



WCGH gets new art piece, plaque to recognize donors

A new piece of Nuu-chah-nulth art has been installed at West Coast General Hospital's (WCGH) newly expanded emergency department alongside a plaque recognizing donors.

Master carver Gordon Dick created the piece in his Port Alberni studio.

"I chose to create the symbol of the lone wolf because of the animal's connection to endurance and the personal journey of healing," he said in an Island Health news release. "I hope that when people see this piece, it will offer them comfort and strength on their healing path."

Beside the art is a new plaque recognizing generous \$500,000 donations from the Coulson and Campbell families, respectively, that made the emergency department expansion a reality.

"At some point, all of us will require help from the medical system. It is my hope that my family's donation will help those in the community who need the life saving care the hospital provides," said John Campbell. "I offer my thanks and gratitude to everyone who works for the hospital, for providing care to the people of the Alberni Valley."

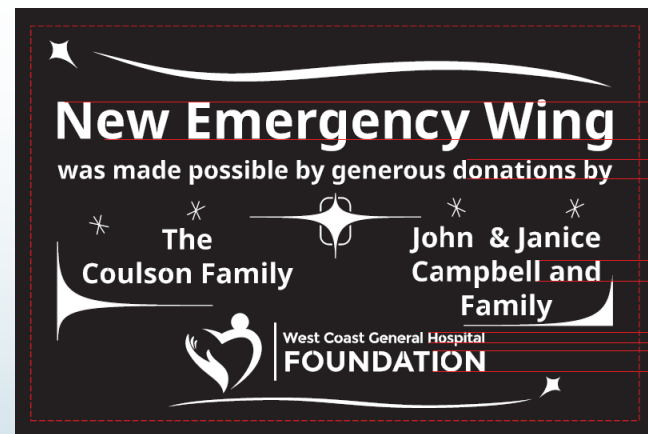
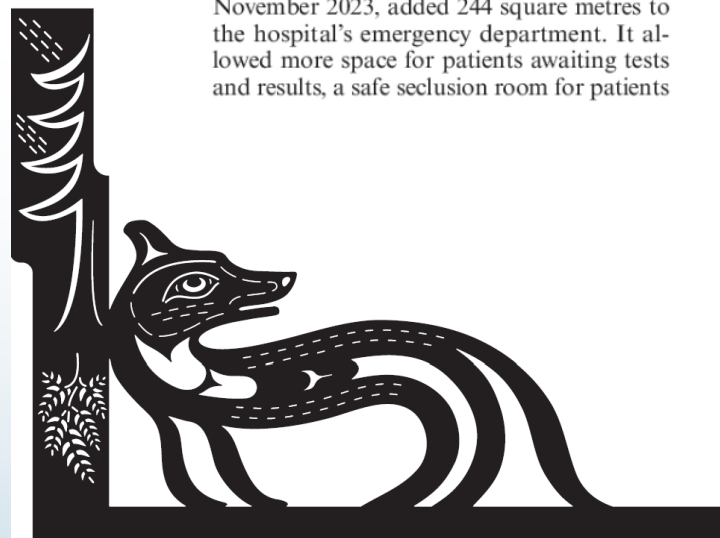
The expansion, which was completed in November 2023, added 244 square metres to the hospital's emergency department. It allowed more space for patients awaiting tests and results, a safe seclusion room for patients

in need of emergency mental health care, improvements to the triage and admitting area, increased clinical space and a dedicated entrance for ambulances.

"West Coast General Hospital has long been a beacon of care and support for people in the community," Wayne Coulson said. "Our family was in the fortunate position to offer some financial assistance to the hospital, and it was our pleasure to do so."

On top of the \$1 million donated by the two families, \$6.95 million of the project was cost shared between the provincial government who contributed \$2.55 million, WCGH Foundation, who contributed \$2.40 million, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional Hospital District who contributed \$1.70 million and Island Health who contributed \$300,000.

"These financial donations are helping us deliver quality care to people in need - I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Coulson and Campbell families for their generous support to our community," said Kelli Walsh, the hospital's site director. "Gordon Dick's beautiful artwork will stand as a symbol of strength and hope to the people of the Alberni Valley for many years to come."



The Lone Wolf by Gordon Dick reflects themes of healing, strength and connection to nature. Central to the artwork is the lone wolf, symbolizing endurance and the personal journey of healing. Rain represents the sacred life-giving power of water, essential to First Nations health and culture. The cedar tree honours its traditional use in medicine, shelter, and ceremony. Ferns embody healing and the intergenerational knowledge of natural remedies. Each element reflects the artist's cultural teachings and personal experiences, offering comfort and strength to those on their own healing paths.

West Coast General Hospital Foundation Spring Newsletter 2026



May 12, 2026 | 7:55 am
Nanaimo News Now

Re: Port Alberni to get Cancer Clinic

Port Alberni will be getting a cancer treatment centre, as Island Health has approved a cancer oncology network at West Coast General Hospital.

Site Director Kelli Walsh says the Cameron Bluffs fire showed how needed the service is.

"It stems from during the highway closure, and it really allowed us to have an opportunity to evaluate where there were some gaps and where we were really seeing residents of the Alberni Valley having to access out-of-the-community services," she said. "We really want to make sure that we're increasing services to meet that need as we look at the growing population and the projection of different illnesses."

According to Walsh, there are more than 250 new cancer diagnosis in the Alberni – Clayoquot region every year, and increasing annually.

Last week, Island Health and BC Cancer approved the construction of a \$1.26 million cancer oncology clinic at West Coast General Hospital.

Work towards the announcement has been ongoing since the Cameron Bluffs fire and an oncologist has been hired, nurses are receiving specialized training, and the hospital foundation and auxiliary have already raised a combined \$550,000 for the project which is expected to open within 18 months.

Our Community Cares : Cancer Clinic Campaign

Help us build the new cancer care clinic at WCGH!

Dedicate a daffodil for a \$100 donation in memory of a loved one who has passed due to cancer.

All proceeds will go towards the new cancer care clinic at West Coast General Hospital.

Daffodils will be displayed in our health square gardens, and we hope to fill every possible space with the names of loved ones.



Receive a tax receipt for each donation.

Help us fill our gardens with memories, while supporting the important work of the Foundation to provide state-of-the-art, life-saving equipment to WCGH.

Dedicate your daffodil now!

For information, or to dedicate a daffodil, contact Erin at erin.williams@islandhealth.ca, call 250-731-1370 ext. 48148 or drop by the Foundation office in the health square at WCGH

Memories Make a Difference

“There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.” — David M. Eagleman

All signage graciously donated by D’Sign Guy & Gal

PATIENT GRATITUDE STORY: *by Kirstin Richmond*

I had only lived in Port Alberni for three months when I was diagnosed with Hodgkin Lymphoma, though I had known something was wrong for almost a year. Before moving to the Alberni Valley, I had seen multiple doctors and undergone various tests, all of which came back normal or inconclusive. I was told, “At least it’s not cancer. Forget about it and live your life.” Which is what I was doing when, on a random morning in June of 2022, I met Dr. White for the first time at West Coast Urgent Care. I explained that I simply needed a form completed and would be on my way. Yes, I had swollen lymph nodes, but it was nothing. I just needed to forget about them and move on. Not on Dr. White’s watch.

He suggested I go straight to the hospital for an x-ray. A few hours later, he called and explained, gently and calmly, that there was a mass in my chest. It was not “nothing.” What stands out to me now is everything he did next. He made countless calls on my behalf, followed up behind the scenes, and even checked in during the evenings. Once, when I called his office to ask a question, I was told he was on the phone speaking with a surgeon. About me. All of this, for someone he had only just met. “Just doing my job,” he said.

The surgeon he was speaking to, Dr. Hudson, saw me right away and became a steady, reassuring presence from consult to surgery to diagnosis. I have a connective tissue disorder that usually makes healing complicated, so I braced myself for the worst. But for the first time in my life, I healed without issue. Three days later, I hiked 10 kilometres at Little Qualicum Falls, feeling strong and proud of what my body could do.

It felt almost ironic to be diagnosed with cancer at a time when I felt my healthiest.

Looking back, I now understand what a blessing that was. Chemotherapy is TOUGH and I would need every ounce of strength I had. Early in treatment, I spent five days in West Coast General Hospital. It was there that I came to understand something I had never fully appreciated before. Nursing is not just a science. It is an art. There is incredible technical skill, but also an empathetic understanding that cannot be taught from a textbook. A rare combination that we are incredibly fortunate to have in our local health care heroes.

As someone new to the area, I did not have a personal support system, and I was also among the many British Columbians without a family doctor. A cancer diagnosis is scary, but it is also very overwhelming and having someone with the knowledge and skill to help navigate such an uncertain time is crucial. I believe, without question, that moving to Port Alberni, and the care I received here, saved my life. The gratitude I feel for those who helped me along the way is something I carry with me every single day. Enter Dr. DuPlessis. When she learned of my situation, she took me on as a patient. She oversaw my care, but more importantly, she saw me as a person. She trusted me to be part of my own treatment. For example, if I followed through on my promise to regularly get out of bed and do some light exercise, I could avoid the injection that would prevent blood clots. I still laugh when I think about what those lunges and high kicks must have looked like from the hallway.

Her trust in me as the patient gave me something I didn’t even realize I was missing. A sense of control. A sense that I wasn’t just a patient, but a valuable member of my own medical team.

Throughout my treatment, I made many trips to the hospital for regular bloodwork, and to have a daily injection that I could never quite bring myself to do on my own. Over time, the staff in the lab and medical day-care unit brought a sense of friendly familiarity that had me feeling like Norm from Cheers after a while!

Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name. But when that place is a hospital, it is a complicated feeling.

I arrived in Port Alberni knowing no one. And yet, when I found myself in the fight of my life, I was cared for as though I truly mattered.

March 21, 2026 was my “No Mo’ Chemo” anniversary and I have now been cancer free for three years. I am stronger than I have ever been and have enrolled in the Bachelor of Science program at Vancouver Island University at the young age of 45. A lifelong dream.