

OZANAM HOUSE Update

WINTER 99



Where the MONEY went

More than \$750,000 raised by Lions Clubs around the lower North Island has been put to work in extending and upgrading Ozanam House's accommodation and facilities.

A new wing, named the Williams Wing in recognition of a Gisborne family which made a substantial donation towards its cost, was opened last year. Invited guests were able to tour this and Ozanam's new office block – the 11th and 12th

new buildings to be opened since the Trust Board was set up in 1971.

A former resident, the late Agnes Harlen from Levin, presented the house with an engraved copper plaque she had made as thanks for the care she had received.

Mrs Harlen was touched by the peaceful atmosphere during her stay at Ozanam House, and her sculpture is designed to depict "the hope of healing".

"That's the kind of gesture which shows us we are providing a really important and meaningful service," says Trust Secretary Tony Finnigan. "People needing cancer treatment and their carers have enough worries without having to think about where they are going to stay during their treatment and how they are going to pay for it."

In addition to the new wing, Ozanam House now has new verandahs and covered walkways, a "quiet" room and conservatory.

"The most popular addition of all," says long-time Ozanam House administrator Eileen Day, "is our new library. It's one of our most used rooms with

people enjoying the peace and privacy to write a letter or read a book."

A billiard table, funded by a \$5000 contribution from the Eastern and Central Community Trust is also well used and much appreciated by residents.

Ozanam House can now provide 58 patient beds in 48 bedrooms and 10 flats. All rooms are en-suite and have a second bed for a care-giver.

"We would never put two patients in together," Eileen says. "If there is an overflow, we use motels."

Ozanam House also now has new office, reception and administration space – essential given the increased number of beds and guests staying there.



Above: The new library – one of the most popular additions.

Right Above: A billiard table, funded by the Eastern and Central Community Trust, is well-used.

Right: Ozanam House Trust Board Chairman Les Walden (left) and Secretary Tony Finnigan admire the copper plaque donated by the late Agnes Harlen outside the house's new Williams Wing. Photo: Manawatu Standard.



HOW DOES OZANAM HOUSE WORK?

Ozanam House is a facility which provides accommodation for cancer patients and their caregivers if required while undergoing treatment at Palmerston North's Base Hospital.

Many patients travelling from throughout the lower North Island are treated on an "out-patients" basis and need accommodation for up to five to six weeks.

Ozanam House was started by the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1967 and has grown – along with the need for its services – from a four-bedroomed house to a facility which can accommodate up to 116 people at any one time.

Guests are encouraged to treat the house as their own home, with housework and cooking, as well as recreation, often being shared.

There are no rules and no charge is made for people's stay, although donations are welcomed.



Residents cook for themselves as if in their own home.



A new sunny conservatory for peaceful reflection.



Friendships develop among people with a great deal in common.

WELCOME TO THE CLUB

The atmosphere at Ozanam House is relaxed and friendly.

You'll see people strolling round the grounds – even bending to remove a weed or two – writing letters in the conservatory, sitting around a table sharing lunch.

It could be a club – and in a way it is, because at least half the members have one thing in common. They're being treated for cancer.

The other half too share a bond – they are there to give love and support to a family member or dear friend needing treatment.

Ozanam House has always emphasised its station as a place of hope – "People come to Palmerston North for treatment to help them get well; Ozanam House gives them the peace of mind that lets them get on with the serious business of getting well," says Administrator Eileen Day who has greeted and cared for residents since 1992.

If Ozanam House is a club, then Eileen is the Club Captain. It is her role not only to welcome residents, explain to them how Ozanam House works and settle them in their rooms, she also has the unenviable task of co-ordinating all the bookings and placements.

"With 48 rooms and 10 flats and people arriving and leaving all the time, it can be quite a logistical nightmare," she admits. But the unflappable Eileen nevertheless keeps Ozanam House running smoothly and keeps her sense of humour.

"We have a lot of laughs."



Left: Eileen Day appreciates the new covered walkways.



Relaxing in home-like surroundings.

It's GREEN in NORM'S Gardens

Every week for the past 10 years, Norm Pearce has been on his knees.

It's not that he's a specially religious man – he's taking care of Ozanam House's extensive gardens, a job he took on voluntarily in 1990 following the death by cancer of his younger brother, sister, mother and brother-in-law.

"I just felt I wanted to do something to help," Norm says.

A keen gardener – but, he says modestly, not proficient – he certainly has lots of experience.

"I came from a poor family. We used to work in the local market gardens for 3d an hour."

He loves talking with the people staying at Ozanam House and he's made some good friends.

"Just recently a lady from Havelock North came up to me and said her friend had stayed here recently and that she should go and chat to the man who does the gardens. That made me feel really good," says Norm who neither confirms nor denies when there's a suggestion of some gentle flirting.

He's happy for patients or their carers to work alongside him in the garden. Many of them donate plants as thanks for their welcome.

"It's natural that they miss their garden while they're here and many of them add a great deal to the plantings," says Norm, who believes there is beauty in every flower.



Norm Pearce – 10 years in the garden.

Getting where they need to be

Accommodation is not the only obstacle faced by many people needing to stay at Ozanam House. They also need to get there.

For the past three years, the Taranaki Cancer Society has provided a round trip van service – picking up patients from around the province, taking them to Ozanam House, and home again after their treatment. The service extends to their care-givers.

Now, Ozanam House is looking at investing money in a similar service to bring patients from the east.

Taranaki Cancer Society's driver, John (Beau) Bocock says it's an important service and one he enjoys – even after having made close on 100 of the three hour trips.

"Every journey is different. Sometimes people want to talk. Sometimes they're quiet. I take my cue from them."

As a cancer patient himself, Beau says he could say he knows how his passengers are feeling.

"But I don't say that, because everyone is different. What I do say is that I have an idea how they're feeling and if there's anything worrying them they can ask. I've seen it all and nothing fazes me.

"I'm very proud of what I do, and the people I work with," Beau says. "When I come to Ozanam House I'm welcomed and greeted like a long lost friend by staff and patients."

Below from left: Tony Finnigan, Eileen Day and driver John (Beau) Bocock.



OZANAM'S PEOPLE

The Ozanam House Trust is run by a management board comprising the two trustees – the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Cancer Society. Members are Les P Walden (chairman), Dr Percy V Bydder, Cliff W Craven and recently appointed Kate McKenzie. Ms McKenzie replaces Mr Ian C Mark who Mr Craven records served the board ably and generously for many years.

Staff at Ozanam are administrator Eileen Day and her assistant June Spicer. Their work is supported by cleaners Nancy Tawharu, Lorna Wonnocott and Barbara Craw and volunteer gardener Norm Pearce.

The Community Cares

While Ozanam House provides accommodation for people coming from out of town to have treatment at Palmerston North's Base Hospital, people in the local Palmerston North community also show their appreciation for the service the facility provides.

For example, every week, Video Ezy provides a selection of videos free of charge.

Local people often bring books for visitors too, making Ozanam House's library/quiet room one of the most popular rooms at the complex.

FUND RAISING on Course

Ozanam House supporters have found a way to combine their passion for golf putting with fund raising – they do it on course.

In the past few months three charity golf tournaments have been held in lower North Island centres, raising thousands of dollars for ongoing needs and special purchases.

For example, \$5000 raised in a tournament organised by former patient Minnie Westrupp from Gisborne along with \$7000 from one held in Mahia organised by Mr and Mrs Dodie Ormond was used, among other projects, to provide patients with a barbecue and outdoor furniture. Gavin Wilson Flooring also contributed to this.

A third tournament was organised in Palmerston North by local solicitors Jacobs Florentine. Larry Florentine from the firm has acted for the Trust since its formation – “and they’ve never ever charged a fee”, says Tony Finnigan.

“The commitment people have to Ozanam House, and the fact they are prepared to go to so much effort on its behalf, is very heart-warming,” he says.

A new barbecue and garden furniture were the result of fund raising tournaments.



Ozanam House Plays Dual Support Role

Perhaps one of the most valuable roles that Ozanam House plays is also its least known – the support of caregivers while patients are undergoing treatment.

Oncologist at Palmerston North Base Hospital Dr Percy Bydder says that patients and their caregivers can fight the disease together at Ozanam House.

“Patients and their partners can now be supportive of one another because they are here for a common purpose. We see in real life when one party gets a cancer and the husband or wife can’t cope with the concept of there perhaps only being one of them one day. They feel like they are sitting on a time bomb.”

Percy says that caregivers can interact with others in the same situation which gives them the support they need to carry on. This support is often continued informally when they leave Ozanam House.

In addition, Percy says patients who are accompanied by a caregiver generally fare better when undergoing treatment. As most treatment takes between two to six weeks, patients benefit from the companionship over such a long and stressful period.

“In the bad old days these people came from out-of-town and stayed in motels. They tended to be by themselves and get very lonely. A lot opted out of potentially curative treatment as the isolation was too

bad. Now that we have Ozanam House the completion of treatment rates is up because people don’t get as lonely and homesick,” says Percy.

Percy quoted an example of a 23-year-old breast cancer patient staying at Ozanam House with her husband and young baby. All three people benefited from the opportunity to be together during the treatment.

Families are housed at an Ozanam House facility, close to Ozanam House called Clendon Court, which has nine, two bedroom motel-type units.

He said paediatricians have long known that if young children are accompanied by a parent or caregiver their treatment is far more successful. Ozanam House is proof that adults need support while they are undergoing treatment also.

This is endorsed by Mid Central Health social worker Kate MacKenzie who is the newest member of the Ozanam House Trust Board. She says people’s first introduction to radiotherapy can be frightening and often causes uncomfortable and stressful side effects. These can include extreme tiredness, diarrhoea and disorientation. Caregivers help patients to undertake the day-to-day activities such as cooking and visiting the hospital, as well as offering moral support when the side effects are uncomfortable.

“The quality of the experience is different for those who have a caregiver – it’s far more positive,” she says.

For example, Kate says a grandmother and granddaughter recently shared a special bond at Ozanam House while the grandmother was undergoing treatment.

She says another important role caregivers can play is breaking down language barriers. Sometimes patients do not speak good English and a caregiver is needed to communicate with doctors and explain treatment to patients.

Patients accompanied by a caregiver fare better when undergoing treatment.

