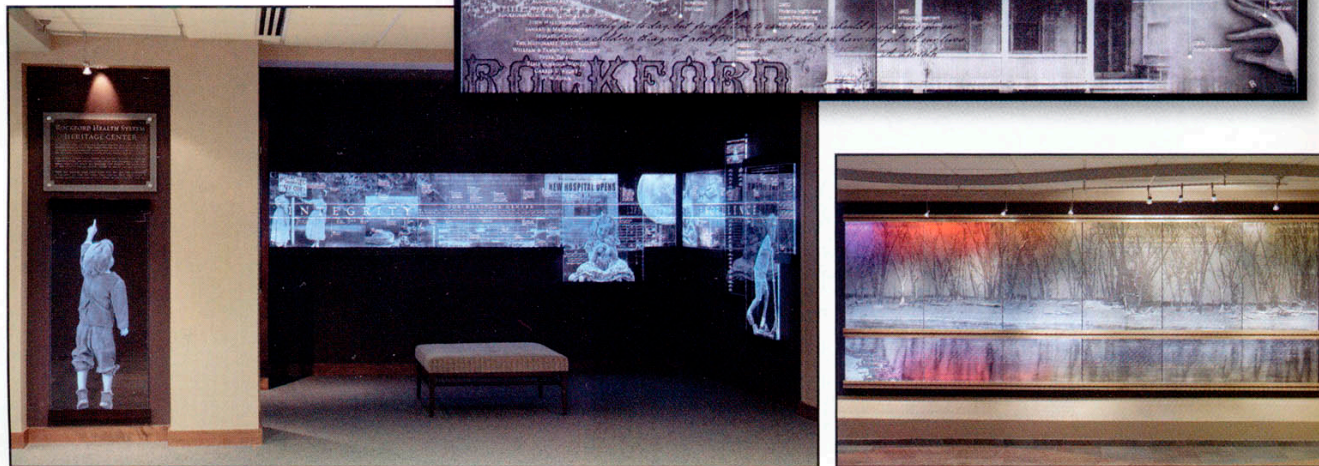


NOTE: Wallach Glass Studio is now AMRI STUDIO.

It continues under the leadership of principal and lead designer Christina Wallach Amri.

## THE ART CORNER

# Welcome to our history



INTERVIEW WITH **HELEN BROOKS**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ROCKFORD MEMORIAL FOUNDATION, AND **CHRISTINA WALLACH**, WALLACH GLASS STUDIO • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **NELS AKERLUND**

**H**ow do you translate a 120-year-old hospital and its proud community tradition into terms that are meaningful in the 21st century? That was a question that the Rockford Memorial Development Foundation and its executive director Helen Brooks faced, having received a surprise bequest of \$2.6 million. The “surprise” was the source of that bequest, a nursing office employee named Helen Howell who had served the Rockford Memorial Hospital in Rockford, Illinois, quietly and reliably for decades before her death in 1997. Brooks and the lobby planning committee saw this as an opportunity to transform the cramped, unsupportive hospital lobby into a welcoming, comfortable environment complete with fireplace, coffee bar, and player piano. Its centerpiece would be a three-sided Heritage Room done in the edge-lit, carved-glass medium established by the Wallach Glass Studio (see “Expressing Gratitude in Glass,” *HEALTHCARE DESIGN*, November 2003, pp. 111-112). Highlights of the hospital’s past, concurrent medical

history, and important historical dates in general are carved into glass, juxtaposed, and brought to three-dimensional life by the Heritage Wall. What follows are comments on the project by Helen Brooks and Christina Wallach, lead designer of Wallach Glass Studios.

**Wallach:** We were honored that a medical community asked us to help take the time, effort, and budget to honor their history in this unique fashion. It was Helen Brooks’ idea. She knew that they wanted to do a history display, but with none of those boring groundbreaking shots everyone has seen hundreds of times.

**Brooks:** I’ve always loved Christina’s work. She has a rare combination of creativity and practical-mindedness. Before initiating this project, she spent time talking with a wide range of people—the building committee, physicians, nurses, auxiliaries—soaking up our history. We already had a written history, and alumni of our nursing school—which operated for 100 years before closing in 1989—had maintained

a collection of memorabilia, including old nursing uniforms and numerous photographs. Christina selected from these the elements that would be highlighted in the Heritage Wall.

**Wallach:** We scanned photos and articles from newspapers, expanded them into a large presentation format, and carved the text and photos in layered, 3-D fashion. We incorporated elements of medical history to give a feeling for how things have changed over 100 years. Also, three area children served as models to represent the spirit of the child who inspired so much community care and was so important to Rockford’s history.

**Brooks:** One of the children represents Freddy Griffin, who in 1883 was hit by a train and tragically died because local medical resources were lacking. This was the incident that gave the hospital its start. Another image is of the so-called “1950s girl,” celebrating the transfer of the hospital to its current campus in 1954. Finally we have a boy on a scooter riding off into an exciting future. These images are actual size and draw viewers in from across the lobby.

**Wallach:** An important source of the history we drew from were members of the women’s auxiliary, some of them former nurses well into their 90s. At one point during installation, we gave them a preview behind the plastic curtains, and one—a former head of nursing—began to cry, saying she was touched that we were honoring a piece of her history in this way.

**Brooks:** Part of the wall honors the tradition of philanthropy that has sustained this hospital for 120 years. We highlight the names of donors to the original hospital, as well as the names of our “Honorary Triumvirate”—one or two award winners named each year for their philanthropy, volunteerism, and commitment to excellence. A separate donor wall around the corner from the heritage area honors all those who have given \$10,000 or more to the health system. **HD**

For further information, phone (503)488-5638, e-mail [office@amristudio.com](mailto:office@amristudio.com), or visit [www.amristudio.com](http://www.amristudio.com).