

Club offers hospice option for care of terminally ill patients

It took 12 years of hard work for the Rotary Club of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, to complete their hospice project. The effort was the brain-child of Nancy Yurkovich, a retired nurse and wife of a Rotarian.

Selling the idea to her husband, Anthony, a retired medical doctor, and to his fellow club members in 1994 was the easy part. Residents of Richmond, a city with a population of more than 160,000, had to be convinced of the need for a community-based facility for the care of terminally ill patients.

Wilbur Walrond, a past president of the Richmond club, says "this was difficult because people are generally reluctant to discuss terminal illness, especially when it affects those very close to them." To start public discussion on such a sensitive subject, Yurkovich made presentations and wrote articles in local newspapers. She explained how families and patients would benefit from being able to choose among the options of care at home, in the palliative care unit at Richmond Hospital, or at a free-standing community hospice.



Through presentations and newspaper articles, retired nurse Nancy Yurkovich convinced her community of the need to build a hospice for terminally ill people.

"Being able to offer choices within a well-integrated continuum of care will help people to face the end of life with comfort ensured, values and decisions respected, and families supported," Yurkovich noted.

The necessity of providing such choices had been driven home over the years by long illnesses and deaths in the families of eight area Rotarians. The Rotarians added their authoritative voices to Yurkovich's convictions.

"It was the trust that these families placed in us that gave us the determination to pursue our dream of a free-standing hospice in our community," says Walrond.

After several fundraisers and a sponsorship agreement with the Salvation Army, the club contributed more than C\$500,000 (US\$435,430) toward the effort. Construction started in May 2001 and three years later, the hospice opened its doors to patients. In August, RI President-elect Wilfrid J. Wilkinson visited the C\$2 million (US\$1,741,700) facility, which is run with the help of Canadian government grants.