

# Ready to prove the case for hospice care

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## Gala: Supporters of local hospice finally win government funding for their cause

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SAINT JOHN - It was a \$730,000 night for Hospice Greater Saint John during its gala fundraiser at the Saint John Trade & Convention Centre.



*Matthew Sherwood/Telegraph-Journal*

*Premier Shawn Graham announced on Saturday \$730,000 in provincial funding for hospice care in Saint John.*

With a gold-coloured construction hat on every table, hundreds took in the glitz and glamour for the good cause. They listened as Premier Shawn Graham brought the crowd to its feet with the news the province would fund the hospice \$730,000 through the Department of Health.

"It's a testament to the people who stepped up and have been able to provide a level of care that is greatly needed. That's why we're here as partners today to celebrate what this community has done," said the premier before the official announcement.

Called the Hospice Hard Hats and High Heels Valentine Gala, the fundraiser celebrated what has been a long road for people such as hospice founder Dr. Nancy Grant. For Grant, it's been a 27-year journey to change attitudes toward the care of dying patients.

"Way too long," said Grant before the speeches began and as a fire alarm rang in the background.

The alarm turned out to be false and soon the evening returned to normal. Inside the walls were lined with a donated items for a silent auction and a band played.

"There were a couple of times where we were close to giving up," Grant said, her eyes welling up with tears. "It's sheer persistence. We kept at it. Honestly, I didn't think this day would ever come."



*Dr. Nancy Grant says it took a long time to change attitudes about hospice care. The tireless professional spoke at the Hospice Hard Hats and High Heels Valentine Gala at the Saint John Trade & Convention Centre on Saturday.*

In May, Atlantic Canada's first residential hospice will open at 385 Dufferin Row. Called Bobby's Hope House, the final bill for renovations to the former Sisters of Charity convent will be \$1.8 million. That's about \$77,000 more than was expected.

The executive director of the hospice, Sandy Johnson, has no doubt the community will come through.

"It really is the hospice house the community has built and funded," said Sandy Johnson. "The community has backed us all the way, and I think they'll continue to back us as we go forward."

A hospice residence provides palliative care for patients with cancer, heart and kidney disease or severe stroke. Some 800 people in Greater Saint John die of a palliative illness each year.

The hospice will accept its first patient in October.

"This is the year that all that work will come true and we're going to admit that first patient," Johnson said.

Dr. Chris O'Brien is the medical director at Hospice Greater Saint John and at the palliative care unit of the Saint John Regional Hospital.

"They're going to have experts looking after them to look at end-of-life issues - pain, symptom management, psycho-social support, spiritual support for families, because you only get one chance to do this right," O'Brien said.

Helping the families prepare is also important.

"There's grief well before the death."

A number of MLAs attended the event along with the premier.

Raising the money was easier, said Grant, than convincing the provincial government.

"That was the harder part, changing the way terminally ill people are cared for, in other words, changing public policy," Grant said. "We and the general public wondered if that ever was going to change."

It's anticipated the 10-bed unit will ease the strain on beds at the hospital. Some 200 terminally ill patients a year will spend their final days in the home-like atmosphere of the hospice instead of within the institutional walls of the Regional Hospital.

"For the next community that's gets a residential hospice, it will be much easier because of the work that we've done," said Grant.

O'Brien said the volunteers of Hospice Greater Saint John will prove its value and the need across the province.

"This will be the model and we're going to prove our case," O'Brien said.