



## Redevelopment dollars delivered to Algoma Manor Home

By BRENT RANKIN, SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Leaving the board room and not afraid to get down and dirty, Algoma Manor Home for the Aged Board of Management chair Donna Latulippe made good on her pledge to "roll in the mud" when the shovel finally went into the ground to begin the long-awaited redevelopment of the 96-bed regional nursing home.

A few years ago, the project was struggling with design and costing issues that saw the original 2002 estimate for redevelopment balloon to more than double. At the time, Latulippe said, "If we ever get all the money for Algoma Manor, I'll roll in the mud to celebrate."

"Well, here we are," Latulippe said this week, pointing to the fenced construction site, "and I'll keep my pledge".

After an official ground-breaking ceremony, a few buckets of the excavated soil were mixed up into a pool of water. True to her word, Latulippe jumped in and rolled around to the delight of manor staff, residents, municipal representatives and area residents.

Site preparation and footings are already under way, following a March announcement by Algoma-Manitoulin MPP Mike Brown of up to \$3.1 million. The extra money was needed to wind up the financing package to complete the stand-alone facility. The new structure is to be built just southwest of the current 43-year old, 106-bed facility.

Among the congratulations and pats on the back for staff, volunteers, and area residents, were sighs of relief to finally see the project go forward.

Since October 2002, when the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) announced the redevelopment of nursing homes across Ontario, Algoma Manor has struggled with design options and funding.

Originally, the MOHLTC proposed upgrades to the existing building, which would require moving residents and staff to Sault Ste. Marie during the likely 18-month construction period. This option would have provided only 64 beds and meant the elimination of on-site kitchen and laundry departments.

The cost at the time was \$6.3 million and the 21 municipalities in Algoma, which contributed annually to any operational deficit, were also asked to make a capital contribution.

The carrot to municipal councils was that, when the new Algoma Manor opened, the communities would no longer be required to help financially with operating the facility.

Many of the communities borrowed to make their capital payments with the hope of getting out from under the operational payments. But delays meant communities were required to continue paying toward operating the facility.

Originally, a delay was negotiated in order to raise an estimated additional \$2 million to add a wing to the structure. This would have prevented the relocation of residents and staff during construction, add 32 additional beds and retain the laundry and kitchen.

The Town of Thessalon took the lead for fundraising and managed to assemble the funding. The money was raised, however, preliminary building designs showed the original MOHLTC estimates were unrealistic. Estimates as high as \$18 million were considered and rejected, and finally a stand-alone design was settled upon, with a price tag of \$12.2 million.

But, despite its best efforts, the board was still \$3.1 million short.

There were more delays and on-going unrest among communities such as Elliot Lake and Wawa, which pressed for an end to levies in 2009. Together, Elliot Lake and Wawa contribute more than half of any total deficit required. Since the 1960s, when the regional facility was built, the two have also built their own nursing homes and have made no secret of not wanting to contribute to Algoma Manor.

When the MOHLTC told the board and municipalities they would have to work it out, there was more pressure put on the province to come up with the extra cash to get the project under way.

It was finally agreed the municipalities would not have to pay levies any longer after 2009. In March, the province came forward with the additional funding and things began to happen. Not long after, SalDan General Contractors was awarded the contract to build the new Algoma Manor and work began.

The new manor will feature two-resident rooms with shared ensuite washrooms, replacing the current model, which includes up to four bed rooms and congregated washrooms in each wing.