Sick patients could get some cheer from Luna and Sakari when the new John R. Oishei Children’s Hospital opens later this year.

The polar bears at the Buffalo Zoo will be among the animals that children at the hospital will see through live webcams from their rooms.

It’s part of a series of digital enhancements that patients and their families will have access to when Women and Children’s Hospital moves from its Bryant Street location to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. Other upgrades include new info-tainment systems and digital mosaics.

Behind all those goodies is Cletis B. Earle, vice president and chief information officer for Kaleida Health, which operates Women & Children’s Hospital. A Brooklyn native, Earle was recruited to Kaleida last May from St. Luke’s Cornwall Hospital in Newburgh, where he served in the same role at that facility since 2011. He began his IT career as a support manager at Brooklyn Queens Health Care Inc., eventually taking on roles as technology director, vice president and chief information officer within that organization.

Earle spoke to the Buffalo News recently about changes in store for the new hospital, how patients will be able to send messages directly to their care providers and why he believes technology will give the hospital a ‘wow’ factor.

Q: What have you had to do to prepare for this new hospital?

A: We're putting in completely new infrastructure. We're putting in new computers, new hardware, new wireless solutions throughout, new computers on wheels. All these different types of solutions that you will see in a cutting-edge facility. We pride ourselves on that. ...

Q: Tell me about the plans for the new "info-tainment" system.

A: If you've been to hotels recently, you'll see that sometimes you go into the hotel and you look on the television and it will say "Welcome." We'll provide that same concierge kind of experience for patients. ...

What's one of the biggest things on kids’ minds? Games. We're really pushing a solution to our customers, our children and their parents, that they will be able to have an interactive experience once they walk into the hospital.

Q: How will you accomplish that?

A: We'll have televisions all throughout the hospital. Digital mosaics – when you first walk in, you'll see some huge screens that will be interactive collages that will be available to our patients. That will be on walls. In some cases, they will be interactive so the kids will be able to see different paintings from different types of artists from all over the world. They will be able to interact with those paintings just
basically by touching the screen and going through the different solutions that are there. It's a digital mosaic. That will be the major area on the first floor and entry way.

Throughout the hospital, particularly in the patient rooms, you'll have these interactive systems which are the info-tainment systems. You'll first come in, and the TVs will welcome you. It would also allow you to have access to your care team, actually on the video. No longer will you be confused, 'who is my doctor or nurse?' Right now, we have wall boards that do that. But now they'll be able to, at the click of a button, see exactly their care team, their pictures and all the issues associated to the care team. It's actually through a pillow speaker. This is a type of remote control that controls your beds, as well as your television. That's going to be really exciting.

Q: What else are you doing different?

A: We are doing some things with Zoo TV and the Buffalo Zoo. We're also going to have the ability for children to watch the animals – digital video of the animals at the zoo. It's a webcam, but the system will scroll through the various high-definition animal feeds that we have at the zoo. They will literally be able to see the polar bears. You can't do that right now at the current hospital.

The zoo is going to put on public education sessions. The children will be able to watch the education sessions while they're actually in their room so they can see and have an experience of a certified educator at the zoo that is giving a class to people actually at the zoo. They can have the same experience at Oishei Children's Hospital. All patients will have the accessibility for that interactive as long as they're staying at the hospital. Anybody will be able to access, once they're in children's hospital, the Zoo TV via WiFi through some type of mobile device.

I've seen some of the feeds and when the facilitator at the zoo is working the camera, they can zoom in right at the nose of the animal. We're really excited to partner with the Buffalo Zoo and making this Zoo TV project become a reality at Oishei Children's Hospital.

Q: Any other huge technology changes?

A: Patients staying here will be able to provide real-time feedback. If something needs to be addressed right away, they'll be able to send their care providers a message right away and send them a message. So having that kind of feedback will be extremely helpful. Everything is brand-spanking new.

Q: Key in on what you've been doing to ramp up for the move.

A: Whatever you imagine it to be, times it by 10. That's how much work goes into it. We have amazing leadership helping us out from a project management organization standpoint. We're talking about a lot of equipment. We have staging areas set up at Oishei where the hardware is being delivered. It's in stages. The computer hardware is starting to arrive. We actually are going to be starting in the next couple of months as far as getting the hardware put in place because you want to make sure you don't put hardware in prematurely while other things are being done. By early June, you'll begin to see the deployment of the hardware. It's being housed and stored. This is one of our most important initiatives.