

bitHeads gets behind new Guest House at the Perley Rideau

Terrible ties and golf event raise serious funds

By Brant Scott

If raising funds for charity has evolved into an art form, Ted Burnett is a modern-day Michelangelo.

Burnett, who is the Vice-President of Business Development at bitHeads on Carling Avenue, also spends his spare time raising money and volunteering at The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre.

He is bringing to bear his considerable marketing expertise to promote the new *Guest House – a home away from home*, scheduled for completion next year on the Perley Rideau site on Russell Road.

bitHeads is a software development company that's acquiring a reputation for its offbeat and entertaining "junk in a trunk" fundraisers and generous managerial contributions, including a hot dog that was recently sold to the CEO for \$50. A recent bitHeads golf event raised \$15,000 and a "Tie one on for charity" auction of gaudy neckties generated \$1,100 for the Guest House.

The proposed Guest House is a 12-bedroom bungalow designed to accommodate people affected by dementia for short stays to allow their caregivers some much-needed respite. The Guest House is scheduled for occupancy in March 2007 and is a joint project by the Perley Rideau, The Alzheimer Society of Ottawa, and the Victorian Order of Nurses Ottawa-Renfrew County Branch.

Burnett found out the hard way that caregivers are also victims when he took care of family members who suffered the ravages of Alzheimer disease.

"Before my mother and grandmother were affected by Alzheimer disease, I was like most people and thought that the care they required would be provided by resources within the family unit and within our communities," explains Burnett. "It's only when you get involved in the process that you realize what the government's resources and limitations really are, and the demands that this places on the affected person's family and friends."

Caregivers' health often suffers under the stress and strain of 24/7 care for those suffering with dementia, and the Guest House will help caregivers attend to their own needs for short periods of time. By placing loved ones in the Guest House for up to 90 days per year, caregivers can enjoy the freedom to reenergize, attend family gatherings or even take short vacations.

Burnett says many bitHeads employees exercise their corporate responsibility by helping charities throughout the region. bitHeads will raise over \$50,000 this year alone for local charities.

In addition to organizing fundraisers to bring the Guest House closer to its \$2.5 million goal, Burnett has been a Perley Rideau volunteer for 10 years, which pre-dates his mother's Alzheimer's diagnosis. Not coincidentally, his wife, Joyce, is the Manager of

Volunteer Services at the health centre. Since his mother died in 2004, he continues to visit with residents and help them live more fulfilling lives.

“I’ve been profoundly affected by this disease,” he says. “My mom lived with it for six years and I had to juggle the requirements of a profession with being a caregiver, a father and a husband. After mom passed, I made a promise to myself that I wouldn’t turn my back on others who suffer from dementia. Some communities have respite beds in a long-term care home, but the Guest House at Perley Rideau is really going to be like a home away from home.”

Burnett explains that families won’t take comfort in leaving a family member with dementia unless they know the situation will meet with their loved one’s approval and individual needs. The Guest House will provide a non-institutional open concept that features hardwood floors, carpeting, lots of windows, comfortable furniture and gardens that echo a home environment. Burnett suggests that families will be able leave their loved ones at the Guest House with a clear conscience and peace of mind.

“This will be a family setting with specially trained staff who know how to care for dementia clients and the staff-to-client ratio will be good,” he adds. “It will be much easier to explain a short stay at the Guest House to a loved one than a stay in a hospital or an institution. That’s why I believe this project is worthy of all the effort that is being invested to get the Guest House built, furnished and functioning.”