



To the 'manor' born

Early appearances indicate a smooth move to the redeveloped Algoma Manor Nursing Home is in store. Still, officials predict a grieving period for both staff and residents

By Pauline Clark

Thessalon residents once feared they might lose Algoma Manor, the local long-term care home.

But that's not a worry now as construction of a brand new facility heads into the final stages.

The new Algoma Manor is scheduled to open in the first week of October with the transition of residents to begin Nov. 1.

Though it will be slightly smaller in capacity than the current facility — down to 96 beds from the current 108 — the new building will offer many amenities and features that are not available in the current building.

Built in 1966, Algoma Manor has long been one of the area's largest employers. Though plans were in the works to remodel the current facility, it was in 2003 when the communities and Algoma Manor staff jumped on the bandwagon when the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care (MOHLTC) outlined plans to move the residents to a vacated home in Sault Ste. Marie, while a new building with only 64 beds was constructed. As well as a loss in beds, plans called for laundry and kitchen departments to be eliminated with those services shipped in from outside the community.

"Entering into the political arena was one of the best things that could have happened," said Donna Latulippe, chairperson of the Algoma Manor Board of Management, overseeing construction of the new facility.

"The 21 supporting municipalities got on board and got the Ministry of Health's attention."

Concerns weren't only that residents would be relocated far from family support and that half wouldn't be able to come back here, but networks and staff would have to drive long distances everyday during the relocation. There were also factors such as the loss of half the beds, as well as the laundry and kitchen facilities, in the proposed new facility.

That's no longer a fear, though 12 fewer beds means there will be a slight decrease in both residents and staff.

Once the community took action, MOHLTC took another look and determined that a stand-alone building was needed. That meant residents could stay where they were until construction was completed.

The provincial commitment also meant municipalities would no longer be responsible for financing the home through yearly levies.

A board of management was made up of representatives from the 21 participating communities and two provincial appointees, of whom Latulippe is one. And though such a board would normally be replaced at the end of its term, the current one was given an extension this year to see the project through to completion.

The project will terminate when the new facility opens, and once all assets are dispersed, the board will disband and a new, already formed, not-for-profit organization will take over operations.

Once the site opens, the name will become Algoma Manor Nursing Home. It will be under the jurisdiction of the not-for-profit board, but Latulippe said disbanding will be an issue until the dispersal of the old building.

With the local hospital and the day care both located in the current facility, it is hoped that building will remain. Algoma Manor provides meals, laundry services and small maintenance work for the hospital and day care.

Second and third phases of the construction plan have not been funded.

Plans for a second phase would see construction of a connecting link from the second floor of the current building to the second floor of the new building at an estimated cost of \$250,000. Latulippe suggested the board would even consider naming the link after a benefactor should a private donation were to become available.

Without a connecting link, residents going to the hospital from the new building will need to be moved by ambulance, even though it's located just across a parking lot.

Destruction of the portion of the building that won't be used would be the ideal solution for the third phase, although funds have not been allotted for that, either. Not only is the cost estimated to be \$750,000, issues such as where materials could be dumped would need to be addressed.

There is also a concern about funds for upkeep of the building since some heat, and a fire alarm system, would still need to be maintained.

Latulippe said research suggests the ideal financial budget for a nursing home is 128 beds.

This home is 96, down from the current 108, so officials hope to stay within budget. The burden of the old building would make this more difficult.

But Latulippe is keeping a positive outlook, pleased with Sal-Dan General Contractor's progress. The company started construction in July 2010 and has rapidly progressed with the budget of more than \$15 million, right on track. As construction nears final stages, the building has been energized, with windows and an elevator installed. Painting and dry walling is in progress.

The new building will hold three pods of beds — each contains 32 — to make up the 96. There will be 74 washrooms, and the elimination of stall washrooms will mean more privacy for residents.

Forty-eight basic rooms will hold two people per room, sharing a washroom. There will also be 24 semi-private rooms, with two private bedrooms sharing a washroom. As well, 24 private rooms will have their own washrooms.

Algoma Manor administrator Barbara Harten said all areas of the new home will be secure and easily monitored.

Though some concerns have been expressed that dementia and Alzheimer's residents will be housed with the general population, Harten maintains studies have proved it's much better for those with such illnesses to not be separated from the general home.

"All units are also similar in structure and design for both security and safety," she said.

"We've split things so the business area is on one end and the living portion is on the other. It's like a little town hall. We want it to feel like an outing when they leave the home area to go to the beauty salon or the store."

Three large activity rooms will also be available for use for the manor's many programs, which include quilting, pickling and baking.

"We really do offer more than just food and hygiene," Harten said.

One of the integral parts of the new facility is a chapel. Area churches are very actively involved in manor activities, ranging from church services to teas and birthday parties.

The attached day care also provides many inter-generational activities with residents.

"We want to market this as a home. Everyone is family here," Harten said.

With orientation plans already in the works, Harten said the new facility will be a big change for everyone.

Work is ongoing with staff about new ideas and issues that might arise.

There will be some decreases in staffing with fewer beds, but effects aren't fully determined. Envelopes of funding are provided for the various departments by the province and budgets will need to be worked out depending on residents' needs.

Staff will tour the building in June to become familiar with the work areas and get oriented with new processes.

Harten said a grieving process is in store.

"There's excitement to move, but there's also a grieving for residents who are changing their homes and for staff who've worked in the old building for many years."

The first room was completed and recently set up for tours, and an open house saw more than 200 go through.

Upon entering the building through the main doors, there is a large area to be furnished for sitting areas. To the left, there is a small reception area and the tuck shop.

Directly ahead is a chapel, which will be equipped with folding doors allowing privacy and more space. A communication centre is being donated by Sal-Dan General Contractors, located in this area.

While the exterior is light-brown coloured brick, a secure inner courtyard is a combination of brick and yellow vinyl siding. This inner courtyard will allow residents to be in an outdoor setting with no security issues. Rocks retrieved during the initial digging will be used for landscaping in the courtyard as well as on the outer grounds.

Two sections of rooms will be on the main floor, while the third will be upstairs. New regulations for nursing homes mean the halls are wide and there's lots of space.

Each section will have its own dining area with many windows.

The rooms also have large windows, allowing for bright, natural light.

"Natural light helps with depression which is common in elderly," Harten said.

Colour schemes for are also based on research and have been selected based on how they will affect residents. Sections will also be colour-coded to make it easier to navigate around.

New bedspreads will reflect a natural environment, and curtains will be light and airy to keep the natural light in. Approximately 40% of the current furnishings are expected to be used, as the cost for new furnishings would be prohibitive and maintaining current features provide familiarity for residents.

While funding was provided by Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care to the tune of approximately \$12 million and a further \$2.68 million was earmarked by the 21 municipalities, there was still a shortfall of \$525,000 that the committee had to raise.

Latulippe said she officials are only \$60,000 short.

Memorial donations have played a big part in fundraising, and Latulippe said officials are grateful to Beggs Funeral Home for accepting donations. She also commended the Town of Thessalon for allowing tax-deductible donations to be made at the municipal office for the Algoma Manor Redevelopment Fund.

Corporate donations have included Algoma Mutual Insurance (\$25,000), Soo Mill Buildall (\$10,000) and CIBC (\$10,000).

The Algoma Manor Auxiliary has also been instrumental in fundraising, donating \$7,000 in the past few months alone, money generated from selling lunches and coffee break goodies to construction workers.

Auxiliary vice-president Renee Bailey said this concept was launched after a worker asked where to get food, and told her such a service would probably sell out if the supply was there.

She brought the idea to the auxiliary meeting, and though members were skeptical at first, they decided to give it a try.

A pot of chili was made in October and Wednesday Hard Hat Lunches have been going strong ever since.

When the auxiliary realized how well the lunches went over, members knew they didn't have the volunteers to carry it out weekly, so they called on other groups to help. Now, church groups, organizations and even individuals, take turns serving up the Wednesday fare, which has ranged from chili to stew, lasagna and turkey dinners.

There are only four dates to fill to the end of July. Groups simply sign up, come with their prepared food, serve, collect funds and turn over profits to the redevelopment fund. Many donations have also been received for lunches.

President Ali Doi estimates about \$200 is raised weekly from both the lunch fundraiser and coffee snack cart.

The auxiliary also runs the tuck shop, or gift and snack shop, and though it's currently only one hour a day, the hope is to extend hours in the new building.

"We need more volunteers to do that though," Bailey said.

Anyone wishing to sign up to provide a Hard Hat Lunch, join the auxiliary or work in the tuck shop, may contact Ali Doi at 705-842-3617 or Renee Bailey at 705-842-3514.

Numerous other groups have raised funds for the redevelopment project, including manor staff, who have volunteered to host many events, including a recent spaghetti dinner, which raised nearly \$1500.

As the construction enters the final stages, there's much work to be done.

A Northern Ontario Heritage Fund grant has provided dollars to hire Blair McClelland for a one-year marketing position, which will include updating pamphlets, signage and even logos and other promotions.

As well, a consultant is working on the scheduling of moving furnishings and residents.

"We want to market it as a home," Harten said. "We are everybody's family."