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KGH celebrates ‘Topping Off’ of new Patient Care Tower

Kelowna Mission MLA Steve Thomson and Westside-Kelowna MLA Ben Stewart led a group of representatives from Interior Health, Graham Construction and Infusion Health in a traditional “Topping Off Ceremony” on the roof of the new Patient Care Tower at Kelowna General Hospital (KGH), in celebration of the construction milestone.

“With the expansion of KGH, we are truly building patient care here in the Interior,” said Thomson, on behalf of Health Services Minister Kevin Falcon. “The new patient care tower, combined with the new UBC medical building, will be bigger than Kelowna’s Home Depot, Wal-Mart and Rona stores combined, and will allow us to provide top quality care to patients as our population continues to grow.”

Ground was officially broken on the construction of the new patient care tower almost exactly one year ago, on Nov. 17, 2008. The new tower will be 33,500 square metres (360,000 square feet). It will also add new operating rooms, a rooftop helipad and two shelled-in floors for future inpatient beds.

“People from all across the Southern Interior will benefit from the expansion here at KGH, along with the one underway in Vernon,” said Ben Stewart, MLA for Westside-Kelowna. “The emergency department will quadruple in size, allowing for 50,000 additional patient cases per year by 2020 – an increase of 30 per cent.”

“We are thrilled that construction of KGH’s new patient care tower has been moving along so well,” said Erwin Malzer, board member of Interior Health. “The team at Graham Construction is to be commended for their hard work and dedication to our hospital. When it opens in 2012, this tower will make a tremendous, positive impact on the people of Kelowna.”

There 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.”

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 Vernon Jubilee Hospital (VJH). The expansion includes new patient care towers at both KGH and VJH and a new UBC Clinical Academic Campus medical school building at KGH to house the Southern Medical Program.

A particularly “green” strategy has been added to the KGH 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 Ton Joosten, general manager of Infusion Health, the consortium awarded the contract for the KGH and Vernon Jubilee Hospital 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.

The KGH patient care tower is on schedule to open to patients in 2012, and the VJH tower will be complete in 2011. Staff will begin moving into the medical school building in December.