

“I’m so proud that we were able to make this wall a reality. It perfectly captures the spirit of love and inclusivity that makes our Family Birthing Center such a special place for patients, families and staff.”

—Jennifer Wray, MSN, RN, NE-BC,
Clinical Manager, Family Birthing Center

The Journey Through Life Starts Here

Community
Support Helps
New Families

Every year, more than 1,200 babies and families begin their journeys together in the Mother-Baby Unit at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital. Each of these stories is a miracle, and that was certainly the case with the arrival of Mackenzie de Guzman on March 11, 2021.

Just two days before this healthy baby girl entered the world, her mother, Michelle Moshier, received a frightening diagnosis of breast cancer. Instantly, the future she and her wife, Alexandra de Guzman, had envisioned for their family was turned upside down.

Unsure if the cancer had spread and how bad it might be, Moshier was admitted to the Birthing Center immediately, and Mackenzie was born at 38 weeks. “From the moment we walked in, everyone at the hospital understood what was happening and how stressed we were with other parts of our lives,” Moshier recalls. “But they didn’t poke and prod—everyone was calm and supportive.”

That attitude helped the couple find their own sense of peace, and Moshier says the six hours of labor and delivery were trauma-free. “Alex and I made a conscious decision that having a baby was a moment we really needed to enjoy,” she recalls, “and it was not to be overshadowed by cancer.”

A week after Mackenzie’s birth, Moshier began chemotherapy at Sentara Martha Jefferson. Thankfully, today she is cancer-free, and little “Kenzie” is thriving.

Art Celebrating Life

As chance would have it, just as Moshier and her family were navigating the difficult start to their journey together last fall, the Martha Jefferson Hospital Foundation was mounting a permanent art installation celebrating love and family at the entrance to the Mother-Baby Unit.

Curated by obstetrics nurse-turned-photographer Meredith McKown, the installation features portraits of seven families who began their journeys at Sentara Martha Jefferson. Inspired by the power in the story of Michelle and Alex, the Foundation team asked if they would be willing to be included in the exhibition and were thrilled when they graciously agreed.



Alexandra de Guzman (left), Michelle Moshier (right) and baby Mackenzie enjoy a happy moment together.

“It was important to have that image,” Moshier says. “It was a very thoughtful gesture for us, that we were a good candidate for the wall.” In the lovely portrait, her short hair is the only clue that the happy family had recently endured a challenging ordeal.

Their portrait and the others in the installation surround a sea of turtles, inscribed with the names and birthdates of children born at Sentara Martha Jefferson. Families inscribe the turtles by making a gift to help underwrite the hospital’s mother-baby programs and extend the circle of care that binds us as families and as a community.

To reinforce the theme, the word “love” is inscribed in multiple languages, simultaneously celebrating both the diversity and the commonality of Sentara Martha Jefferson’s community, as well as the hospital’s commitment to caring for all who enter its doors.



Family Birthing Center nurses celebrate the hospital's new "love wall" installation.

"Just about every mother who enters this unit comes down this hall first," says McKown, harkening back to her 16 years as a nurse helping babies and families at Sentara Martha Jefferson. "We wanted to show families that all are welcome here."

Making a Difference for Families in our Community

Support for the baby wall makes possible a suite of programs serving mothers and babies, including rocking chairs, prenatal classes and educational resources for obstetrics nurses. As maternity team coordinator, Laura Salvatierra manages many of the maternity programs, which fall primarily into one of two categories: educational classes and support groups. The classes include offerings such as childbirth prep, breastfeeding support and family CPR. The support groups are aimed at new mothers and parenting support that is inclusive of both partners.

Salvatierra likes to say that she gets to welcome people to the hospital and make sure that when they walk out the door, they know they can come back for support. "This is a unique role that most hospitals don't have," she says, noting the program goes back more than 30 years. "We represent a lot of that community connection that just doesn't exist in other hospitals—especially for moms and babies."

For McKown, the baby wall installation is a gift to her former colleagues on the maternity ward, an homage to the families who begin their journeys at Sentara Martha Jefferson, and a celebration of the intimate and enduring connections between family and community.

"Healthy, loving communities create healthy, loving families," she says. "And healthy, loving families create healthy, loving communities."

For their part, Michelle and Alex are proud to have their family's journey commemorated on the wall, and to share their appreciation with the Sentara Martha Jefferson team members who helped them get through two major life events simultaneously.

"I think about it a lot," says Moshier. "The fact that there was so much positivity surrounding a potentially negative and traumatizing experience speaks to the care they provide. We are very grateful for the team at Sentara Martha Jefferson."



Mothers and babies benefit directly from the generosity of families who honor a child's birth by inscribing a turtle on the hospital's love wall.



Photographer Meredith McKown's experiences with her own children informed her vision for the love wall. "Turtles represent a journey that's very enduring and lasting, just like our journey with our children," she says. "And the thing that connects it all is love."

Welcome your baby with love. To honor a beloved child in your life, please add a turtle to our wall with a gift of \$250 or more. Visit mjhfoundation.org or call us at 434-654-8258 for more information.