

What will Wellwood look like in five years?

The following is an edited version of the presentation by executive director Jane George from the 2004 Wellwood annual general meeting.

It was 14 years ago that Greg O'Connell and Maureen O'Connor decided to investigate the idea of creating a resource centre for people living with cancer in Hamilton-Wentworth. In 1995, they established the working group, chose the name Wellwood, developed a mission statement, and on December 13, officially incorporated.

In January of 1997, Scott Rowand, then CEO of the newly formed Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, promised Wellwood a home, subsequently donating his own suite of offices at the Henderson. Wellwood opened its doors on May 27, with an official opening later that same year.

Now, although we were so grateful to receive the donation of space, Wellwood was never intended to be a hospital-based Centre. The original plan was always to be community-based. The Henderson space was as a short-term solution to the problem of having volunteers and programs, but no space for service-delivery.

And yet, at the Board of Directors retreat in 1999, we were all asked to find a place where we could watch the sun set on Isabelle Harmer's magnificent property in rural Burlington, and invited to take 15 minutes to imagine our dream for Wellwood in ten years.

It was an incredible moment of clarity and purpose. We regrouped and shared our visions and it was apparent to all of us that Wellwood needed to be in the community. But what was suddenly less clear was whether we needed to move there or expand there.

We knew that a hospital is simply not the best place for clients affected by cancer, especially those who are immune compromised. Others find it emotionally and even physically difficult to come back to the hospital, a place they associate with their own experiences with the illness. We have people who tell us they just can NOT bring themselves to come there.

And yet, what the Board recognized at that retreat, what we discovered during that sunset meditation, was that we ARE

meeting a crucial need here in this clinical space...we are helping people in crisis: we are comforting those who have learned the devastating news of a diagnosis, spread of the cancer, or a recurrence; we are supporting those who are, in turn, supporting loved ones who are in hospital and, in some cases, actively dying; we are there for those in active treatment; we are there for in-patients; we are there for the residents of Lakeview Lodge, isolated from their own families and local support systems.

SO the dream became clear, the direction, known, and the path, obvious. Wellwood would have two homes, one in the hospital and the second, community-based.

A committee began to look at the possibilities. Many of us visited other Centres to see what we would and would not want for ours.

There were a number of MUSTS:

- *It must be sited in Hamilton.*
- *It must be located on a bus route, to ensure economic accessibility.*
- *It must not be an intimidating place. Too grand would be just as inappropriate as not lovely enough.....*
- *It would be a single floor plan to ensure barrier free access and safety for those with physical challenges.*
- *It must be completely accessible for disabled persons. Completely, as in every room and every exit, no elevator required.*
- *It must be within an area perceived as safe.*
- *It must give the Centre high profile and visibility in the community, and be easy to find for those with cognitive challenges from disease or treatment, or with language barriers.*
- *The property would have the capacity for a garden.*

In the spring of 2001, Terry Cooke and Aldo DeSantis become co-chairs of Wellwood's "Community Roots" capital campaign, which aspired to build a second site for Wellwood, one that was community based.

On May 24, as requested by Terry Cooke, Chedoke Corporation gave a parcel of land to Wellwood and invited us to work with their consultants to find a suitable site. June 18, Chedoke Corporation approved a proposed location at the corner where Rice becomes Sanitorium, and three weeks later, the capital campaign received its first gift, a pledge from

Dofasco for \$45,000. A second major gift of \$50,000 was to follow from McKeil Foundation.

On the morning of a day that lives on in infamy, September 11, 2001, Terry Cooke and I presented to City Council, who were so gracious despite the horrific distraction of the devastating events that were unfolding across the United States, and received a declaration of support and the waiving of development fees.

Severance and zoning meetings followed, with planners Brenda Khes and Don May providing invaluable guidance and navigation through it all. Joanne McCallum of McCallum Sather Architects dedicated her incredible talents to the design of the new Centre, based on a comprehensive premises prospectus prepared by the Board. It would be a beautiful, safe place, full of life, light, laughter and hope.

Ah, but meanwhile, back at the ranch.....the Henderson announced plans for a complete redevelopment of the hospital. Wellwood's future at the Henderson was now up for discussion. Many meetings were to follow, where Wellwood was assured that as a highly valued Centre, we would not only be given space in the new hospital, we would be given prime real estate, directly off the new front lobby. It was thrilling news, to be held in such high regard and to be part of the vision for the future of Hamilton Health Sciences. The long-term future at Henderson was rosy....less so, the short and medium-term reality of existence in a construction zone.

Spring of 2003, and the SARS outbreak closed Wellwood's offices for a five-week period, inspiring a new focus on community linkages and formal partnerships with Sacred Heart Community Centre and Mohawk College, who generously donated space. The relationships continue, an unexpected gift in the midst of a major challenge.

And then, and then.....December 31, 2003. A transformative gift and, indeed, defining moment for the future of Wellwood and its sustainability. Local philanthropists Charles and Margaret Juravinski, at the suggestion of their close friends Ned and Patricia Gagic, donate an endowment of two million dollars. Charles and his dog, Nick, arrive on my doorstep with cheque in hand. The news makes front page headlines in Hamilton. Our dream...is now so close to reality.

So, let's begin to gaze in the crystal ball, shall we?

The Henderson redevelopment will mean big changes for the hospital, and for Wellwood's hospital-based Centre too. This will mean big changes for our clients, the staff team, and for our (as of this precise minute) 194 incredible, talented, dedicated volunteers.

For the long-term, it is only good news. The offices, currently scattered throughout the first floor of the hospital in three different wings, will finally be together and in rooms that are the size and layout that we need. The design of the space is based on our input, so we will have a Centre tailored to meet the needs of our clients and the delivery of our programs and services.

For the short to medium-term, it is a good news/bad news kind of thing....In the very near future, Wellwood will temporarily be moved to the basement level. Bad news – basement. Good news – the offices and programs space will all be together in one location, and we are assured that signage will help our clients to find their way to us.

The time frame for each step of this will depend on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Senior Administration at the hospital. We do know it is not happening tomorrow, but we are poised, ready to move to the temporary location at a moment's notice. It will also mean that our collaborations and relationships with Mohawk, Sacred Heart and the Spec will be ever more important.

And now, let's head a few kilometres west to the community-based home.... Wellwood's Juravinski House, so named by the Board of Directors in sincere appreciation for the extraordinary generosity shown by our benefactors, and to thank them for the faith they have demonstrated in Wellwood, our work and our future.

The highlights, as developed by the Wellwood's Chedoke site planning committee, and as designed by McCallum Sather Architects:

The materials are environmentally rich (wood, stone). The grounds are lovely and tranquil and soothing....healing gardens. It is a place that will appeal to everyone, regardless of economic or cultural backgrounds. It is not too grand...not intimidating. It is lovely. It is welcoming. As you go inside, there will be a beautiful wall that honours the contributors. The focal point of the home is the fireplace....everything is built around the hearth as the heart of the home. There are many windows, many of which are high up to assure privacy while allowing the home to be filled with light.

We requested a fully-functioning large and central kitchen that would exist as pro-

grammatic and community space, include laundry facilities, as well as food preparation and counter space.

It is also to include a harvest table to gather around, which will function additionally as the board/meeting room. Other rooms include a library, exercise/group room, peer support room, quiet niche, creative arts and children's play spaces, relaxation rooms and offices.

And, obviously, your next questions are when? when? and when? I wish I had an easy answer.

We have come incredibly far. We really are so close.

We have an endowment that we hope will generate the revenue needed to fund the operation of the house itself. The two million dollars will not be spent on building the house. The capital will not be touched. Only the investment income will be used. We have well over one hundred thousand dollars in cash to build.

The truth is we need more. We need

several major donors to finalize the gifts that we are discussing with them, we need some others to come on board, and we need the support of Wellwood's friends. **We need all of you to be a part of this campaign.** If you are, it is entirely possible that we could begin building next year.

The impact on the program committee, volunteer committee and staff team will be tremendous. Our volunteer numbers will need to grow. So might our staff numbers. Our costs will increase. Our programs will too. But we are ready. We are excited. We will make it happen.

I invite you to drop by to look at the drawings, to talk with the members of the Board of Directors, the staff team, and with each other. I invite you to give us your ideas and input. This is your Wellwood. Tell us your dreams for Wellwood too.

Jane

WELLWOOD RESOURCE CENTRE

for People Living With & Affected by Cancer

7th Annual SPAGHETTI DINNER

**WED., SEPTEMBER 29th
from 4:30 to 7:30 PM**

EAT IN or TAKE OUT

Church of the Resurrection
821 Upper Wentworth St.
(at Mohawk Road near Limeridge Mall)

TICKETS AVAILABLE
AT THE DOOR & AT THE OFFICE

Adults \$10
Seniors (60+) \$8
Children (10 & under) \$5

**For Information Call:
905.389.5884**

