



NICK IWANYSHYN, FOR THE GUELPH MERCURY

There's an open house today at the new Hospice Wellington facility at 795 Scottsdale Dr. The dream of a residential hospice has been a long one.

Hospice dream comes true

Guelph's new residential hospice facility will receive its first client on Monday

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GUELPH — The vaulted ceiling in the main hall and small garden by the front doors are the last recognizable vestiges of Kortright Presbyterian Church.

The rest has been renovated and is now home to Hospice Wellington's day programs — plus a new, 10-bed, residential facility. The space is soothing, bright, well-appointed, and comfortable.

If not for the serious nature of client stays, just about anyone would want to be there.

Hospices are about dying — there's just no getting around that, says Hospice Wellington's new executive director.

“But we are also about celebrating a life and creating an end-of-life experience that has dig-



nity and respect,” Rosslyn Bentley said.

“So we want to recreate a homelike atmosphere. Our staff and volunteers will put in that extra effort so our clients will feel safe and comfortable in their final days.”

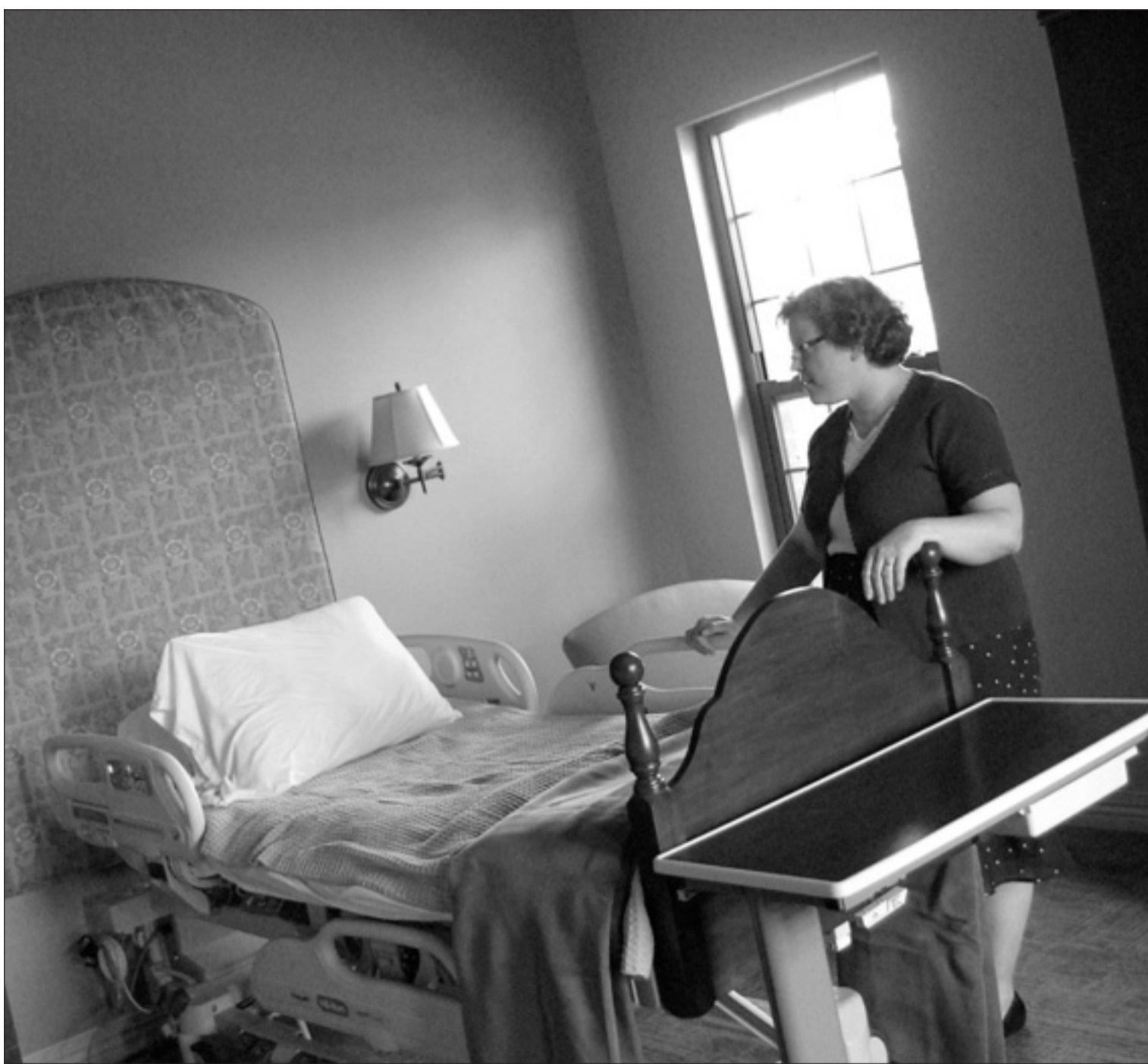
Hospice Wellington is holding an open house for the general public today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and will receive its first client Monday. That's when the 30-year dream of a residential hospice in this community comes to fruition.

Bentley said she's been warned to expect a lot of people for the open house — perhaps upwards of 1,000 visitors throughout the day — so she's arranged a shuttle bus that will run between Hospice Wellington, at 795 Scottsdale Dr., and the Sears end of the parking lot at Stone Road Mall. Parking is limited on Scottsdale Drive and Hospice's parking lot will be filled by staff and volunteers leading the tours. Bentley is recommending visitors use the shuttle bus. They should also dress for the weather, since there could be a wait to get in.

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Joanne Coyle likes to say Hospice Wellington actually started with a birth. She was an occupational therapist at Guelph General Hospital 30 years ago and she and family doctor Dr. Carl Mackie got talking after attending to a birth.

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Executive director Rosslyn Bentley stands by a bed at the new Hospice Wellington facility on Scottsdale Drive in Guelph.

Hospice dream evolved slowly

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They discovered they shared an interest in palliative care and recognized that local services to help the dying were in short supply.

“We formed a committee and organized a seminar on palliative care,” said Coyle, who is soon to retire as president of Therapy Partners, a private health care provider based in Guelph. “Out of that seminar came a group of interested people who basically stayed with it until Hospice Wellington was born.

“Our first client, she understood what we were trying to do. We were by her side in shifts. She did not die alone.”

It’s been a slow evolution for Hospice Wellington. But the organization gained traction and recognition locally at a time when palliative care was becoming a topic of discussion at both the federal and provincial health ministries.

Guelph General Hospital gave the fledgling organization some office space on Delhi Street and it started recruiting and training volunteers, fundraising, writing newsletters, amassing a library and running group sessions.

The Rotary Club of Guelph gave a five-year commitment to fund the not-for-profit organization, which allowed it to move to larger quarters on Speedvale Avenue. Over the years, Hospice Wellington has opened satellite offices in northern parts of the county and expanded its groups to include grief groups for teens and children.

And now all that progress has led to — and delivered — a residential hospice. It’s a place that feels like home. But it has staff and volunteers trained in palliative care, which accommodates different traditions around death and allows family members to concentrate on their relationship with their loved one and not on their physical care. And that even allows pets.

Hanna Boos has been a Hospice Wellington volunteer for 28 years and her late hus-

band, Walter, served on its board of directors for years.

“Walter was adamant there would be a residential hospice here in Guelph, so it will be touching for me when it opens,” Boos said. She said she cared for her husband for three years before he died, “but a place like this for his last 10 days would have been perfect.”

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Bentley points out the environmental features in the renovated building such as a “living wall” of plants that improves indoor air quality, independent heat controls in the client suites, solar panels for ambient water heating, and energy-efficient windows that take advantage of natural light.

There are communal spaces, such as the kitchen, dining room, solarium, outdoor balconies, serenity garden and gazebo. Doorways to all those spaces are wide enough for a bed to be wheeled through, and clients and their families are free to roam the grounds and use all the facilities.

Bentley is most excited, though, about the 10 client rooms. They’re large rooms with neutral décor, upholstered headboards and footboards on hospital beds. They also feature sleeper-sofas — so family can stay overnight — locked storage for personal items, and private, wheelchair-accessible washrooms.

Clients can hang their own art and photos on the walls. The shower and tub room have special fittings and lifts to make bathing easier for frail clients.

The lower level is home to Hospice’s day programs. There are offices for Hospice staff and wellness rooms for programs.

Other associated professionals can also use the space. There’s a drop-in office with internet access for visiting professionals. The Community Care Access Centre’s palliative care team can do charting there. The Bereaved Family Network of Ontario and Brain Tumour Association are renting space and there are two exam rooms for

outpatients of the pain- and symptom-management program.

The children’s room is Bentley’s favourite element. It includes a hopscotch pattern on the floor and a ‘crooked little house’ playhouse for imaginative play.

Bentley said every tradesperson who has worked on the space has gone an extra mile to deliver quality construction and finishes.

“The attention to detail and level of care has been outstanding,” she said. “I think everyone who comes here realizes what a special place it is.”

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Hospice Wellington’s residential facility is part of an overall palliative care plan for the region. The province has committed \$580,000 a year for Hospice Wellington’s operating costs. Bentley thinks that will cover between 65 and 80 per cent of the real cost, but won’t know until the building has been running for a while. Fundraising will be an ongoing reality, however, she said, but clients will never be charged.

“People are really touched by Hospice when they use it and they often make donations. That’s been a significant part of our campaigns,” Bentley said. “Don’t you wish the rest of health care was like this?”

There are a few palliative care beds at long-term care facilities in the city, plus palliative beds at Guelph General Hospital. The Community Care Access Centre operates in-home palliative services for those who wish to die in their own homes.

Lisaard House, in Cambridge, is the only other residential hospice in the region, but it caters to cancer patients who are over 18.

Hospice Wellington will take anyone who lives in the region, at any age.

Marianne Walker, chief executive of St. Joseph’s Health Centre, said there’s often a waiting list for palliative beds at her facility. “So this is great news for our community. People will have more choice and the system has more capacity,” she said.