

Dr. Jim opened Ontario's first walk-in clinic

BY FRED SIMPSON
Staff Writer

Dr. James Langstaff didn't have to go very far to reach his office back in the 1930s, '40s and early '50s.

He just walked from his living room to his office/surgery to greet his patients.

This was the same home, built in 1849 by his grandfather Dr. James Miles Langstaff, that served as Richmond Hill's first hospital.

It was set up by Dr. Rolph Langstaff and his wife, Dr. Lillian — parents of Dr. Jim, as he was affectionately called.

Later on, Dr. Jim built the Langstaff building on Yonge Street and moved his office from the house to there.

"That was about the mid-50s," recalled Jim Monkman, co-ordinator of the Richmond Hill Historical Society's project to create a one-hour video about Dr. Jim's life.

He brought into his practice three other doctors and they worked on a 24-hour schedule. There was always someone on call.

Monkman believes he was probably the first physician in Ontario to set up a joint medical practice, similar in many ways to today's walk-in clinics.

"No one had heard of such a thing in those days," said Monkman.

The video features Dr. Jim reminiscing about his mother and father in the early days when the doctor's office, hospital and a private home, were all one.

"My father decided to open a small hospital in his home," he said. "He had two rooms for that purpose, which held about eight patients."

A lean-to attached to the back of the house served as the operating room.

"This was before the time of electricity," said Langstaff, "but there was a big eight-by-eight-foot skylight directly over the operating table, which meant he could only operate in the daytime."

"The hospital itself was terminated by my father just before I was born in 1911."

Dr. Jim took over his mother and father's medical practice in 1937 and continued to run his office out of the home before opening the Langstaff medical building in 1955.

"The ambulances would drive right up the laneway and into our backyard parking lot with the sirens still on. Many times, we woke up to see what was going on."

The Langstaff video was a special project of the historical society, which used it as a millennium project and a launching pad for its 25th anniversary.

The video was produced by Lifetime Productions of Markham, at a cost of \$15,000, with the historical society committing \$5,000 to get it started.

Funding was also received under the federal Millennium Partnership Program, with the balance donated by friends, former patients and colleagues of Dr. Jim.

"We interviewed Dr. Jim in the living room of his home, which has been occupied by the Langstaffs since 1849," said Monkman. "We decided to do this history because we didn't want the Langstaff story to get lost," explained Monkman.

Copies of the video *Emergency: Dr. Jim Langstaff A Real Prescription* are available from the Richmond Hill Historical Society, (905) 884-5603, at \$20 each plus \$2 postage if applicable.



DR. JAMES LANGSTAFF

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Tell us about your role model

February is when the rich and spirited African heritage is celebrated throughout North America. In York Region, we're giving students a chance to let the community know who they look up to within the black community. The Economist & Sun/Stouffville Tribune is asking students, from elementary grades to high school, to tell us about their black role model.

Essays should be no longer than 250 words, and winners will be chosen by a panel of community judges. Submit your essays by Jan. 31 to Black History Month Contest, c/o the Economist & Sun/Tribune, 9 Heritage Rd., Markham, ON, L3P 1M3 or fax to 294-1538.

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