

Image Is Everything

By David Winkler Schmit

Doctors Imaging Services offers state-of-the-art technologies to health care patients in New Orleans



Gregg Soll, Shea Soll and Dr. Edward Soll

While restoring all aspects of health care is critical to our region's recovery, too often the conversation is focused only on reopening public hospitals. These hospitals are essential, but what about private entities such as outpatient services, which can prevent hospital stays? Doctors Imaging Services, a state-of-the-art diagnostic center, is a prime example of a privately owned company that has dramatically added to the quality and accessibility of health care in the New Orleans area.

Construction on the diagnostic center was originally to have begun in early September 2005. After Katrina hit, Dr. Edward Soll, a renowned local radiologist



and an owner of Doctors Imaging Services, could have stopped the project, but Shea Soll, Dr. Soll's son and the company's CEO, says that option was never considered.

"Our immediate thoughts were to start construction as soon as possible," Soll explains. "We felt the Greater New Orleans area was in critical need of new and advanced imaging capabilities."

When the center opened in last June, the metro area started receiving the benefits of these "capabilities."

The center can handle up to 160 patients per day and houses two Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) systems, a 64-slice CT scanner, digital X-ray and 3D/4D ultrasound for expecting mothers. Shea Soll says there is no other provider that brings all of these latest technologies under one roof, adding that there are other advantages to outpatient centers.

"If not for outpatient centers like Doctors Imaging Services, all patients requiring MRI, CT or other imaging exams would have to depend on hospitals," Soll says. "While most major hospitals are well equipped, they also have a tendency to be inefficient and more costly."

Efficiency is a key priority of Doctors Imaging Services. As soon as an exam is completed, the images are transmitted electronically to one of the center's staff radiologists, who interprets the study. For most studies, test results are reported to the patient's doctor within a few hours. This goes a long way in terms of relieving a patient's concerns over the test's outcome. The sooner, the better.

Patients can sometimes become anxious about the test itself. Most MRI systems require the patient to lie flat in a closed system, which can cause anxiety. In order to relieve this stress, the center employs two MRI systems, the Ultra High-Field 3T MRI and the C-shaped open MRI. The 3T MRI is extremely fast, so patients spend far less time in the system, and, as Dr. Soll puts it, it "produces unparalleled image detail, especially for neurological and orthopedic evaluation."

The C-shaped MRI is for obese or claustrophobic patients and is highly effective with children, who might be frightened by the closed system. Since the system is open, Dr. Soll explains, the patient is never alone during the exam, allowing for a combination of technology and human touch.

"Just as important for pediatric and severely claustrophobic patients are personal care and the ability to allow a loved one to sit in the room and hold the patient's hand," Dr. Soll says. "Whether it is a child's

parent or one of our staff, that TLC goes a long way to help a patient."

In terms of saving lives, the center's 64-slice CT scan is one of its best assets. Dr. Soll considers the scan "one of the greatest advancements in decades for the evaluation of cardiovascular disease." By using the scan, which takes a large volume of photos and essentially freezes the motion of the heart, radiologists are able to evaluate a patient's risk for a major coronary event. Unlike a conventional angiogram, which requires intravenous anesthesia and a minor surgical procedure, the 64-slice CT scan is noninvasive, takes far less time than a conventional angiogram and costs about 80 percent less than the traditional procedure.

Doctors Imaging Services has invested more than \$10 million in the innovative technology and the center's construction. As Shea Soll sees it, however, the center is more of a contribution than a cost, and demonstrates the kind of economic endeavor vital to our area's resurgence.

"Communities are built by people, and private investment is essential to the rebuilding process," Soll points out. "We have made a substantial and significant investment in our community, hoping to help people and more specifically, patients and doctors who expect and deserve the best." ■