

Brother's brain injury inspired Centre for Neuro Skills

By Kelly Lopez

With over 30 years of history treating patients with mild and traumatic brain injury, Centre for Neuro Skills (CNS) is not only a Bakersfield institution, it is a world-renowned rehabilitation clinic that offers hope to individuals who seek healing, recovery, and a return to independence.

CEO and founder Dr. Mark J. Ashley, Sc.D., CBIST, started CNS in Bakersfield in 1980, after a devastating family event altered his life forever.

His brother, Steve, suffered a brain injury at age 21 that left him completely disabled. Conventional medicine and a shortage of long-term care gave Steve little hope for resuming a normal life.

"My brother was our first patient," Dr. Ashley said. "His recovery became a model for our philosophy and practice. I was a part of Steve's journey, and I witnessed first-hand the unique physical and emotional needs he had."

Basic living skills, independence, using his voice, movement and behavioral issues all needed to be addressed. But getting such treatment was tough. That all changed with the opening of CNS in Bakersfield, where the company is headquartered.

"Steve needed to be treated with aggressive and innovative therapies," Dr. Ashley said. "Most of all, he had to find a source of positive motivation."

That source and spirit underlies the CNS treatment model to this day. It resonates in the four clinical centers located in Bakersfield, Dallas, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.



Centre for Neuro Skills President and CEO, Dr. Mark Ashley at the new CNS Bakersfield Clinic

The occupational, educational, physical, speech, counseling, and cognitive therapies are what Dr. Ashley believed was needed for Steve - and all people with brain injuries.

In March of this year, the success of this patient-centered treatment was celebrated when CNS opened a new clinic in Bakersfield.

At 25,000 square feet, it is twice the size of the old clinical facility, and is one of the most striking buildings in the city.

Located at 5215 Ashe Rd., the facility features an exterior waterfall, a curved modern entrance, a new gym, patient pool, education center, therapy rooms, and offices.

"The building was relatively new but never occupied, so we designed it specifically for our population," said Stephen Katomski, CNS

manager of construction and development, who oversaw the year-long design and construction.

From the peaceful entrance to the lush landscaping, the building reflects a distinct corporate style. CNS' brand promise, "The Bridge to a Meaningful Recovery," is referenced in the arched design touches throughout - a metaphor of journey and connection.

CNS programs include an inpatient component for patients in active rehabilitation, which focuses on re-learning basic living skills lost as a result of the injury. Called CNS Innovations, the program offers long-term care options including assisted living, supported living, day activities and

respite care at all locations.

The Bakersfield inpatient component is housed in a specially-renovated residential complex owned by CNS - just two miles from the new headquarters. Residents who've been through hospital treatment learn self-care, home skills, health and wellness, and enjoy day enrichment activities - all with 24-hour supervision.

Much of the company's success stems from a highly-educated, experienced staff. The majority has graduate degrees and a combined expertise company-wide totaling 2,900 years of working in the field. A patient's independence is a common theme that all therapists strive for.

Public awareness of brain injury has grown over the years and CNS is at the forefront of advocacy. Dr. Ashley is a national leader in the effort to educate the public and change policy toward brain injury. He has testified before Congress, calling for appropriate funding for treatment and fair insurance coverage.

"I'm most proud of the impact we've made in people's lives," Dr. Ashley said, "watching our patients go from complete dependence to returning home, working again, and rejoining their family is very gratifying."

- Kelly Lopez is the Public Relations/Communications Specialist for Centre for Neuro Skills. More at neuroskills.com