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VJH celebrates 'Topping Off' of new Patient Care Tower

Vernon-Monashee MLA Eric Foster led representatives from Interior Health, Graham Construction, Infusion Health and the Regional Hospital District in a traditional "Topping Off" Ceremony at the new Patient Care Tower at Vernon Jubilee Hospital (VJH), in celebration of the construction milestone.

"The VJH expansion will bring a whole new level of patient care to the North Okanagan," said Foster, on behalf of Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon. "The new patient care tower will add over 180,000 square feet of state-of-the-art space to the hospital, and will allow us to meet the needs of patients as our population continues to grow."

Ground was officially broken on the construction of the new patient care tower on Nov. 17, 2008. The new tower will be eight storeys. It will include a new emergency department, new consolidated operating rooms, a new maternity pediatrics ward, a new intensive care unit, a consolidated outpatient department, and two shelled-in floors for future inpatient beds.

"The construction of the VJH Patient Care Tower is a great achievement," said Norman Embree, Interior Health board chair. "Our partners at Infusion Health – and especially the Graham Construction team – should be congratulated for the hard work they've put into this project. When it opens in 2011, this tower will be among the highest calibre health care facilities in the province."

"Today is an important day in the history of health care in the Southern Interior," said Rhona Martin, chair of the North Okanagan Columbia Shuswap Regional Hospital District, which is funding \$67.4 million of the capital costs for the patient care tower. "This patient care tower will modernize Vernon's health care facilities, bringing patient care to a whole new level of quality."

The "topping off" ceremony is a tradition within the construction industry to celebrate the point in a construction project where the basic structure of the top floor is finished. The tradition, thought to have started in Scandinavia in about 700 A.D., involves affixing a tree to the roof of the building.

"This is a unique way that we celebrate a significant milestone in a construction project," said Dave Corcoran, project director with Graham Design Builders. "The inclusion of a tree in the ceremony signifies life and growth, for the building as well as the community."

A particularly "green" strategy has been added to the VJH Topping Off Ceremony. The tree being affixed to the roof is a live tree that will eventually be replanted as part of the landscaping for the new hospital.

"We are working very hard on LEED Gold certification, and we thought this was a very special way we could celebrate in an environmentally friendly fashion," said Duncan Ball, board chair with Infusion Health, the consortium awarded the contract for the VJH and KGH expansions.

Infusion Health is responsible for the construction of the new facilities, along with building maintenance and project financing over the life of the contract. All clinical, housekeeping and food services will be retained by Interior Health.

This expansion is part of a \$432.9 million commitment to building patient care in the Interior, along with a similar expansion currently underway at Kelowna General Hospital (KGH). The VJH patient care tower is ahead of schedule and will open in 2011.

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