

Hospice head confident about future

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SAINT JOHN - Things are moving forward with Saint John's residential hospice and its executive director is confident that, by the time the plumbing and electrical installations are set to begin in February, the cash will be in place to complete final renovations on the stately west side home called Bobby's Hope House.



Cindy Wilson/Telegraph-Journal

From left: Michael Richard, architect for the Hospice of Greater Saint John, Patrick Woods, chairman of the Hospice board; Roly McIntyre, project supporter; Terry McKee, Bird/Rideau on-site supervisor, and Steve Legere, Bird/Rideau project manager, watch Hospice executive director Sandy Johnson take the first blow at a wall at Bobby's House as renovations get underway.

The building, at 385 Dufferin Row, will accommodate 10 palliative-care patients and their families.

Sandy Johnson, executive director of Hospice of Greater Saint John, says the project will be half-way complete by the end of January and with the project's fundraising team in the midst of a big push, she's optimistic the remainder of the money will fall into place.

So far, Hospice has raised \$826,537 for the project.

"We're hoping that the number of initiatives we have under way are going to give us enough money to at least go immediately into phase 5 and then to continue to fundraise and go immediately into phase 6," Johnson said.

"That would be our ultimate goal.

"We need our community's continued support so we can get the project done."

Fueling that confidence is that New Brunswick Southwest MP Greg Thompson and Saint John MP Rodney Weston have agreed to make a pitch for the project with ACOA (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency).

"I'm hoping that Keith Ashfield, being from New Brunswick and as the new ACOA minister, is willing to support it," Johnson said.

"In terms of supporting economic development, we're helping to shore up the acute health-care system by moving people out of acute-care beds. We also have temporary and permanent job creation as a result of this new business model."

Requests have also gone out to the province for operational funding in the 2010/2011 budget and for increased capital investment through the Regional Development Corporation.

The project suffered a bit of a setback this fall when a bank turned down a request by Hospice to open an \$800,000 line of credit on the basis that the province is not committed to the project.

That news pushed the opening date back to 2010.

Recently, Hospice of Greater Saint John was named one of Canada's top six palliative-care charities by Charity Intelligence Canada. Hospice has also been a top performer in the Donner Canadian Awards since 2002, winning the service to seniors top prize in 2004 and 2005.

"This is a tremendous honour," Johnson said. "This independent analysis and certification tells donors that Hospice Greater Saint John is a wise investment. We maximize every dollar donated, giving donors the greatest impact right here at home."

The residential hospice will provide palliative care for people suffering from any terminal illness, such as cancer, heart and kidney disease or severe stroke. The average length of stay in a residential hospice is two to three weeks. Each year the hospice will provide community care to 150 people who would otherwise occupy acute-care beds at the hospital.

The hospice board has been adamant that there will be no co-pay to patients; under its plan, the government would fund \$200 a day per patient, with the hospice providing the additional \$100.

Hospice contends that the residence would allow more than \$2.28 million a year to be reallocated to acute care services.