

Students return to their own classrooms

BY PAULINE KERR
SCN Editor

2000

Walkerton students will be returning to their own schools Sept. 5.

Vern Batte, director of education for the Bruce Grey Separate School Board, said preparations are in place, and students will be back at their own schools.

The contaminated water emergency in Walkerton forced students to finish their school year in alternate locations, mostly in Hanover at various locations.

Although everyone was extremely co-operative, said Batte, it was an "administrative nightmare". For example, students from Mother Theresa School attended classes in three different buildings. Everything worked out, although it wasn't easy.

"You do what you can, but... everyone's very happy to be back in their own schools," he said.

"School is about community," Batte said, "and there is nothing like being at home."

Janet Glasspool, director of education for the Bluewater Board, said, "It is important to the community for things to get back to normal."

She added that she was pleased the work has been completed in time for the beginning of the school year. "A tremendous amount of work went into this," Glasspool said.

Thanks to government funding, extensive preparations were made to ensure the students are not exposed to Walkerton's water. The town is still under a boil water order.

Batte explained how storage tanks have been installed at the schools. This involved repiping with temporary plastic pipes, from the holding tanks.

The water will be subjected to extensive testing, and will be used for everything except drinking at the three elementary schools. At the high schools, the water from the tanks will be used for washing. Bottled water will still be brought in for drinking.

The repiping and installation of tanks has been under way since the first week in July, Batte said.

Even with the alternate water supply, there will still be extensive testing. "There are so many precautions, there is no danger for the students," said Batte.

He noted the effort involved co-operation between the two school boards, and several government ministries including environment, education, health, and the local health unit.

Cost of providing the alter-

nate water supply amounted to in excess of \$5.5 million. Work could not begin until the funding was in place. A series of meetings were held, approval was granted, and only then did the work begin.

Waram

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Hogg said.

Hogg, who called the staff efforts "truly heroic," said the conduct of the Walkerton hospital during the crisis has been praised by citizens, medical professionals, the district health council, and the Ministry of Health, including Minister Elizabeth Witmer.

Hogg also commended those who provided assistance, including other regional hospitals, which supplied resources and assistance, physicians and specialists from outside the area, such as Children's Hospital of Western Ontario and the London Health Sciences Centre, volunteers who worked in many areas and the Ministry of Health, which provided additional financial help and relaxed deadlines for the hospital.

The cost for handling the E. coli outbreak locally has been pegged at about \$750,000.

Waram, called the efforts to handle the E. coli outbreak a "team effort."

"This included the switchboard staff who handled the extra calls and kept the media at bay, the maintenance staff who responded to security and parking issues, dietary, housekeeping, laundry and secretarial staff, who adapted to all the demands placed on them, purchasing, who were able to obtain whatever we needed and front line patient care and medical staff," he said.

Waram commended for handling of E. coli outbreak

BY PATRICK RAFTIS
Special to SCN

Acting CEO Dianne Waram received a standing ovation at the South Bruce Grey Health Centre Annual General Meeting, for her role in handling of the E. coli outbreak at the Walkerton site.

"When we asked Dianne Waram to stand in for Mike Jackson neither she nor we had any inkling as to what was in store," said SBGHC board chair Walter Hogg.

Days before the crisis struck, SBGHC CEO Mike Jackson was transferred to hospital in London, where he required heart surgery. Waram was appointed acting CEO.

"In an instant, Dianne found herself propelled from relative obscurity into a world of flashing cameras, glaring TV lights and daily press conferences with national and international media.

"That Dianne managed to deal with this, keep control of the situ-

ation, define what she needed and get the attention of those who could provide it - is a testament to her iron will and coolness under pressure," said Hogg.

Dr. William Knox, SBGHC Chief of Staff also commended Waram for her "skill and courage" in the dual role as CEO and Director of Patient Care.

"The medical and nursing staff, as well as the people of Walkerton are forever in your debt," he said.

Hogg noted that all hospital staff have worked long hours under difficult conditions for the last five weeks.

"Many of them were exposed to the deadly organisms in the early stages of the outbreak, some became ill, increasing the stress level enormously. The low point for our staff came with the passing of our long-service employee Betty Trushinski on June 1,"

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