

Maple Ridge Hospital

By Marie Nightingale, Senior Communications Consultant with the Fraser Health Authority

When the idea for a hospital first surfaced in the 1920s, the 4,000 residents' health needs were being met by Dr. D. Garnet Morse, who arrived in Port Haney in 1912. This was a progressive step for the area as Dr. Morse was its first permanent doctor. He took over the medical care of the community from Dr. Mewed of New Westminster, who previously made periodic visits to help with emergencies or epidemics.

In 1913, a small wooden bridge was built across the Pitt River, providing the first access to a modern health facility—the Royal Columbian in New Westminster.

For years these two advances seemed to satisfy the majority of the people but as the population grew, so did their needs. The idea for a local hospital resurfaced in 1935, but the depression overshadowed the prospect, and kept it as just an idea to be left stewing on the back burner.

During those bleak years there was little money in the area and often as not, Dr. Morse's pay would be a chicken, a sack of vegetables or a block of cheese. It was clear no one could afford any kind of health care facility.

In 1941, the Haney Board of Trade took up the cause, investigating the possibility of a 50-bed hospital to serve 7,000 residents. Larry Jackson of Webster's Corners got involved, speaking with women's organizations in Ruskin, Webster's Corners and Yennadon, but once again, they met with a stumbling block, as the Second World War intervened.

Finally in 1947, a hospital association formed. The catalyst was the Hamilton Report, which recommended a 50-bed cottage style hospital be located in Maple Ridge. A membership drive was initiated, and over 1,500 people joined the association. Inspired by the enthusiasm of the people, the association seized the moment and pushed for their cause. However, arguments soon arose over the community's ability to pay for such a

service, and the debate turned into a political battle. A group of influential citizens campaigned against the hospital, and a referendum on December 13, 1947, was defeated, with a vote of 919 in favour and 1,378 against.

After the defeat at the polls, membership in the association plummeted.

The association reorganized in 1950–51. The board of trustees was made up of members of community service clubs and organizations, with Larry Jackson as president.

Dr. Sid Arber, Dr. Morse and Dr. Don Gallagher pushed hard for the establishment of a hospital. Dr. Arber went on to become the Hospital's first Medical Chief of Staff.

As the population reached 13,000, the need for a local hospital became increasingly critical. Residents and doctors found driving the distance to an acute care center increasingly an unacceptable hardship. A massive research effort was undertaken to validate the need. The association decided the time was ripe to push for the hospital.

When this monumental task was complete, a recommendation for a 63-bed hospital lay before the association. The preliminary design was drawn up on a piece of wrapping paper, while committee members gathered around the dining room table of board member Malcolm Brown. The sketch plans were completely revised 14 times before an adequate design was found, with the local doctors influencing the final decision for an innovative double corridor design.

Another referendum held on December 13, 1954, resulted in 1,884 votes in favour of the hospital and 643 against it.

Peter Hodge came on board as the first paid staff member in 1956. From an office the size of a broom closet, Hodge directed the effort as the hospital's first administrator. The association purchased 14 acres of the Baillie Farm at the corner of 3rd avenue (now Laity) and Lougheed Highway for \$12,000.



Then, after seven nights of deliberations, the association accepted a tender for \$1.13 million, awarding the contract to Cloverdale Construction Company of New Westminster, on January 30, 1957.

On March 1, 1958, just over a year after the first sod was turned, the doors officially opened to a state-of-the-art health facility. Thousands of people stepped through the doors and crossed over the threshold of a new era of health care for their community. Maple Ridge Hospital surpassed the medical standards of the day and was touted as the best hospital of its size and type in the province. Reports stated it was the finest looking small hospital in North America. One dignitary paid it the highest compliment, saying it was “the most unhospital looking hospital” he had ever seen.

The two-storey building opened with 63 beds, a staff of 62 and a medical staff of eight doctors.

Original Doctors at Maple Ridge Hospital, 1958.

Left to right: Sid Arber, D. Garnet Morse, Robert Rhodes, Donald Gallagher, Robert Stothers, Ted Thordarson, Lloyd Capling, and Andrew Trudel.

Note the photographer was five seconds late in the taking of the photo.

The first patient wasn't admitted until 10 days after the opening because equipment was delayed on trains coming from the East. The hospital's first baby, born on March 13, 1958, was Doreen Cynthia Cissell, a daughter for Mr. and Mrs. George Cissell. She received a lifetime membership to the hospital association, as well as countless gifts from the community.

As the population grew, it became increasingly apparent that 63 beds were not sufficient to serve the needs of the local people. In answer to this demand, a third floor expansion opened for service on September 9, 1967, bringing the hospital's bed capacity to 106. The expansion included extensive additions to the first floor, including an outpatient treatment area, laboratory, physiotherapy and radiology departments.

An Intensive Care Unit was opened in an existing ward on the medical floor in 1969, and a day care surgery service was introduced.

By 1973, the occupancy rate was again up to 98 percent, and the operating expenditures were more than 10 times greater than when the facility opened.

More space became available in 1974, with the opening of Alouette Manor, a 75-bed extended care unit. The unit fulfilled a need for a residential facility for elderly people who could not return to their homes but still needed a certain level of care.

Creekside Manor opened 50 of its 75 extended care beds on June 1, 1984, helping to ease the burden caused by a shortage of beds.

The Ridge Meadows Hospital Foundation was incorporated February 11, 1985, with a mandate to raise funds and public awareness to the hospital. It launched its first formal campaign in April 1988, with a goal of raising \$1,048,000 to replace and upgrade medical equipment in the acute care facility, help equip phase two of the expansion, and to support the hospital Chaplaincy program. It was the largest fundraising effort in the history of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows area. This year, Ridge Meadows Hospital was rated as the fifth largest health care facility in the Fraser Valley, with 131 beds.

As the community continued to grow, so did the demands on the hospital. In 1991, a brand new emergency ward, a new trauma room and a new \$1.5 million computer admitting system were added to the hospital. In 1992, the administrative role was taken on by Bill Dartnell, who served as the president of the hospital for two years. By 1993 there were 264 beds and 520 employees. In the fall of 1994, a 25-bed Discharge Planning Unit opened for business. It was the first of its kind in the province, as it was housed in a separate area. As well, a new kitchen unit opened.

CareLife Maple Ridge, adjacent to Ridge Meadows Hospital and one of the most advanced health care facilities in BC, opened in July 2006 providing a new home environment for 148 complex care residents (Baillie House), a new work environment for Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Home and Community Care and a home for the 10-bed McKenney Creek Hospice Residence.

Fraser Health has partnered with the Ridge Meadows Hospital Foundation to create new space for Emergency and Ambulatory Care Services at Ridge Meadows Hospital. The 2,950-square-metre (31,742-square-foot) development will nearly triple the size of the current emergency room, and will consolidate ambulatory (outpatient) care services, including oncology, respiratory services, medical day care including intravenous therapy, endoscopes and cataract surgeries.

Construction is nearing completion with the ER targeted to open in Spring 2008 and the Ambulatory Care in early Fall 2008.

As well as physical plant changes and equipment advances, there have been many enhancements to local service provision such as the addition of sub-acute (rehabilitation) beds in 2006, the addition of cataract surgeries, and triple the number of joint surgeries in the past year.

The Ridge Meadows Hospital that exists today has 107 acute beds (including 15 sub-acute and 14 psychiatric beds) and approximately 1,135 employees, 90 active physicians (plus locums and consultants) and 500 volunteers who support a population of 91,000.



“We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give.”

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

You may not be able to perform surgery or set a broken leg but you can make a difference at Ridge Meadows Hospital. Thanks to your donations the foundation purchases life saving equipment every year. Please make your gift today. Together, we will ensure the best diagnostic and treatment tools are available when you and your loved ones need them.

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