

Nurses return home for jobs

High dollar, full-time work lure some back from U.S. hospitals

BY DAVE BATTAGELLO
STAR BORDER REPORTER

Windsor nurse Daniella Dickens took a look at the crumbling U.S. dollar last fall, then added up her border tolls and \$10 in gas she spent daily to commute to her job in Detroit.

Even though Dickens had spent more than 15 years at St. John Hospital where she rose through the ranks to become co-ordinator of its operating room, the high-ranking nurse realized it was time to work closer to home.

"It was very sad to leave all my friends," said Dickens, who two months ago took over as unit manager for the operating room at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital. "But I can honestly tell you I'm jumping for joy with the commute."

"I live seven minutes away from this hospital. I've made new friends — I'm over it."

Dickens is typical of many high-level Windsor nurses who in recent months have left their longtime Michigan jobs, flocking back to hospital positions in their hometown.

Many of those returning have 10 or 15 years experience in highly skilled critical care or operating room positions, meaning local hospitals are

reaping the benefits.

Since the beginning of the year, Hotel-Dieu Grace has hired 15 Windsor nurses who previously worked in Michigan.

While the dollar has played a role, perhaps a larger factor has been the number of nurses retiring in local hospitals. Roughly 40 per cent of the 800 nurses at Hotel-Dieu Grace will be eligible to retire by 2009.

"(Hiring) is going to be ongoing for the foreseeable future," said Pat Somers, chief nursing officer and vice-president for patient services at the hospital.

The hospital has 25 nursing vacancies and will hold a nurse recruiting job fair June 3 and June 5.

It will also post a billboard at the Windsor-Detroit tunnel urging Windsor nurses working in the U.S. to return home.

"We are trying to be proactive in addressing what we are going to need," Somers said. "The reason most went over there in the first place was there were no full-time positions here. Now that we have that, it's very appealing to them."

The availability of top nursing jobs has been a prominent factor in luring commuters to come home, the return-



'BONUS FOR COMMUNITY:' Daniella Dickens, newly appointed unit manager of the operating room at Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital, is among nurses who recently left jobs in Michigan to work in Windsor.

Star photo: Dan Janisse

ing nurses agreed.

"It's a bonus for the community," said Marg Campigotto, who worked for three years at a Grosse Pointe hospital before returning two years ago to Hotel-Dieu Grace to take a job as manager of the recovery room.

"We should be trying to bring our staff back working in our own community. With experienced nurses, there will definitely be a shortage."

"Hotel-Dieu has been a great place to work. It's been two years and I'm still here. I love it. It takes me five minutes

to get to work. It just feels better."

Dave Musyj, vice-president of corporate services for Windsor Regional Hospital, did not know the exact number of its 600 nurses who have returned from the U.S., but said of the 50 hired in the past several months, 15 were previously employed in Michigan.

"We are seeing more of it," he said. "We are seeing considerably more since the Canadian dollar and gas prices have gone up."

The trend of nurses taking jobs in Detroit because of the lack of full-time jobs dates to the early 1990s, he said.

It began to change two years ago when the provincial government created the goal to have 70 per cent full-time nurses in hospitals. Just a few years ago, the majority were part-time jobs.

Deb Charron left her six-year job as a pediatric intensive care nurse at St. John's main campus in Detroit last October to become a clinical care co-ordinator providing education to emergency room staff at Windsor Regional.

"I was one of those nurses who graduated in the late 1980s and early 1990s when there were no jobs here," she said. "I ended up getting a job in Detroit where there was lots of opportunity to move up and improve."

New MRI to cut cancer patient waiting times

BY AMANDA FERGUSON
STAR STAFF REPORTER

Windsor's long-awaited second MRI machine has arrived, marking the end of a 20-month fundraising effort by the Cancer Centre Foundation's Field of Dreams campaign.

Onlookers watched Tuesday as a crane lowered the machine into its new home, the Windsor Regional Cancer Centre.

The campaign raised a total of \$3.9 million toward the creation of the most advanced cancer centre in the province.



Peter Hrastovec

Launched in September 2004, the campaign raised nearly \$4 million to purchase the area's second MRI and more equipment for the scanning of small children.

"I was like a schoolboy waking up on the last day of school," said campaign chairman Peter Hrastovec. "There's so many opportunities for us in this community now."

Hrastovec hailed the community for its generous donations, leading the Cancer Centre Foundation to a record-breaking year for fundraising events and donations.

"I've been involved in a lot of fundraising campaigns for a variety of causes, and this happened to be the easiest of all fundraising campaigns I was involved in," Hrastovec said.

Before the arrival of the new machine, the only MRI in the area was at

Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital and was running at maximum capacity at about 6,000 scans per year.

The new MRI will mean shorter waiting times and will improve access to the current MRI, said Mayor Eddie Francis.

"The true celebration is of the MRI and what the MRI can do for the community," Francis said. "This community came together and today we can provide new hope."

County Warden Mike Raymond — whose wife and daughter have both been diagnosed with cancer — reminded the crowd almost every area family is touched by cancer in some way.

"Health care doesn't have any boundaries," Raymond said. "When you need help, you need help."

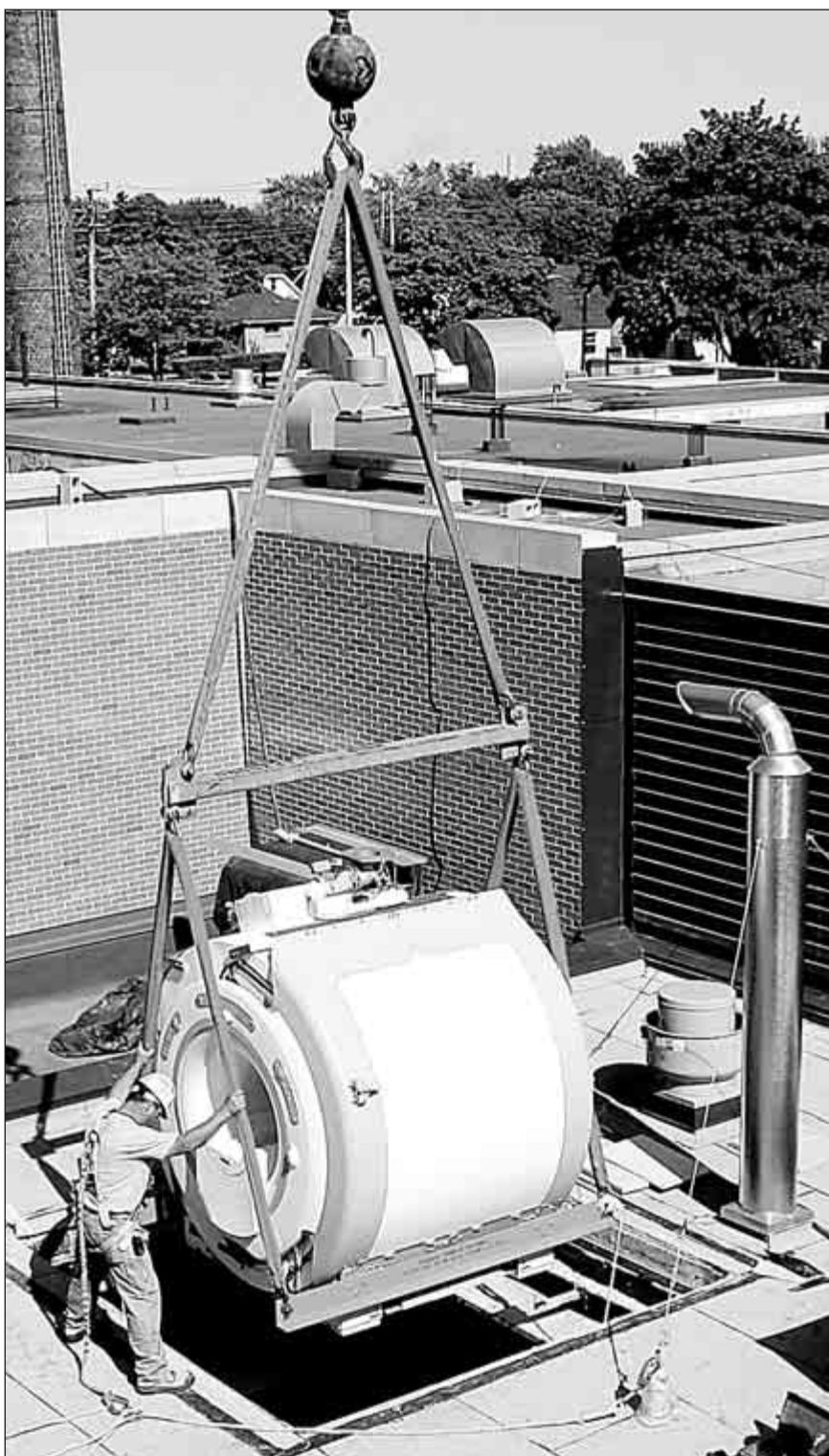
The Windsor Regional Cancer Centre diagnosed 2,567 members of the community with cancer in 2003, an average of about 50 cases per week.

The ceremony also made note of the contributors who donated time and money to the centre, notably honorary campaign chairman Anthony P. Toldo, who donated \$1 million and convinced the provincial government to donate \$1.2 million to cover the operating costs of the MRI.

"We pushed a little bit, but the premier was right on the stick," Toldo said.

"We asked for it and two weeks later we had the money."

Some of the major donors in the campaign were CAW locals 200 and 444, Casino Windsor Cares, Daimler-Chrysler Corporation Fund, the Morris and Beverly Baker Foundation and the Greater Windsor Home Builders Association.



CAMPAIGN SUCCESS: The Windsor Regional Cancer Centre's new MRI arrived Tuesday and was lowered by crane through an opening in the roof. The MRI is expected to reduce wait times for patients.

Star photo: Scott Webster

Armed driver led to border alert

BY CHRIS THOMPSON
STAR STAFF REPORTER

Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officers walked off the job Monday as the result of an alert to send a possibly armed man to secondary inspection, the local union president says.

Marie-Claire Coupal, president of Local 18 of the Customs and Excise Union Douanes Accise (CEUDA) said the alert issued advised officers to direct the man to secondary inspection rather than release him.

"This individual could have been armed and dangerous and he was known to be mentally unstable at times," said Coupal.

The alert for southwestern Ontario was issued sometime Monday and officers in Windsor at the Ambassador Bridge and Windsor-Detroit Tunnel walked off the job at around 2 p.m., citing their right under the federal labour code to withdraw from work they believe to be dangerous.

Coupal said rather than being directed to secondary inspection, officers should have been advised to release the man and notify local police.

"If this guy came out blazing with a gun he could have endangered people's lives," said Coupal.

Coupal said an investigator from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada reviewed the grievance and agreed that officers should have been directed to release the man and notify Windsor police.

"The decision was to alter the activity that constitutes the danger immediately," said Coupal.

Changes were made to the lookout, Coupal said.

"They made the changes and the officer's went back," said Coupal.

Officers returned to their posts at around 9:30 p.m., but not before border crossing delays at both crossing points throughout the afternoon and evening.

Management staffed the vacant posts. CBSA spokesman Danny Yen said the agency is awaiting the final report of the labour investigator.

"We'll have to wait for the complete report of the labour officer's judgement," said Yen.

He confirmed the issue "had to do with an alert" and that the labour officer investigated and the officers were ordered to return to work.

Coupal said the incident further highlights the need for customs officers to be armed.

"I just wish they'd do it sooner than later," said Coupal.

In the federal budget earlier this month Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty announced \$101 million to begin arming customs officers and eliminate "work-alone" posts.

A call to the officer of Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day was not returned.

Apprentice training fund boosted

Skilled trades 'extremely important' for Windsor industries, MPP says

BY SONJA PUZIC
STAR STAFF REPORTER

The Ontario government will invest \$31 million in classroom instruction for 27,000 apprentices across the province, of which \$2 million has been set aside for apprenticeship programs in Windsor and Essex County.

The minister of training, colleges and universities, Chris Bentley, announced the latest boost to the province's skilled trade industry Tuesday at Classic Tool and Die Inc., an Oldcastle company that specializes in training apprentices.

"We know that in order to compete with other jurisdictions, we don't want to do so on the basis of the lowest wage," Bentley said. "We have to do it on the basis of the knowledge and the skills of our workforce."

The money allocated for the Windsor area will provide classroom training for more than 1,500 apprentices in 2006 and 2007. St. Clair College, the Ironworkers Local 700 training centre and the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 552 will provide the training.

"The trades are extremely important in this area," said Bentley, who was joined by Essex MPP Bruce Crozier and Education Minister and Windsor West MPP Sandra Pupatello.

"When you have access to people with the skilled labour that you need, you can compete with anyone anywhere in the world. That's good for the business and it's good for the community," he said.

Ontario has Canada's largest apprenticeship system with about 72,200 registered apprentices being trained as carpenters, tool and die makers, plumbers and mechanics, as well as many other trades. About 90 per cent of the training occurs in the workplace and the rest is provided in classes taught at community colleges or union training centres.

John Strasser, president of St. Clair College, said there is a big demand for skilled trade programs from graduating high school students in the Windsor area.

"Once you open (the programs) up, they fill up, so it's a matter of how do we get the teachers to teach the classes and how do we get the equipment. All



FUNDING ANNOUNCED: In the shadow of a 350-ton press at Classic Tool and Die, Chris Bentley, minister of training, colleges and universities, centre, Sandra Pupatello, left, MPP Windsor West and Bruce Crozier, MPP Essex, announce the province's investment of \$2 million in training for more than 1,500 apprentices in the Windsor area.

Star photo: Nick Brancaccio

of that costs money, so \$2 million is great," he said.

St. Clair College's apprenticeship programs received more than \$1 mil-

lion from the province in 2005 and Strasser said more funding is always welcome.

It will provide young people like Scott Summerfield with an opportunity to graduate from skilled trade programs on time and enter the workforce as soon as possible. The 20-year-old Classic Tool and Die apprentice is just one exam away from becoming a licensed tool and die maker through the existing Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.

"Working in this profession demands consistency and accuracy," he said in a prepared statement. "I want to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for recognizing the importance...of smooth transition between school and apprenticeships."

Pupatello said Summerfield's experience is a perfect example of the type of "smooth transition" the ministry wants to ensure for all future apprentices.

"It really does mean the world to (Windsor). We really are leading the nation when it comes to this industry," she said.