

Romero House hits target

Published Thursday August 13th, 2009

Charity Plans unveiled for Mystery Lunch to raise money for soup kitchen's 'rainy days'

C1 HILARY PAIGE SMITH
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN - Carolyn McNulty, founder of Romero House, issued a call for help in July when the soup kitchen was in dire financial need.

 [ENLARGE PHOTO](#)



KatÉ LeBlanc/Telegraph-Journal

Paul Zed, right, speaks about the needs of Romero House at a press conference Wednesday. From left are Colin Sifton, executive chef at the Hilton Saint John; Jennifer Smith, human resources manager at the hotel, and Carolyn McNulty, founder of Romero House.

And Romero House supporters have delivered a resounding reply.

The soup kitchen has reached its fundraising goal of \$30,000, Paul Zed announced Wednesday. Zed is chairman of a committee set up to plan for long-term funding for Romero House.

Romero House revealed in mid-July that it was struggling financially and had issued layoff notices to its eight paid employees. The soup kitchen serves up 300 meals a day, 365 days a year.

News of their financial woes spread quickly across the city, igniting a wave of support and charity from Saint John residents and businesses.

"The community of Saint John and Greater Saint John has heard the call for help for Romero House and to

have achieved \$30,000 in less than a month, I think is phenomenal and I'm happy to report that we will exceed that goal," Zed said.

He made the announcement at a press conference held to alert the public about an upcoming fundraiser that will be held for Romero House in partnership with the Hilton Saint John.

A "Mystery Lunch" event will be held on Aug. 27 under a tent on Brunswick Drive outside Romero House from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Hilton executive chef Colin Sifton will be cooking up a mystery lunch from entirely donated food. His menu will depend on what is donated and will vary as supplies last.

"When we say 'mystery,' it's exactly that. The first 50 people might get shepherd's pie, a salad, something else," Sifton said.

"The next 50 people might get pulled pork. ... In the spirit of Romero House, you never know what you're going to get." Both Jennifer Smith, human resources manager for Hilton Saint John, and Sifton said they can guarantee the meal will be good.

Tickets for the event are \$50, with a tax receipt included, and go on sale next Monday. Tickets are available from the Hilton, the Clark Drummie law firm at 40 Wellington Row and the Saint John Board of Trade office at 40 King St.

All of the proceeds for the event will support Romero House.

Hilton Saint John partnered with Romero House earlier this year to make them a primary charity for the

hotel. Smith said that Hilton intends to carry on its work with Romero House for as long as the soup kitchen needs the hotel.

Even though the soup kitchen has surpassed its fundraising goal, the \$30,000 covers only the operational costs and salaries of their employees. Additional money raised will go toward a sustainability fund to ensure that whenever the soup kitchen is lacking necessary equipment, a stove, for example, it will be able to purchase what it needs.

"There are ongoing operational costs, but hopefully, a lot of the money that will be raised over this event will go into a segregated amount of money that'll be used when she, Carolyn (McNulty) and the management and the board of directors at Romero House need it," Zed said.

"We're hoping to segregate this money for the rainy days."

McNulty said a stability fund is necessary for what Romero House, which she called the "love of her life."

She also mentioned reinstating on a permanent basis the soup kitchen's finance committee, which was only operational during the building of the soup kitchen.

"We cannot go through this every summer. ... Now we need to put (the finance committee) back into practice because we need to stabilize the financial situation at Romero House so that we can continue to do our mission, which is to make sure that no one in Saint John needs to go without meals every day," she said.

McNulty said she hopes a fundraiser, similar to the Mystery Lunch, for Romero House can become an annual event.