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# Long-term care wing in Blind River turned doors into murals

By KEVIN McSHEFFREY,  
Of The Standard

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Photo by KEVIN McSHEFFREY/THE STANDARD Patsy Bell and Romeo Francouer, two residents of the North Shore Health Network - Long Term Care, donated funds to paint the murals on the doors. They are accompanied by the artist Monique Legault.

Roberta Paquette, North Shore Health Network - Long-term Care (formerly Golden Birches) nurse manager, says they have come up with an idea to help their dementia residents in long-term care.

Paquette says she attended a long-term care conference at a nursing home in Sudbury about 18 months ago and came across something that the long-term care home there did.

Paquette says a common symptom dementia patients exhibit is they pace a lot and when they see a door they want to leave. They often get frustrated because the doors are locked to prevent them from leaving the safety of the facility.

There are 42 residents at North Shore Health Network - Long-term Care wing in Blind River, most of who have one of the several forms of dementia, of which Alzheimer's disease is the most common, explains Paquette.

To help alleviate that frustration and calm them down, they painted murals on a couple of the North Shore Health Network - Long-term Care doors.

On a set of double doors, they had a Sudbury artist Monique Legault - who specializes in murals, paint a scene of what someone might see out of a window in Blind River. The scene is a forested area with a trail, and even wildlife.

"It's very Northern Ontario. It's just what you would see looking out of your window."

On Paquette's office door Legault painted a bookshelf, complete with books.

The murals have depth and look three-dimensional.

"When they go to a door they are constantly pushing to get out. So, when they look at this, it diverted them.

"They won't go to that door to push out. Instead, they see a nice calming, pleasant environmental picture.

"The whole idea is to calm our residents."

She says she has not had one person go to those two doors since they have been painted.

"So, it's showing me it's working, it does divert them..., and it's nice to look at."

After she returned from the long-term care conference in Sudbury she approached the family council and asked if they would be willing to donate money to have doors painted. The family council is made up of relatives, and advocate for the residents, as well as the staff.

"A family council is an integral part of a nursing home."

The residents also have a council.

The family council, which also does some fundraising, agreed and suggested they invite local clubs to take part. Several clubs and individuals, and even two residents of the long-term care facility opted to donate money for the murals.

"These doors are all painted through donations."

As a way to thank the donors, their names were written on the spines of the painted book on the bookshelf mural. Paquette says they have plenty of books on the mural for anyone who would like to make a donation and have their names on the spines.

She hopes they will receive more donations so they can paint more murals on doors.

However, they cannot paint all the doors.

Paquette says they had to get permission from the Blind River Fire Department to paint the doors.

The fire department had to inspect it for entrance and exit security.

"It was a long process, but it got done."

“It looks like it’s part of the building.”

Most of the long-term care wing’s doors are fire rated and they must be careful not to change the integrity of the doors. In addition, some of the doors need to have a small window left unpainted to allow people to see through to the other side, she explains.

She says more long-term care homes in southern Ontario are painting their doors.

Some of the residents even bring their visiting relatives to see the artwork on the doors.

“It brightens up the place a little.

“It also camouflages some of the stuff so it looks less institutional, and more like a home.”

Legault painter

Paquette says they looked for local artists who would do the work, but they found none who could paint three-dimensional.

They engaged Legault to do the work because Paquette says she saw the quality of her work, and she is from Northern Ontario.

Legault began painting at the age of 13. By the time she was 15, she was teaching it. She says she painted her first mural at the age of 16. And 18 years ago, she took over her mother’s art studio, and has operated the Monique Legault Studio ever since.

She says she paints a lot of murals for individuals in their homes, as well as some corporate jobs.

She says it took her about 24 hours over two days to paint the doors.

She calls the work she has done ‘homescaping,’ and blends such things as door fixtures into the murals, hiding some of its institutional look.

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