

Montreal shelters join forces to help homeless veterans

Groups aim to 'treat them, refer them'

THE GAZETTE

Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson acknowledges that the number of homeless veterans living in this country may only be in the dozens.

But he's quick to add that "even one is too many," and to that end, Thompson, several Montreal shelters for the homeless, and other community groups have joined together in an effort to find those veterans and give them

access to the services they've earned in service to their country.

The United Auto Workers of Canada has donated a van that will allow volunteers to canvass the homeless on Montreal's streets. The union also donated \$5,000 to cover any immediate costs to get whatever veterans are found off the street.

The federal government is counting on the assistance of local community groups to help with the search.

But Serge Lareau of L'itinéraire, a group that helps the local homeless, noted that identifying veterans from the ranks of the city's estimated 25,000 homeless is a task that will not be easy for anyone.

"When someone shows up at a shelter, the sense of shame, of vulnerability is such that in many cases they won't identify themselves, they'll try to hide who they are and what they used to be," he said, "Normally, it doesn't matter to us if someone was a soldier. We help them, we treat them, we refer them."

"But this program is to al-

low those veterans access to the programs they're entitled to.

"Maybe (homeless veterans) won't be more open with Veterans Affairs, but at least we can help them along. Maybe in a week, maybe in six months, we can get them to trust us, to tell us who they are and then we can lead them to the help they need."

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Six of Yasmine's daughters share the same bedroom

Her 12-year-old lives in a hospital

MAX HARROLD
THE GAZETTE

Yasmine has eight children under age 17. Seven of them live with her and her husband in a cramped three-bedroom apartment on the West Island.

But it's the one child who doesn't live at home, her 12-year-old disabled daughter, who preoccupies Yasmine the most. That child lives at the hospital because of her many ailments, which stem from having been born prematurely at 29 weeks.

"She has problems eating, she barely talks, she can't sit on her own," Yasmine, 41, said. This year, the girl had surgery to repair her malformed spinal cord, and the four-month recovery was especially painful.

Yasmine doesn't have a paying job. She cooks and cleans for her family and spends time at the hospital with her daughter. Her husband, a landscaper, doesn't work in the colder months. Their welfare and child allowance cheques total about \$3,000 a month.

"It's tough to stretch that



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out for a family of 10," Yasmine said.

Yasmine is among thousands of people who are to receive \$125 cheques from the Gazette Christmas Fund this year. The money helps make the holiday season a bit more cheerful for needy families and individuals.

Six of Yasmine's daughters share one large bedroom, which is the basement level of their apartment. Her 15-year-old daughter helps out a lot,

but her 17-year-old son spends a lot of time away from home and his mother doesn't know where he is most nights.

How does Yasmine find the strength to get through it all? "Honestly, I don't always," she said. "I suffer a lot. My daughter's not here. She's always sick. My other children don't like to visit her in the hospital, so they don't really know their own sister."

"Sometimes I get so depressed, I just want to leave and not come back," she said. She tries to put on a brave face, especially in public.

"Lots of people need help," said Yasmine, who volunteers at a thrift shop where the proceeds go to help the poor. "I don't show people I have needs. I don't want my children to take that on. I'm proud of the way my husband and I have tried so hard to raise our children to be good people."

While she doesn't celebrate Christmas because she is a Muslim, Yasmine said she appreciates the intentions behind the Christmas fund and she will use the money to pay bills.

"It's a great thing to help," she said. "If I had money, I would help, too."

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Advertisement

Community mobilizes to build the new MUHC

BLG donates \$500,000

"IN OUR MINDS TOP QUALITY HEALTH CARE IS CENTRAL to ensuring Montreal remains a leading international city that offers an enhanced quality of life," notes John Murphy, managing partner at the Montreal office of Borden Ladner Gervais LLP (BLG), the largest Canadian law firm. "With the construction of the McGill University Health Centre's new facilities on the Glen Campus about to begin, we are proud to join the corporate community as well as individual Montrealers in supporting this much-needed and most welcome initiative."

While announcing BLG's \$500,000 donation, Murphy added: "We hope that our gift will inspire others."

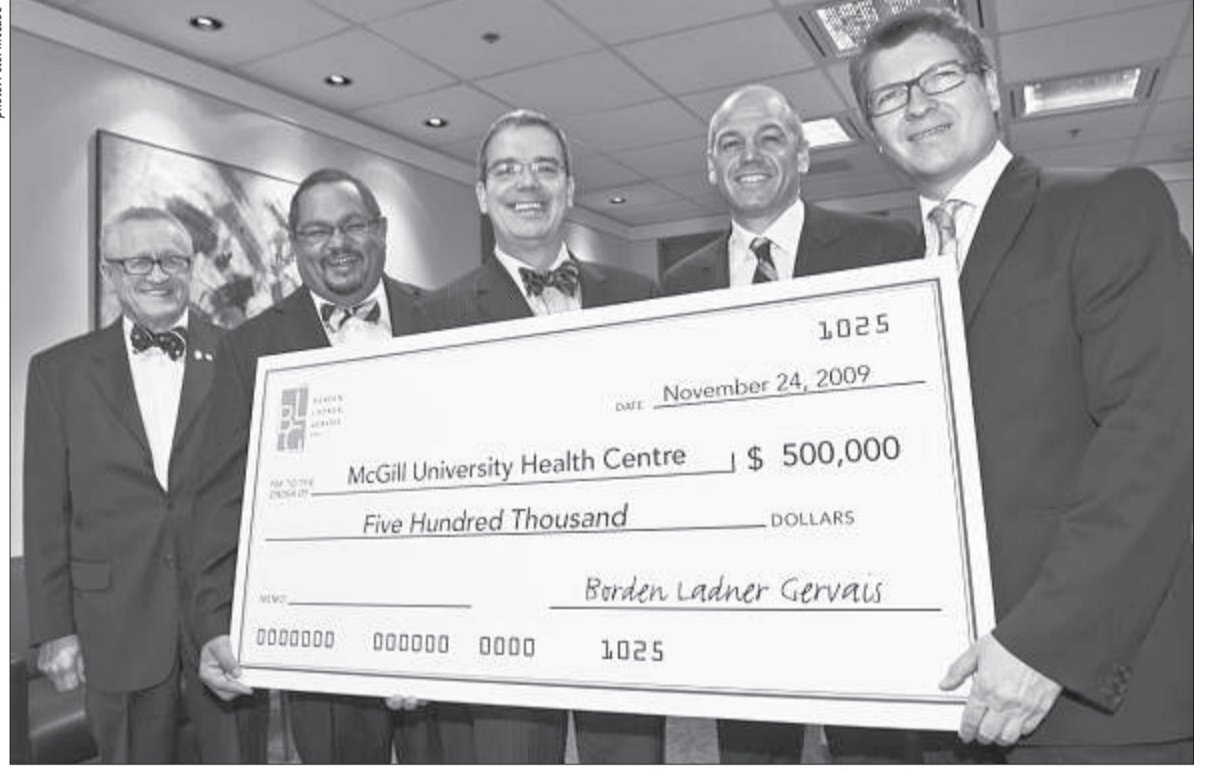
The Quebec Government has asked the community to contribute \$300 million towards the \$2.2 billion overall cost of this once in a generation project on three campuses, the Glen (future home of the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal

Children's Hospital, Montreal Chest Institute, Comprehensive Cancer Centre and the Research Institute), Lachine (home of the Lachine Hospital and Camille-Lefebvre Pavilion) and Mountain (home of the Montreal General Hospital), where a complete transformation of the physical space is well underway, including in mental health, gastroenterology, ophthalmology and cardiac intensive care.

So far, corporations and individuals have donated more than \$210 million to *The Best Care for Life Campaign*, a partnership of the MUHC Foundation, Cedars Cancer Institute, Lachine Hospital Foundation, Montreal Chest Institute Foundation, Montreal General Hospital Foundation, Royal Victoria Hospital Foundation and the Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation through its *Best Care for Children Campaign*, chaired by Marc Courtois.

"The community has been incredibly generous, and we are very appreciative," states John Rae, *Best Care for Life Campaign* Chair. "Yet we still have a distance to travel. I am confident as Montrealers become aware of the benefits of single patient rooms across the MUHC and the potential rewards of this investment in care, teaching and

photo: Peter McCabe



Alex Paterson, retired partner and Honourary Chair of *The Best Care for Life Community Campaign* (left to right), Arthur T. Porter, Director general and CEO of the MUHC, John Murphy, Managing Partner at Borden Ladner Gervais, John Godber, National Corporate Commercial Group Leader, and André Dufour, Montreal Business Department Leader

research they will answer our renewed call for support."

"With work underway at the Mountain Campus, plans set for Lachine and construction ready to start on the Glen, now is the time for the community and the staff to get behind the project," echoes Dr. Sylvia Cruess, former Director of Professional Services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, and co-chair of the *Best Care for Life Community Campaign* along with her husband, Dr. Richard Cruess, Ian and Helgi Soutar, as well as Raymond Royer and his wife France Denis. "We're getting a growing sense of excitement and enthusiasm as Montrealers begin to realize that the dream is closer to reality."

Once complete, the new MUHC will feature private patient rooms on all campuses as well as the latest in medical equipment and will allow clinicians and researchers to work side by side, leading to innovation and advances in treatment. "The new Children's, with its single patient rooms and modern equipment,

will create a better environment for staff and a much improved healing environment for the children of Québec" explains Marc Courtois, Chairman of the *Best Care for Children Campaign*, which has contributed more than \$65 million so far

The employee campaign was launched in May with events across the MUHC, such as fundraising barbecues, raffles and ice cream sales. "Our internal community are our best salespeople," noted Helgi and Ian Soutar. "Their enthusiasm is contagious

"The community has been incredibly generous, and this has been very inspiring," states John Rae, Best Care for Life Campaign Chairman. "We still have a distance to travel to attain our goal. We are confident that as the great merits of this once in a lifetime project are increasingly known by Montrealers, we will succeed in our mission."

towards the *Best Care for Life Campaign*.

Hospital workers are eagerly awaiting their elaborate new facilities. "I'm really excited about the enhanced hospital accommodations consisting of single patient rooms which will offer safety, dignity, privacy, and patient-centered care in a comfortable environment," said France Denis, a clinical perfusionist at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

and will inspire widespread community support and participation. To meet our goal we need donations of all sizes - as the old saying goes, every penny counts."

"We are proud to be partnering with the MUHC," concludes BLG's John Murphy. "Thanks to them Montrealers benefit from first-rate care, and the MUHC is a world leader. They deserve our support and our gratitude."