

Planned centre in Kirkland: A wellness building



K A T E S H E R I D A N , S P E C I A L T O M
More from Kate Sheridan, Special to Montreal Gazette

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Four years ago, Debbie Magwood, the founder and executive director of the West Island Cancer Wellness Centre, burst into tears when she informed the staff the centre needed a waiting list.

“It was something that we vowed we would never do,” Magwood said, “but we couldn’t keep up with the demand for the services with the amount of programming that we had. It was going to become counter-therapeutic.”

“It was probably the worst day in the history of the West Island Cancer Wellness Centre.”

That was also the day she realized the centre may have outgrown the little yellow house in Beaconsfield, where people living with cancer and their families can receive free services and find community and support.

Construction of a new, bigger yellow house in Kirkland will begin this spring, after nearly two years of fundraising and a zoning change scheduled to be approved in February.



It's a \$3-million move for the centre, funded by large donations, including \$1 million from the Eric T. Webster Foundation.

Magwood hopes the public will contribute the remaining \$400,000 needed to buy the land and construct the building at the corner of Barry and Hedgerow Sts.

Larger donors in the capital campaign have sponsored rooms, including the new library, but there are other items that smaller donors can contribute. Rooms cost at least \$50,000, but smaller donors that contribute at least \$250 can buy stepping stones for a garden pathway in the centre's "stepping stones of inspiration" project. The centre is also asking local businesses for in-kind donations, such as flooring or windows.

"For the remaining donations, we want to focus a lot more on giving the community an opportunity to put their legacy into the building at a less expensive rate," said Magwood.

The centre will start reaching out to the community in earnest for their support via social media early this year, though Magwood refused to spoil any details about potential promotions she called "pretty awesome."

The centre is continuing to host events, including a women's-only fundraising dinner in February, to help raise money for their operating budget while the capital campaign is ongoing. (The centre saved some money for their operating budget, anticipating that fundraising may be affected by the capital campaign, according to communications director Serena Chenoy. So far, the impact has been minor.)

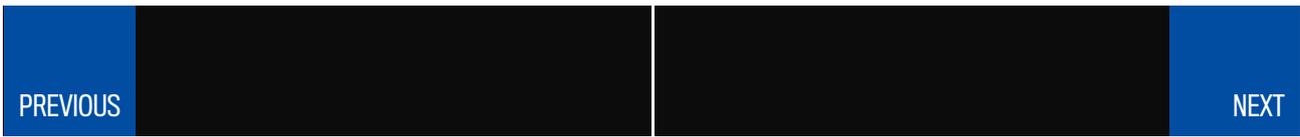
While the amount of fundraising has been a challenge, Magwood praised the centre's entire team's work.

Teamwork and community has helped the centre run for years, Magwood emphasized. Their operating budget is primarily funded by smaller donations from the community. And after the waiting list was announced, the centre's team worked to clear it within a week. The waiting list has been kept clear since.

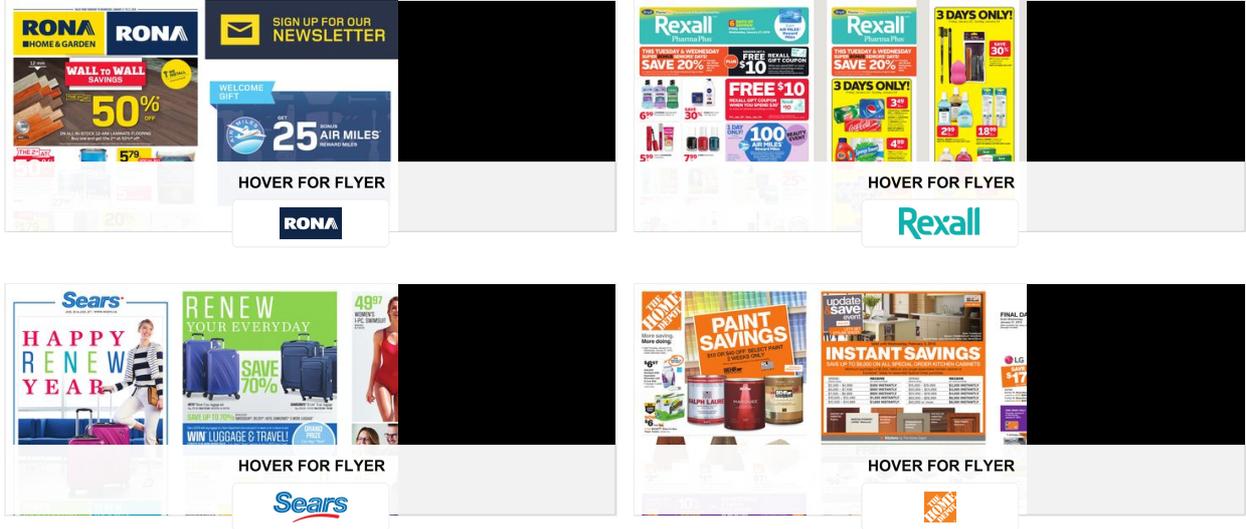
Magwood said she was confident the local community would step up in the coming months during the capital campaign to help the centre continue to provide a vital "safe haven" for cancer patients and their families — like one participant who wrote a testimonial for the centre.

"It's a relief to be in a place where people understand ... and don't stare," she wrote. "I've met people I can only

describe as heroic at the WICWC.”



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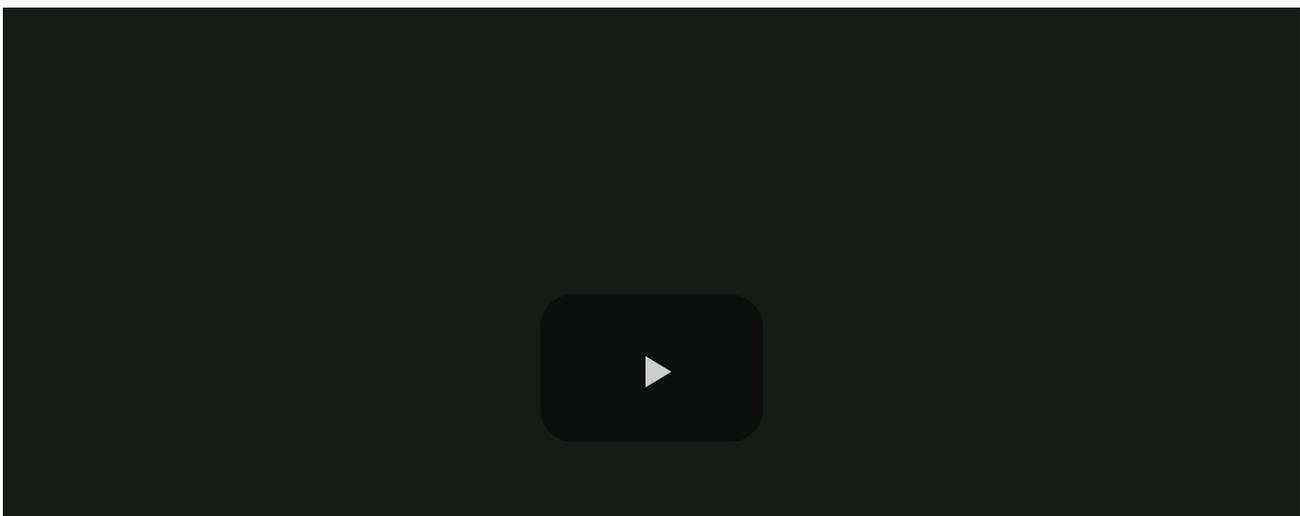
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