



June groundbreaking for new Kitchener hospice

KITCHENER — Construction will begin soon on a residential hospice in Kitchener, adding much needed palliative beds to the region.

Innisfree House will have 10 beds to provide comfort and care to end-of-life patients and their families, nearly doubling the number now available in Waterloo Region when it's expected to open next spring.

"The population is aging, so the need is growing," said Connie Dwyer, executive director of Lisaard House.

The Cambridge hospice is nearly halfway to its \$4.4-million fundraising goal to cover the cost of building and furnishing the new house. Innisfree House, like Lisaard, will depend on donations for more than half of its operating budget because government only provides partial funding for bedside care.

Groundbreaking at the Homer Watson Boulevard site near Conestoga College will be June 19, and construction is expected to start the first week of July.

Since Lisaard House opened in 2000, it has cared for more than 1,100 people at no cost — but double that number were turned away because of lack of available beds.

Last year 141 residents spent final days in the six-bed Lisaard, a charity founded by a Cambridge couple.

Lisaard is dedicated to cancer patients, while Innisfree is open to any palliative diagnosis.

Innisfree will be designed to have the same home-like feel as Lisaard, with comfortable bedroom suites, sunrooms, living and dining rooms, and kitchen where volunteers often pop in to bake treats. Some staff are interested in going to the new hospice.

"The culture from here is transferred to Innisfree," said Sheila Ainsworth, president of the board of directors.

That welcoming atmosphere encourages families "to share in that journey," which Ainsworth said helps ease the grieving process for those left behind.

Children coming to either hospice won't find a hushed and clinical hospital setting, but a place that feels more like home.

"I think it's nice when you have the children here and they're outside playing," Dwyer said.

"It makes it a more normal thing for them. You can't take away that loss, but it makes it more normal."

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