

HOSPITAL FOUNDATION FUNDRAISER RETIRING DEC. 31

Foundation's Sue Popesku stepping down

By Bruce Lantz

FORT ST. JOHN -

The woman most credited with building the Fort St. John Hospital Foundation into a fundraising powerhouse is stepping down.

Executive director Sue Popesku, who joined the foundation in 1996, will retire December 31.

The search for replacement is already underway and while her replacement is expected to start work Sept. 1, Popesku will stay on for four months to ensure a smooth transition.

"I've never enjoyed anything so much," said Popesku, who has taken foundation fundraising from a strictly volunteer effort that raised just under \$100,000 in each of its first two years to what could be \$1 million raised this year.

She remembers the call from hospital administrator, Chris Wenzel who needed an extra \$200,000 for a facelift of facility. The timing was good because two years earlier, while in the hospital for an operation, Popesku had noticed a huge crack in



Sue Popesku

the wall and wondered, "If they can't keep up the appearance of the hospital, how can they look after me?"

Wenzel's call started a decade-long association.

"But it's time to move on and let someone develop it for the future."

"Sue has played a central and critical role in the development of

the Fort St. John Hospital Foundation," said board chairman Gordon Gentles.

He said the foundation benefited from the contribution of her "enthusiasm and talents" and her "vision and determination" was a large part of the foundation's success over the years.

Applications are already coming in for the salaried position, from BC and Ontario and even from the Philippines. While the foundation board hopes to get interest from local applicants, too, Popesku said the interest from farther away indicates people are willing to move to Fort St. John because "they see the vibrance, the ener-

gy" of the community.

Completing a decade of work in the hospital's 75th anniversary year and with fundraising likely to hit \$1 million for the first time, it's a good time to call it quits, she said, adding she wants to spend some time travelling with husband Paul, who has been retired for three years.

STAYING HERE

But they won't be moving. Popesku, who came here in 1974 as a high school English and Drama teacher who went on to develop the Community Arts Council and spearhead fundraising for the North Peace Cultural Centre, plans to find "something else" to do.

"I won't go home and shut the door," she said, adding she'll continue to volunteer with her beloved arts council.

While others credit her with building the foundation, Popesku says the "well oiled machine" exists because the board of directors develops and follows clear policies and takes their responsibilities seriously, working with the hospital to

define what's needed and identify campaign targets.

"We've developed a system so anyone with skill and knowledge can carry it forward," she said.

The foundation provides a way for the community to have input into its hospital and the response has been incredible, she said, with 5,000 on the donors list - most of them repeat contributors and most of them families, not corporations.

"The sustainability of any community is its families," she said

"Businesses come and go but families come and stay."



photo courtesy Karen Carver

Many hospitals have long recognized the therapeutic benefits of both creating and displaying art. The dinosaur themed mural in the Fort St. John Hospital emergency waiting area or the children's mosaic artwork installed at Stanford University Hospital in California are examples of how art can be used to help reduce the stress and anxiety of patients, especially children.