

# Sod turned for La Loche's new hospital

Nov. 16, 1999

After 18 years of refusing to budge, La Loche's "temporary" trailer hospital is on its way out.

With the flip of a shovel last Friday, associate health minister Judy Junor gave La Loche residents something they've been anticipating for nearly a decade: a firm commitment to replace a facility that's been past its prime for eight years.

Junor first visited the aging St. Martin's Hospital during her tenure as president of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN). "I actually left there with tears in my eyes, to think that people were getting their health care in that setting," Junor recalled of that visit. Now, "the soil is turned ... There is a definite commitment to, if not to have every curtain hung and every wall wallpapered, to at least have it mostly completed by the end of 2000."

For the first time in administrator Violet Lemaigre's tenure at the hospital, her staff will be able to do "preventive work rather than just reactive ... deal with issues before they become real problems."

The existing hospital — a collection of 15 linked ATCO trailers with equipment so old, Lemaigre laughed, "Y2K is not a problem with us" — acts almost exclusively as an acute care facility, stabilizing patients before they are transferred to any required specialists. It has been operating since 1981, even though it was expected to last only 10 years.

Plans for the new facility, however, go far beyond existing services. In addition to acute care, the 24-bed facility will offer long-term care, in-patient alcohol and drug detoxification services, and a wide range of community health services.

What excites Lemaigre most is what the facility promises for seniors and youth. The nine-bed long-term care wing "will no doubt be filled as soon as the doors open," she said, and free day programming will serve far more than just those nine residents. At present, there are no programs, clubs or activities for La Loche's elders, whom Lemaigre estimates to be between 10 and 15 per cent of the village's nearly 2,000 residents. "Right now, everybody's isolated in their own homes," Lemaigre said of the seniors.

The new health centre will also address the needs of youth, notably through an already-initiated sexual wellness program. Youth, feeling lonely, bored or emotionally lost, turn to sex, Lemaigre said. "It's an expected thing in the community: 'you're 15, 16 now, it's time to have a baby.'"

"It's an excuse," she said. "Come graduation, they'd be pregnant. ... It's an excuse not to go on to further education, because they're afraid."

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# La Loche awaiting expanded health service

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Plus, Lemaigre said, a baby fills a heart-longing: "If you feel like other people, like your parents, don't love you, this baby will love you or you'll have someone to love." The aim of the new program is to teach youth that sex is not an "out", and that they can find what they are searching for in healthier and more lasting ways.

The cost of the new health centre, expected to total \$9.5 million, will largely be covered by the province. The community will, however, be expected to

raise \$700,000, which worries Lemaigre. La Loche has extremely high unemployment, and no real tax base, she said.

Still, there are signs that the goal could be achieved. At the sod-turning, for example, a snowmobile and a \$100,000 corporate cheque were donated to the project.

Even if there is a shortfall, it will not stop the project, Junor said, but neither is she worried

about the community's ability to raise the cash.

"There are (fundraising) ideas floating around, and there's a lot of enthusiasm. ... I would hate to dampen that," she said.

"There are some reservations ... and I don't blame them," she added. "I hope the community gets over its skepticism."

*Carmen Pauls*

*Staff*

## *New hospital at a glance*

**Name:** La Loche Health Centre (a contest will be held to choose a name more reflective of the community)

**Construction timeline:**

- Sod-turning and initial site work — fall 1999
- Construction ready for public tendering — early 2000
- Fully operational — early 2001

**Cost:** \$9,589,480 (the community will be expected to raise \$700,000 to cover the estimated cost of equipment and furnishings)

**Services:**

- Acute care: 11-bed adult, pediatric and labour/delivery; three observation/short stay beds; two-bed nursery
- Long-term care: nine long-term beds (including palliative care); activity and dining facilities; day programming
- Addictions: four-bed self-contained social detox unit
- Emergency: trauma room; small procedure treatment room; examination and cast rooms; ambulance storage garage
- Outpatient services: X-ray department; laboratory facilities
- Community-based services: home care; public health; mental health; suicide prevention; addictions (outpatient program); physio and occupational therapy; early childhood intervention; dental operatories; visiting professionals
- Medical clinic: four physicians; visiting specialists
- Support services: kitchen/cafeteria; laundry services; maintenance; materials management

**Steering committee partners:**

Northern Village of La Loche, La Ronge Health Centre staff, Clearwater River Dene Nation, Northern Hamlet of Turnor Lake, Birch Narrows First Nation, communities of Garson Lake, Deschambeau and Black Point, Keewatin-Yatthe Health District and Saskatchewan Health

**Consultants:**

- Prime consultant: Montgomery J. Sampson Architect/The Architects Collaborative
- Project manager: G. Lalonde Consulting Ltd.