

Healthcare projects are almost paid for

Seemingly overnight, HHHS Foundation is only \$200,000 from its \$6 million goal

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Editor

There were times over the past few years when it felt like barely a dent was being made in the debt this county still owed on the new healthcare facilities in Minden and Haliburton and yet, seemingly overnight, the goal is now down to a scant \$200,000.

What miracle occurred?

This spring did happen to have a confluence of happy events for the Haliburton Highlands Health Services Foundation. County council – frustrated by the length of time it was taking to wrap up the capital campaign – agreed to give the Foundation a grant of \$300,000 rather than continue to pay interest on the outstanding loan.

Then the Foundation received a large bequest from a local man's estate. This was followed by the more-successful-than-anticipated auction of three Ethel Curry paintings and the usual success of the annual golf tournament.

When you add this to the generosity with which people responded to last fall's gala, the Christmas campaign and the first-time request that accompanied tax bills, the Foundation was able to pay off about \$1 million over the past year.

The Foundation is now cautiously optimistic that the debt will be cleared from the books by this Christmas, or the end of next March at the latest.

Yet despite how well the Foundation has done in the past year, the real reason for good fortune is the same today as it was when the \$6 million capital campaign got underway in 1998 – this county's residents and cottagers deeply value our healthcare facilities and are willing to open their wallets to prove it.

"You almost have to be against motherhood to think it wouldn't happen," says Don Popple who, along with Ray Selbie, has been a member of the Foundation's board since its inception.

When the provincial and federal gov-

ernments agreed to pony up 70 per cent of the capital costs of the two expansion projects, HHHS decided that rather than raise its share of the \$20 million, it would borrow the money so construction could start right away. A previous fundraising campaign for a long-term care unit at the Haliburton hospital had ended with anger and frustration when the province cancelled the project. The organization knew that people would be skeptical until they actually saw the walls of the new facilities go up.

The only drawback to this approach, Popple says, is that once the buildings were fully operational people tended to believe that the projects had already been paid for.

There was approximately \$670,000 sitting in the bank from the thwarted campaign in the 1980s but, as Popple notes, most foundations begin with a lot more than that.

At the time, and still true today, the \$6 million that this community had to raise was the biggest campaign anyone had dared to undertake. However, the Foundation always knew that having proper healthcare facilities in Haliburton County was near and dear to people's hearts and the volunteers' faith never wavered. Residents and cottagers alike had a project they believed in.

Local accountant Hugh Nichol, who was also the chairman of the HHHS, knew that on top of all the ways people would donate to various fundraising events there would also be people who would name the organization as a benefactor in their wills and life insurance policies. He set up the Special Gifts program which has indeed become an essential component of the fundraising campaign. More bequests are expected this year.

The federal government also recently gave charities a boost by changing tax

laws to benefit donors, says Peter Oyler, the Foundation's present-day chairman.

As well, "what's added impetus is the growth in our population, the increased number of visits to emergency at both sites and the continued satisfaction of people who visit our facilities," Oyler says.

A few weeks ago, the Ontario Hospital Association released a study which gave HHHS top marks in patient satisfaction among hospitals in the province.

Dale Walker, who was involved with the campaign from day one, first as chairperson of the Foundation and then as its executive director, says that with such a lengthy endeavour "you've got to keep it front and centre so people never forget about you."

While never discouraged, last fall it did seem as if it was taking a long time to get to the finish.

"We all knew that the last million would be hard," she says. "Even though our programs are successful, last fall we thought, 'Oh, we've still got a long way to go.' Last year was dragging a bit."

What's always kept her motivated, apart from belief in the projects, is the community's enthusiasm. "What energizes me is when donors come to me and ask, 'What's next on the list?'"

There are three fundraisers left on the 2006 calendar.

On August 23 Terry Adair is hosting Art in the Garden at his studio on the corner of Hwy. 118 and Bayshore Acres just north of Haliburton village.

The gala's format will be different this year. On October 21 people will gather at Wigamog Inn for A Classy Cocktail Caper but instead of sitting down for a meal they'll enjoy a bevy of gourmet hors d'oeuvres while listening to music and schmoozing.

The annual Christmas campaign mail-out begins on November 21.

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