

The
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Advance

Premier opens new Markdale Hospital

(by Kimberley Black)

When you enter the new hospital in Markdale, the bright and inviting atmosphere impacts your senses.

The mix of wood beams, floor to ceiling windows that expose the natural light and rural scenery mixed with modern design elements. It took over 20 years to arrive but like most deliveries, pain aside, it was worth it.

On hand for the ribbon cutting ceremony Thursday was Premier Doug Ford, who praised past and present politicians for moving this project forward, noting that having a strong advocate at Queen's Park gets the job done.

But some would argue that the real work started more than 20 years prior when a small group of community members formed the Special Gift Table and set out to raise \$13 million for a new hospital.

The initial agreement with the Provincial government was about a 20/80 split with the community raising 20 per cent of the costs before the province would contribute the balance. Members of the committee included the chair Dr. Hamilton Hall, Dave Chapman, Erie Nicole, Dan Rose, Anne Marie and Jake Hammer, John S. Black, and Willard Foster.

In an interview following the ceremony, I spoke with Jake and Anne Marie Hammer who received a more extensive tour of the new facility in August.

"It's absolutely phenomenal, state of the art," said Jake while Anne Marie appreciated the thoughtful planning to achieve good flow and less clutter while

the architect's use of beams, she felt reflected the rural community. "The hospital will be an anchor for the community," she said.

Recalling the early days of planning and the excitement and energy the committee members all brought to the table.

Meetings were held in the Board Room at Chapman's Ice Cream as they launched their first fundraiser, a benefit concert at Talisman Mountain Resort in Kimberley with Roger Whittaker performing.

All committee members attended every event planned, and worked well with one another to achieve its initial goal \$13 million. "They were all good people...that's what kept us all in it," said Jake. And then they waited.

While the Hammers are proud of the work the committee did, they recalled the frustration and deflation everyone experienced when delay after delay occurred. Then as the years passed and inflation was factored in, they were informed that the cost of the hospital construction would be more, a lot more.

"I heard from some donors who felt they had been misled... the whole community was hurt, people gave beyond what they could afford because the hospital was important," said Anne Marie.

When asked if the committee ever considered quitting, Anne Marie shared that the chair, Dr. Hamilton Hall wouldn't have heard of it. "He was an incredible leader, the glue that held everything together," said Jake.

And now that the bricks and

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mortar are complete the existing members of the committee can breathe a sigh of relief: this community's perseverance has paid off. For the Hammers, they plan to occasionally enjoy a cup of good coffee at the new café, "it's the nicest coffee house in town," Jake shared.

Elsewhere in the province, the health care system will be receiving an infusion of much needed dollars according to the Premier Ford.

"Folks, there's never been more money put into our health care system by any government in the history of this province," Ford said, citing some \$50 billion to be spent on Ontario hospitals for either additions or complete rebuilds.

In February of this year, the Provincial Government embarked on a 10-year bilateral agreement with the Federal Government to receive \$73.97 billion in federal funding that will focus on shared health care priorities. \$776 million was freed up for immediate use for urgent needs in pediatric hospitals, emergency rooms and to reduce wait times for surgical procedures.

Minister Sylvia Jones was on hand Thursday reiterating the Provincial government's commitment to its Your Health program which will top up the Federal government's funding package. As part of this funding package the government plans to add 49 new MRI scanners including 2 allocated for Grey Bruce.

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This ribbon cutting ceremony was also an opportunity to launch the rebranding of Grey Bruce Health Services to the new Brightshores Health System, and while the sun was shining for the ribbon cutting ceremony, a notable cloud of protest continued to follow Premier Doug Ford wherever he goes.

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About 100 silent protesters lined Toronto Street in Markdale near the entrance to the new hospital in support of Ontario's Greenbelt area. Greenbelt Campaign organizer Mike Marcolongo took a leave from his position at the Ministry of Agriculture to organize this campaign.

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The 18-year veteran to civil service is passionate about this cause because he "saw what was going on with this government from the inside," he said and could not just sit back and watch it happen."

It is much more than just the Green Belt (citing Bill 23 findings) it's about collusion and corruption," he said.

The hospital will officially open for business on Sept. 24.

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Regards

Paul & Gail