



The provincial government made a \$200,000 donation to Hospice Greater Saint John during Hospice's Valentine Gala at the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre Saturday night. Left to right are Tourism and Parks Minister Stuart Jamieson, Saint John East MLA Roly MacIntyre, Social Development Minister Mary Schryer, Saint John Lancaster MLA Abel LeBlanc and Hospice executive director Sandy Johnson

\$1.2M Hospice campaign gets off to a great start

Fundraising Realize the Dream drive gets \$200,000 boost from provincial government

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SAINT JOHN - Hospice Greater Saint John celebrated its 25th anniversary Saturday night by officially launching the most important fundraising initiative in its history.

Hospice founder Dr. Nancy Grart announced the launch of the Realize The Dream capital campaign - with an ambitious \$1.2-million goal as the local chapter continues its quest to open the first residential hospice in Atlantic Canada.

The silver anniversary gala drew about 500 people to the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre for a dinner, live and silent auctions and a dance with Donnie & The Monarchs. The event raised about \$65,000, and those funds go toward day-to-day operating expenses, said executive director Sandy Johnson.

"The evening far exceeded our expectations," said Johnson, who said the dinner has come a long way in the eight years she's been involved. The 2000 dinner raised \$12,000.

But the highlight of the evening's festivities was the launch of the campaign that will see the new hospice property on Dufferin Row on the west side be equipped with an elevator, sprinkler system and furniture and be refurbished to meet fire marshal's regulations.

"The goal is to accommodate overnight patients," said Johnson. "Basically, we're going from offering non-medical support services to offering medical services as well.

"We'll be hiring qualified nursing staff and Dr. Chris O'Brien was announced as our medical director."

Social Development Minister Mary Schryer gave the campaign a huge boost by presenting a \$200,000 cheque on behalf of the provincial government.

"Roly MacIntyre, when he was the minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, had worked extremely hard on the funding request and as MLAs from the area, we support the

request so it's a pleasure to be able to help them out with their capital costs," said Schryer, who was joined by MacIntyre, Tourism Minister Stuart Jamieson and Saint John Lancaster MLA Abel LeBlanc for the cheque presentation.

"We hope to watch the fundraising campaign meet the goal," Schryer said. "They have a lot of work ahead of them and this was just our contribution as a government toward that goal."

Steve Murphy, the CTV News anchor who is a Saint John native, has been named honorary chair of the capital campaign.

Murphy praised Hospice for the services it provides and related his family's experience with the organization during his mother's battle with cancer a few years ago.

Johnson said the community's response so far has been very supportive

"We're still dependent on community and individuals," she said.

"We received more than \$30,000 from individuals before the launch. We've had people coming in off the street saying they read about us in the newspaper and they want to support us. Those are unexpected, unsolicited donations. The community has just been amazing."

Johnson said the next step in the fundraising efforts is a drive to sign up local employers to offer payroll deduction.

Bayshore Home Health is the first firm to offer to offer the option and Hospice will be looking for others in the coming months.

Johnson added Hospice would continue to lobby government departments such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency for funding as it works toward reaching the fundraising goal that will allow it to achieve the dream of becoming a full-time residential hospice.