

Dream becoming a reality

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GUELPH — Deb McWilliams has faced the reality that when she is in the end stages of her life, she may need more care than friends and family can provide.

She's healthy now, but after being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004 she became one of the thousands of people Hospice Wellington has helped.

That's why it was important for her to attend yesterday's unveiling of plans for a new 10-bed residential care centre at the hospice, she said.

The current facility on Scottsdale Road will be expanded and renovated. The completed project will be about 10,000 square feet larger, and cost about \$1.5 million more, than was originally announced in April.

Day programs will continue and be expanded with a new palliative care clinic.

Construction begins in May, and the first clients are expected to arrive in early 2010. The building has some environmentally friendly features incorporated into the design.

"We're dedicated to maximizing patient care and minimizing our carbon footprint," board chair Liz Fisk said.

The hospice has been offering day programs and support for more than 25 years. But there has never been a residential care centre for palliative patients.

"This day has been in our hearts and minds and prayers for a long time," executive director Brent Charette said.

Now, people with terminal illnesses often die at home, in acute care facilities, or are moved to a hospice in Cambridge for their final days.

It's not an easy situation, especially for seniors who want to be with their spouses during this time, Charette said.

"They get overwhelmed by the physical care, and they don't have the time to do the emotional care," he said.

"This will allow people to be a wife or a husband instead of a nurse."

Each of the 10 rooms will be large enough to accommodate family members who want to stay with their loved ones overnight.

Expansion of room sizes is one factor that is driving up the cost of the project. Construction costs have also risen about 20 per cent since the centre was first proposed.



RYAN PFEIFFER, GUELPH MERCURY

Hospice Wellington volunteers Susan Neath, Mimi Craig and Marnie Allen look over plans for Wellington County's first residential hospice on Scottsdale Drive yesterday morning. The completed project will be about 10,000 square feet larger, and cost about \$1.5 million more, than was originally announced in April.

Fisk said the hospice is financially in a position to support a mortgage for about five years.

McWilliams, unable to drive and with no family in town, relied on hospice volunteers throughout her lengthy recovery period. Now she's a volunteer herself.

She is aware she may have to rely on others again, and feels relief in knowing hospice care is available.

"When I die, I could be in a place with a home-like atmosphere. I could go with dignity," she said.

McWilliams stresses that hospice care is not about dying. It's about life.

"You might come here with less than three months to live, but every day is about living."

123 by the numbers

- 456** A closer look at Hospice Wellington:
- \$6.3 million:** Total cost of the project
 - \$2.6 million:** Government funding
 - \$2.2 million:** Donations from the community
 - 300:** Volunteers
 - 700:** Clients a year currently supported by various programs
 - 150 to 250:** Number of clients expected in residential care per year