

Hospice closing in on capital campaign goal

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Community: Still \$100,000 to go to hit target of \$1.8 million

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SAINT JOHN - With just \$100,000 left to raise to complete renovations at Bobby's Hope House, Sandy Johnson is now able to make her way around the gorgeous old residence and marvel at what her team's vision and tenacity have accomplished.



KâÉ Braydon/Telegraph-Journal

Sandy Johnson, executive director of Hospice Saint John, at the front entrance of Bobby's Hope House, Atlantic Canada's first residential hospice. The facility, located at 385 Dufferin Row, will welcome the public for a tour in May and its first patient in October.

"It's incredible to see what's been in your imagination come to life," said Johnson, executive director of Hospice Greater Saint John.

It's been 10 years in the making but, come May, the community will be invited to tour Atlantic Canada's first residential hospice at 385 Dufferin Row.

It will accept its first patient in October.

An open house hasn't been held at Bobby's Hope House since September 2007, after hospice purchased the building at a rock-bottom price from the Sisters of Charity.

Although the potential of the big, bright residence could be envisioned then, the building has come a long way.

The former Sisters of Charity convent, the oldest part of which dates back to the 1920s, is in the midst of a \$1.8-million transformation.

Soft, earthy tones have been chosen for the walls of 10 patient bedrooms and a mural depicting a big, leafy tree full of adventurous children will brighten the playroom while, in the big relaxing tub room, a tranquil scene of a tropical beach will be applied wall to wall.

"We want the colours to be the background to create an environment of peace, comfort and serenity," Johnson said.

"It calms and relaxes."

Hospice staff member Diane Sullivan, who happens to be a colour expert, helped choose the palette.

"She did a lot of research | looking for colour schemes. Every bedroom is a different colour, just like at home," Johnson said.

A hospice residence provides palliative care for people suffering from any end-stage medical illness, such as cancer, heart and kidney disease or severe stroke. Its mission is to alleviate uncomfortable symptoms for those who are living their last days.

Nursing and support staff will be available around the clock and medical support provided as needed.

Carpenters, plumbers and electricians have been working from the top down to overhaul the building.

There is a big, fully equipped kitchen and dining room for the use of families, along with a chapel and lots of quiet space.

While toilets, sinks and lighting fixtures need to be installed in the second-floor patient bedrooms, the four third-floor bedrooms - which have been renovated - are dedicated to family members who want to be near their loved one during their last days. But they still need to be fully furnished, and couches, chairs and a television are needed for the big family room.

"We will be looking at some corporate partnerships to help fund some of those," Johnson said.

Workers are now concentrating on the first floor with the installation of an elevator the biggest project left; that work will take about a month to complete, Johnson said.

"We're hoping to have the house turned back over to us in April," she said.

Some community residents have stepped up to the plate with donations to have rooms and suites named in their honour and there are still some naming opportunities available for meeting rooms and entry ways, Johnson said. Names of loved ones can also be engraved on trees, acorns or rocks for donations of \$100, \$500 or \$1,000, respectively, for permanent display on a wall of the residence.

Donors of \$5,000 can contribute to decorating a room and buying beds, furniture and equipment.

The new Hospice Shoppe has also been "a hit," Johnson said, with 100 per cent of money raised there going to help pay for renovations. Next year, profits will go toward the residence's \$1.4-million operating budget; the province has pledged to provide \$730,000 of the amount.

"It's exceeding our expectations," Johnson said of the shop's success.

"People are happy to donate because they know it's supporting something right here in their community," Johnson said.

"They can see what's happening."

Income tax receipts are issued to people who have donated goods that sell.

"That's been an added bonus," she said.

About 800 people - four in five - die of a palliative illness in Greater Saint John each year.

Four hundred of those die in hospital, 200 in the hospital's palliative care unit and 200 in acute care beds in hospital; it is the latter 200 that the residential hospice will target, which will free up hospital beds.

The average length of stay in a residential hospice bed is two or three weeks.