

Breath of fresh air



Melody Mayberry, a hospice palliative care nurse, on the new rooftop patio at the Saint John Regional Hospital. PHOTO: REBECCA WATSON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

Rooftop patio provides fresh comfort to palliative patients

REBECCA WATSON
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN • A breath of fresh air is breathing hope into the Palliative Care Unit at Saint John Regional Hospital after the doors to a long-awaited rooftop garden patio officially opened Tuesday.

During the grand opening, Dr. Julia Wildish, medical director of palliative care, said that a serious illness can take away a person's identity as they become increasingly dependant on others.

"One of the best things we can do for them is just help them forget about that for a little while and sometimes that makes a big difference," she said. "It also helps us remember that even very close to its end, life can actually be full of meaning and I think what this garden does is prioritize that meaning we all have, especially right at the end."

The outdoor space was a long-time

dream of the late Tim Cameron, former CEO of the Saint John Regional Hospital Foundation.

His wife, Cathy Cameron, said she was grateful to see her husband's dying wish come into fruition.

"It means a lot. (Tim) fretted about it because typically when projects are suggested they go through quite quickly but this one seemed to have obstacle after obstacle," said Cameron while holding back tears.

"But just before he passed away two years ago he was told it was going to happen and it brought him great comfort."

Since the patio is on the roof, ensuring the space was able to carry the load of a patio was one of the biggest challenges and reasons for the projects delay, spokeswoman Christine Gilliland said.

"But it's here now and we are so

excited," she said.

Furniture for the patio will be arriving in upcoming weeks and next spring staff expect to plant more flowers with the help of volunteers from the hockey



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team Moms In Gear.

The team already maintains the oncology garden year-round and recently accepted the task of looking after the new Palliative Care garden as well.

"There are 25 girls on our team and we rotate who helps maintain the gardens and hopefully we do a good job," joked Pamela Connolly, 63, hockey player and volunteer.

One guest at the opening, Darlene Hadland, 59, has visited the palliative care unit twice before to be close to relatives.

"It will be nice to have a space to get fresh air and to give patients and their families a dose of reality amongst all the chaos," she said.

Former chaplain for the Saint John Hospital, David Jackson, 84, agrees.

"This is just wonderful. Fresh air is something you really need and a lot of people just don't get enough," he said.