests recipes in the industrial-size kitchen, which McKeen said is the place which children find most interesting. And a kitchen is a place a child would associate with their own environment, giving them a link with family and home.

Now, when the hospital is empty of patients, Kindergarten to Grade 8 students visit the pediatrics unit where they test the electric beds and can try out the nurse call system they'll be using in the event they are admitted. In the birth place they can see where their baby brother or sister will be born.

"Our goal is to create a comfort level within the surroundings of the hospital.

Hopefully this will diffuse the fear associated with a hospital visit," said McKeen.

The opening of the hospital won't put a damper on these weekly journeys. In fact, it will add an educational benefit to the familiarizing tour as children can look at an X-ray being taken, watch a cast be plastered on a broken arm and squint through a microscope to see a real specimen squirming on a slide.

And children are acquainted with the emergency unit, probably the most terrifying environment for people of all ages.

When a child suffers from a sudden high fever or breaks a bone, he or she won't be thrown into a strange, hectic place - they'll already have seen it from a visitor's point of view not colored with pain and confusion.

Older students are given a more complete tour, taking them through the diagnostic imaging, radiology and pharmacy departments.

McKeen is preparing a mobile portion of this open-door program where information and pictures are shown to groups, such as Brownies and Guides, clubs and schools.

People who can't physically take a tour can get a taste of the new facility through a slide show to be taken to places such as seniors' homes.

"By the hospital's opening thousands and thousands of people will have been through here," McKeen said. "They'll get a taste of our commitment to provide more than health care in the community."

The hospital was built by and for the community, and should be looked at as more than a hospital but as a familiar and friendly place in Markham.

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 the Markham Stouffville Hospital
 and all who contributed towards
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 that it is.*

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