

# Markdale hospital fundraiser 'too important' to not succeed

SCOTT DUNN

A \$5.7-million fundraising campaign, to complete the Markdale-area community's funding obligations for its new hospital, kicked off Saturday with a gathering at the hospital construction site.

Construction of the estimated \$69 million hospital began in March and so far, the first floor has been erected and the second floor is underway.

The community is expected to pay 10 to 15 per cent of building costs. The foundation and Grey Bruce Health Services, which runs six hospitals including Markdale hospital, must pay for all furniture and equipment.

Though it poured rain Saturday, people wearing masks to guard against COVID-19 stayed dry under a tent, listened to speakers and ate burgers and hot dogs during the "Together in Care" campaign kickoff.

"Oh my gosh, it was awesome," said Darlene Lamberti, executive director of the Centre Grey Health Services Foundation, in an interview Sunday.

"We had a lot of community support (from) many people that came out to the event."

The hospital is on track to open in later 2023.

It will take up to six months after it's built to move some equipment from the old hospital and to train people on new equipment and technologies.

Replacement of the Centre Grey Hospital, which was built in 1958, was recommended 24 years ago by the Grey-Bruce District Health Council.

Officials with Grey Bruce Health Services and the Ministry of Health met in 2000 to start the

process. Two years later the Centre Grey Health Services Foundation launched a \$12 million community fundraising campaign for a new hospital.

Twelve years after that, the province approved capital funding for the build, with final approval and the contract to build the new facility awarded to Bird Construction earlier this year.

Initial fundraising years ago reached \$12.5 million in pledges. But as the project stalled, people moved away, died or lost faith the hospital would be built, about half the money never came in, Lamberti said.

With \$6.8 million in hand, the campaign's goal of another \$5.7 million, if met, would allow the community to reach its \$12.5 million obligation. Lamberti said she thinks the campaign will run for a year or so.

Now businesses and citizens will be approached for donations. Mass mailings will begin and committee members will be visiting specific donors who've expressed interest, Lamberti said. Fundraising events will also be held, she said.

"Of course with the help of all the municipalities and the community at large, we have every reason to believe that this will be a successful campaign. It's too important not to be."

Mayors of Chatsworth, West Grey, Grey Highlands and Southgate attended Saturday's kickoff, as did the warden and MPP, Grey Bruce Health Services executives and board members of GBHS and of the Markdale hospital foundation. Members of the public came too.

Lamberti noted local bottled water company Ice River Springs has donated \$500,000, Markdale's Rotary Club has given \$300,000, the

Kinsmen have given \$100,000 and the hospital auxiliary has pledged \$650,000.

Also Saturday, the 20th annual Health Care Heroes Radiothon raised \$101,000 for Markdale hospital, exceeding its \$75,000 goal.

The money will be used to purchase an ultrasound machine for the new hospital and will count towards the \$5.7-million fundraising goal.

During the seven-hour event on Blackburn radio stations, more than \$500,000 was raised for 12 hospital foundations between the Bruce Peninsula and Goderich.

The county has contributed \$1 million, including \$220,000 worth of land on which the new hospital will stand.

Fraser asked for another 15 per cent or \$150,000 during his visit to council. It will be given 2022 budget consideration.

The new 68,000-square-foot Markdale hospital will have an around-the-clock emergency room, along with eight examination and treatment rooms, four in-patient rooms, a procedures room, laboratory and outpatient clinics, such as memory, mental health and diabetes clinics.

The new facility will also have palliative care, physiotherapy, diagnostic imaging, spiritual care, a cafe, flex space on the ground floor for future expansion and will house the foundation's office.

About 90 full- and part-time staff work at the Markdale hospital.

That includes two permanent physicians and six to eight locums who cover the emergency room, which records around 12,700 visits annually.

About 84 per cent of the patients who use the hospital are from Grey County.



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Ice River Springs donates \$500,000 to the \$5.7-million Markdale hospital fundraising campaign, which kicked off Saturday in Markdale. SUPPLIED

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