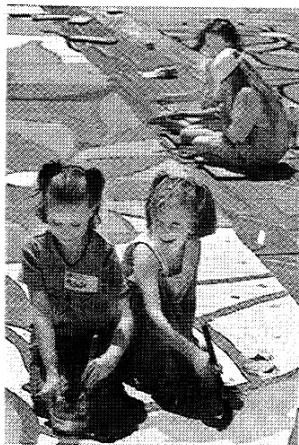


# THE Press DEMOCRAT

SUNDAY, MAY 2, 1999



MARY GARDELLA/PRESS DEMOCRAT

*Michelle Scovill, 7, left, whose leukemia is in remission, Saturday paints with buddy Zoe Wachs Bel at Sutter Medical Center in Santa Rosa as part of an art project for kids all too familiar with hospitals.*

## Kids' art therapy to be monumental

### Sutter patients paint for 'Project 9865'

By MIRIAM SILVER  
Staff Writer

They painted with a healthy vigor, despite years of chemotherapy, respiratory ailments or a half-dozen recent operations.

About 75 children who had spent time in the hospital with serious illnesses or disabilities spent a few hours painting outside Sutter Medical Center on Saturday, adding their acrylic and latex swirls to a canvas that will someday be a panel on the "Project 9865" pavilion.

Project 9865, named for its street address, is a 165-foot-tall abandoned oil tower in downtown Beverly Hills that will become a memorial for seriously ill children and their families.

"This gives them a friendly environment associated with the hospital," said creator Ed Massey of Los Angeles, an artist and children's book author who conceived the project four years ago.

With lime green paint spattered on his shorts, and a dab or two on his hands,

4-year-old Josh Gernert of Ukiah was done with his contribution.

"Now I want to paint a round piece," he said.

Josh just completed 3½ years of chemotherapy for leukemia that was diagnosed when he was 18 months old. The longer the cancer stays away, the better Josh's chances are, said his mother, Trudy Gernert.

"He's doing great," she said. "It's scary. You are just worried that it's going to reoccur. It might get easier the longer it stays gone."

Part of what helped get Josh through the ordeal, said his mother, was the support of his big family — a half-dozen of whom were with him painting on Saturday.

Josh was surrounded by his 8-year-old and 15-year-old brothers, an uncle, two aunts and his grandmother.

"This is a great thing for Josh to be a part of. And something else the rest of the family can be involved in and it's positive," Trudy Gernert said.

Project 9865 was the brainchild of Massey, who had spent a lot of time reading to hospitalized children. For the past year,

Massey, his brother Bernie, a writer who also works in art therapy, and their crew

have been traveling to hospitals up and down California, inviting children and their families to paint yellow, lilac, green and pink flowers. The drawings will be assembled on polyvinyl and fiberglass panels, and hung on the tower in the fall, along with a plaque with each one of the children's names.

Some 4,000 children and their families are expected to have participated when the project is completed, said Massey. A public artist with outdoor works in big cities all over the country, Massey used to drive by the gray eyesore in the middle of this country's most expensive real estate and came up with the idea of the painted children's tower.

"We are going to re-create this tower into a very vibrant monument," he said.

With a specially designed paint brush on an extension pole, 7-year-old Jenny Rogina leaned from her wheelchair, and painted lilac inside the outlines of a big flower petal. The Rohnert Park girl was a premature baby who spent the first three months of her life in intensive care. She had spinal meningitis, a brain abscess, hydrocephalus and cerebral palsy, said her mother, Debbie Rogina.

While Jenny does not walk and cannot sit up, her mother said her right arm is good,

*See Kids, Page B3*

*Continued from Page B1*

"and the little girl was laughing and smiling as she painted with the help of someone else guiding the pole.

"I like painting. I always do. I usually do this in kindergarten," Jenny said.

Austin Calos, almost 4, and his brother Brandon, 6, happily kneeled down on the canvas as their mother, Cindy Calos, showed them where to paint.

Austin's strep infection in February spread to his hip, placing him intensive care for a month, and he was hospitalized several other times, going through a total of 10 surgeries to drain the infection, said his mother.

But, it was good to come back to Sutter on Saturday. "It is so nice to see all the staff that has helped us through this and for him to see them in a different capacity," said Cindy Calos of Windsor.

"I felt so honored to be asked to come and do this," she said.

It had been five years since 15-year-old David Silva spent time at Sutter Medical Center when it was Community Hospital for complications with his cystic fibrosis.

"Our insurance changed," he

said. But, coincidentally, painting right next to him was Marian Hamann, the nurse who took care of him.

"The kids are the easiest parts to remember," said Hamann, who came to paint with her own two children.

Sandra Dalton of Santa Rosa brought her two children, Kevin Taylor, 8, and Samantha, 5. Kevin has been in and out of Sutter with respiratory ailments.

"I am really pleased they are honoring not only the child that goes to the hospital, but the siblings who have to deal with their lives being disrupted," she said.

Michelle's Scovill's leukemia is in remission, and the 7-year-old has six more months to go with chemotherapy, said her mother, Theresa Scovill.

Her daughter was hospitalized when she was 5, and had always been made very comfortable, her mother said. She came back to paint with her best friend, Zoe Wachs Bel, who also has spent time in the hospital.

"They've known each other since they were 2. They've bonded so well. They've been through illnesses together, which is real special," said Theresa Scovill.

Information on Project 9865 can be found at the nonprofit agency's Web site: [www.project9865.org](http://www.project9865.org).