April 14 marked the official opening of a healing garden at the St. Louis French Hospital, a chronic, geriatric and palliative care hospital at the seam of the Old and New Cities of Jerusalem. The garden was made possible by a gift in memory of Lawrence native Randie Malinsky, a scion of the supermarket titans Waldbaum family and a noted philanthropist and supporter of Jewish causes, by her husband Aaron Malinsky and their children Carolyn, Ben, Rebecca and David.

The hospital offers concrete testimony of what can be achieved when people representing the multitude of ethnic groups, cultures and faiths in the city work together for the common good. The staff and patients are Jewish, Christian and Muslim; wealthy and poor; born in Israel and abroad; tourists and even political refugees, all of whom manage to transcend mistrust and outright hostility to collaborate, support each other and shatter stereotypes, all in the service of helping those who suffer the effects of chronic or terminal illness.

Dedicated by the French Count Piellat in the 1880s, the hospital is run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, who ensure that the festivals and customs of Muslim, Christian and Jewish patients are all respected.

“We are the only convent in the world with a kashrut certificate,” beams Sister Monika Duellmann, hospital director.

Another unusual feature is the high staff-to-patient ratio. Young European (mainly German) students volunteer each year to feed, bathe and take care of patients, many Jewish and some Holocaust survivors. As Duellmann said at the opening ceremony, “many people think this place is a dead end, the last station, depressing. We want the patients to feel part of the hospital by Kashouvoit,” says Malinsky, a real estate developer in New York. He says his late wife Randie “would have been proud of [the organization’s] pioneering work as its female clergy pave the way for a new profession in Israel, and she would have loved the setting where old meets new, where past meets future, and where physical beauty inspires the soul.”

The garden, which was designed pro bono by Israel’s Rachelle Wiener-Steinberg landscape architects, incorporates French elements in its furniture, pathways, flowers and herbs. The fragrant plants will grow to wheelchair level, and patients will repair to the healing garden for prayer, contemplation as well as conversation, and for viewing the stirring Jerusalem cityscape beyond.

“We want the patients to feel part of the city,” says Stessin. “They can see the light rail, people walking by, taxis and an occasional camel. And they can see the flowers growing. It will be a focus of hope and renewal in a place that sees too much decline and suffering.”

The opening ceremony for the new healing garden featured music, poetry readings and words of Torah, and an homage to the passion, generosity and hands-on approach to philanthropy exemplified by Randie Malinsky. Visitors, patients and staff all enjoyed refreshments in the garden, a living testimony to her spirit.