

THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CARPENTER

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Carpenters Help Make Kaiser Innovation Center Pay Off For Patients

Kaiser Permanente asks questions.

What's the most effective way of arranging an operating room for the best possible result? What's the best way to set up a patient's room to facilitate the care that only family and friends can provide? How about home care—how can we use technology to connect patients with their care providers from the convenience of their homes?

Those and many other questions are asked and answered every day at the Kaiser Permanente's Garfield Innovation Center, a one-of-a-kind living laboratory in San Leandro where Kaiser staff, with the help of carpenters and other union trades workers, get to try new ideas, make mistakes and fix them before applying them at health care facilities across the country.

BUILDING PROTOTYPES

At the Garfield Center, carpenters and other experts build prototypes of operating rooms, laboratories, labor and delivery units, emergency rooms, family waiting rooms, radiology facilities, medical offices, home environments, nursing stations and more. Kaiser staff then uses the spaces to test workflow patterns and technology, among other things.

Here, you can see the hospital rooms of the future—for example, rooms with large-screen monitors where patients can talk to family members or caregivers on Skype. They've even built a prototype of community medical clinics that are now located in shopping malls.

"Carpenters help take these prototype spaces from cardboard walls to fully mocked-up spaces where Kaiser Permanente can innovate and problem-solve in a safe environment before deploying ideas and new technologies in the clinical setting. That is important work," said Northern California Regional Construction Superintendent Len Skalin, Local 152.

Lately, carpenters have been at work at the Garfield Center framing up and building a model bathroom that will inform the way Kaiser Permanente builds bathrooms in its medical centers. With very little maneuvering room, the design uses high ceilings and stylish sinks and faucets to give the feeling of spaciousness.

"The hardest part of this job is demolition in a small space where it gets pretty loud, especially when you're using the grinder," says Gauvain Bactad, Local 713. "The enjoyable part is that you get to see the finished product and know that you're helping to improve the care Kaiser Permanente provides."

KEEPING ON SCHEDULE

The challenge, says Skalin, is to "keep the project on schedule, when we're working with new and unusual finishes that are sometimes hard to get, longer than expected lead times to get unusual products, and keeping the work moving. The secret on a job like this is putting together a good team of subcontractors and suppliers with experience with cutting edge and innovative material and building techniques."

General foreman Glenn Oxenford, Local 713, adds, "We do it all. We get to work with all aspects of the trade from framing and drywall to hanging doors. I love coming to work every day. It's nice to take something old and make it new, and get the reaction from staff and even patients who see what we have done."



Foreman Glenn Oxenford and journeylevel carpenter Gauvain Bactad, both Local 713, get ready to hang a door at the Kaiser Garfield Innovation Center. Photo by Richard Bermack.



Superintendent Len Skalin, Local 152, checks out plans for an experimental bathroom at Garfield Center. Photo by Richard Bermack.

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