

Dreams come true at Hospice Village

BY ANDY COMBER

Patients and families facing life-threatening illnesses were among those who helped design a new 8-bed residential facility at Windsor's Hospice Village. The facility was unveiled at a special preview event April 10.

"A lot of dreams have been addressed and answered," said Wayne St. Louis, one of the family consultants, who lost his wife Gayle to breast cancer in 2005.

"This was a project Gayle really wanted," said St. Louis, speaking of how his wife chose to spend her final days in a hospital-based hospice unit, rather than at home.

"She was protecting us," he said.

Architect Dan Amicone originally met with hospice patients and their families in 2005 to hear their recom-



Architect Dan Amicone explains the features of the new residential facility at Hospice Village during a special preview for the media April 10.

mendations for the design elements that would meet the needs of people and their families affected by a life threatening illness.

St. Louis said ideas received from patients and their families were used in the design of the homes, which are equipped with many amenities including fireplaces, hydrotherapy bathtubs, living room areas, and garden views.

"It is just like being at home," said St. Louis.

Support for families was also evident with a nearby kitchen, dining room and living room that offer a change of scenery and a place for families to enjoy meals, music, TV or conversation.

"There is a lot of thought that went into this project," said Clarence Weidman, who joined his wife Bev at the preview. The Windsor couple lost their daughter Joy, at the age of 44, to lung cancer in 2005.

"There isn't a thing left out," said Weidman. "It is wonderful to see it come to fruition."

Officials with Hospice said the \$1.3-million residential facility would offer care at a lower cost to the health care system, free up acute care beds in local hospitals and result in less emotional strain on the patient's family. It will serve citizens from the Windsor and Essex County region.

"Our own hospice team, a virtual army of volunteers, will be working in the homes," said Hospice executive director Carol Derbyshire, speaking of over 100 volunteers that will devote time at the new facility.

"We never believed it would be this beautiful," said Derbyshire, who outlined the vision for Canada's first Hospice Village, which is currently constructing a children's house that will join the wellness centre, pain clinic and newly constructed residential homes.

Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman presided over a grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony at the Hospice Village April 16, along with local civic and regional leaders, health care administrators, Hospice staff, volunteers, donors, and members of the general public.

Essex County residents have donated over \$1 million to the Hospice Village project.

Founded in 1979, the Hospice of Windsor and Essex County offers a wide range of services for patients living with life-threatening illness, including support groups, healing and wellness practices, patient and family education programs, and supportive care teams.

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