

The West Parry Sound Health Centre was reconstructed 20 years ago, but now has areas that need to be upgraded and expanded.

COTTAGERS HELPING WEST PARRY SOUND HOSPITAL

Cancer and eye surgeries now available thanks to donor generosity

BY KIM GOGGINS

PHOTOS COURTESY WEST PARRY SOUND HEALTH CENTRE

Imagine you're relaxing at the cottage after a day of boating and swimming. The sun is slowly sinking into the horizon, casting glorious pinks and purples throughout the sky. The smell of steak is rising from the barbecue and you're just about to set the table when you hear an ear-splitting scream from one of your children.

The utopia is broken and adrenaline kicks in. All that's on your mind is getting your child help as quickly as possible. But what if the nearest hospital doesn't have the equipment or expertise to help?

The West Parry Sound Health Centre (WPSHC) emergency department sees three or four times the people in the summer than it normally does the rest of the year. When you're sick or injured — especially at the cottage — the last thing you want to hear when you get to a hospital is that you need to get back into your car and drive to the next health-care centre, which could be over an hour away.

"The West Parry Sound Health Centre Foundation's job is to make sure that when a patient comes through the front door of the hospital, they can trust that their health-care team has everything they need to provide advanced health care," said Deborah Loosemore, CEO of the foundation. "We can't do everything; we're a smaller hospital. There will be patients that have to be transferred, but we want to keep that to a minimum."

In a large geographical area that has only about 12,000 permanent households most of the year, but swells significantly to about 80,000 cottagers during summer, as well as 500,000 to 600,000 campers in the provincial parks, and approximately 16,000 vehicles driving through on Highway 400 each day, cottagers have joined permanent residents in taking on the challenge of raising money in a big way.

Seventy per cent of donations to the foundation come from cottagers and non-residents in the area. In one instance, a group of donors consisting mostly of non-residents created a giving society called Northern Angels. Members commit to an annual donation for five years, which ranges from $1,000 to $75,000 per year.

"It's important to remember that many cottagers, especially in the Georgian Bay cottager world, have deep ties to the region," said Loosemore. "They may be second generation or even third generation cottagers. They grew up here, essentially, and they see their children grow up here, so they have this deep love of the area and they feel a connection. It's part of their world, their life."

Since April 1, 2020, the total revenue to the foundation is more than $20 million. Some of the money goes to an endowment fund so the money is making money through interest, but the majority of funds are reinvested back into the hospital.

Few are more grateful to donors than Tom McEwen, whose trachea was completely severed when he ran into a wire that was strung across a trail while four-wheeling.

While severely injured, he managed to drive out to the road until he made it to a neighbour's front yard. An urgent call

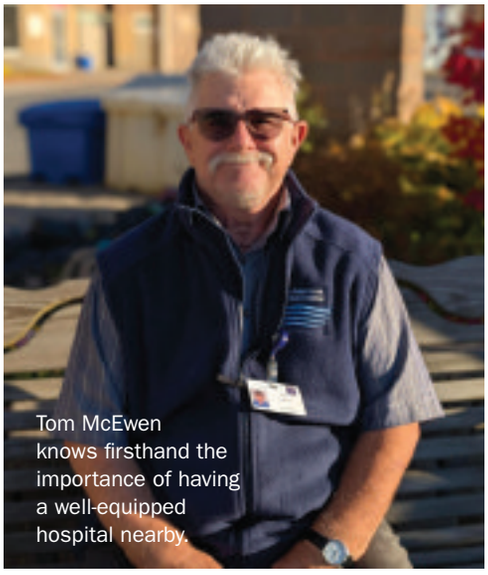


Members of the surgical team demonstrate the newly established ophthalmology unit, which is part of the $2.5-million surgical suite upgrades.

were all right here, exactly where I needed them to be," he said.

The new hospital was built 20 years ago and now has areas that need to be upgraded and expanded. The foundation is currently working on upgrading the emergency department and a $2.5-million campaign for a floor-to-ceiling upgrade of the surgical suite, which includes three operating rooms and a colonoscopy room, as well as a device reprocessing department, where all instruments and equipment in the hospital get sterilized for future use.

Members of the board of directors and various fundraising committees are often cottagers, and they help to spread the



Tom McEwen knows firsthand the importance of having a well-equipped hospital nearby.

to 911 got him the next 15 km to the West Parry Sound Health Centre emergency room.

Once inside, a doctor climbed on top of his gurney and forced a metal tube into him so he could breathe. This care by the WPSHC team kept him alive until Ornge flew him to the trauma centre at Sunnybrook Hospital.

"I owe this hospital everything," said McEwen. "I am here for my wife and children because of the doctors and nurses here who did everything they could to keep me alive. Every day I have is a special gift thanks to our hospital's emergency room team. So many people worked so hard to save me that day, and I was lucky they

The surgical team stands with some of the new equipment purchased because of donors.



word about the hospital's needs through receptions, dock parties and special events at their cottages.

"We're still raising funds but the hospital is already spending it and through that we now have breast cancer surgery options available that weren't available before," said Loosemore. "There are prostate surgery options — prostate cancer surgery that had not been performed here before now. There are also cataract and glaucoma surgeries that had not been performed here before that are now being performed here."

For more information about the foundation visit wpshcf.com



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