'It's fabulous': Public gets first peek inside WMU medical school during community open house

KALAMAZOO, MI – For 40 years, James C. Breneman worked with Homer D. Stryker at Borgess Medical Center, sharing coffee each morning when the two doctors started their day.

So, as he and his daughter completed a tour Saturday of the new medical school in downtown Kalamazoo that bears Stryker's name, Breneman said he couldn't help but wonder what his old friend would have thought of the $68 million facility.

"It's fabulous," Breneman said of the Western Michigan University Homer D. Stryker Medical School, which was opened to the public Saturday for a community open house. The event came two days after the medical school's grand opening.

"When I went to medical school, it was nothing like this," said Breneman, who worked as a physician for more than 50 years and co-authored a book about Stryker with former Kalamazoo Gazette reporter Dave Hager. "I think Homer Stryker would be so flattered ... He would've just glowed thinking this was in his honor."

Breneman and his daughter, Lisa Reed, were among about 850 people who attended Saturday's open house.

They were greeted by the facility's brand new atrium and were able to take both guided and unguided tours of the of three of the building's seven floors.

The medical school was made possible by a $100 million donation from Stryker's granddaughter, Ronda Stryker, and her husband, William Johnston, a WMU trustee. The building where the school is now located was donated by William U. Parfet, who is CEO of MPI Research and the great-grandson of Upjohn Co. founder W.E. Upjohn, after whom the campus is named.

"I think people are just amazed by how modern it is," said Laura Eller, spokeswoman for the medical school.

Eller said the new building has proven to be "a great learning environment" and "a place where students want to be" already for the 54 medical students who began attending classes on Aug. 18.
"This is their home," Eller said.

Eller said the new facility, which is located at 300 Portage St, gave school officials the opportunity "to design the building around the curriculum."

That curriculum, Eller said, is patient-focused and centers on teamwork and collaboration among medical students.

The facility features, among other things, a virtual hospital with several rooms, including an operating room and a trauma room on its lower level. The rooms are equipped with technology and mannequins so that students can experience different simulations as part of their training.

For example, Eller said one of the mannequins, known as Sim Man 3G, is able to speak, yell in pain, sweat or even vomit. His eyes also dilate, she said.

There's also a virtual clinic where medical students will work with what Eller called "standardized patients," who have been hired by the school to act out different scenarios in a clinical setting.

Additionally, the medical school has a digital library that currently boasts 60,000 medical journals and 15,000 books and is one of the fastest growing digital libraries among medical schools in the country, said Liz Lorbeer, the library's director.

"It is a terrific learning facility," said Hal Jenson, founding dean of the medical school. "People can see the building ... but the curriculum is just as exciting.

"I think this is really an incredible part of the legacy of Homer Stryker and W.E. Upjohn to continue their focus on patient care," Jenson added. "That's in our DNA. That's a great legacy to build on."

Kai Jackson, who toured the new facility Saturday with her three children, said she was impressed by what she saw. "It's wonderful that Kalamazoo has a medical school," she said.

"I think it's wonderful that someone from the Kalamazoo area ... has a place within their community that they can aspire to be educated in," said Jackson, who works as a behavioral specialist at Milwood Magnet School. "I just think it's great.

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