

# Former elementary school opens as nurse training facility

from article in Sept 13/2012 Manitoba Co-operator by Lorraine Stevenson



Members of the Cypress River Resource Centre board are thrilled to be welcoming 25 licensed practical nurse trainees into the former Cypress River Consolidated School, which closed in 2009. Pictured are board members Linda Truelove (l to r), Pam Griffin, Jim Cassels, Lisa Clouston, Jeannie Christie, chair of the board and Georgette Hutlet. Photo: Lorraine Stevenson

When local residents put up \$100 to buy their four-classroom school back from the Prairie Spirit School Division last year, they weren't sure what they were going to do with it.

But they weren't prepared to stand by and watch the 7,000-square-foot school closed in 2009 fall into disrepair, so they took a leap of faith that it would find new purpose.

They were right. Soon after they took possession, they opened Encore!, a second-hand store now doing a brisk trade in one of the classrooms. Then in June the community hosted an inaugural Prairie Wind Music Festival.

"That's going to grow in the future and we think it will be one of our major fundraisers," said Georgette Hutlet, one of the board members for the Cypress River Resource Centre.

But their real coup came from learning about Assiniboine Community College's rotating LPN training program, which has been offered in other underused spaces across rural Manitoba since 2000.

CRRC immediately approached ACC to see if their little school might be considered.

They learned late last month they'd been chosen as the site for the ACC's 22-month program starting in 2013.

The school will be outfitted with hospital beds and other training equipment for the 25 students scheduled to start classes in the New Year. Encore! will stay open in the school's gymnasium.

"We're very excited," Hutlet said. "It's something brand new for us."

The LPN program will provide a secure tenant for the next 22 months and a chance to build on the mandate their board gave the facility when they acquired it — giving their school a new lease on life.

This wasn't done for sentiment for an old school either.

Needs are evolving across rural Manitoba, said Hutlet. The business plan they put together for a new use for this school aims to meet them.

"We want to bring educational opportunities as close to home as possible," said Hutlet. "That's one of our mandates."

They're now looking forward to 25 new faces around town. Some from farther away will rent accommodations in Cypress River and nearby Glenboro. Cypress River is planning a community supper to welcome them when they arrive.

They hope other towns with a closed school, or a closure looming might take heart from what they're doing too, she added.

"As much as it's a sad day when a school closes you need to look for other options," said Hutlet. "You can make it something that your community will still be proud of."

ACC offers this localized training after surveys done across the province's RHAs to determine where demands for LPN training is highest, said Kirk Joyce, chair of health programs at ACC.

Over the years, they've had training programs set up in other towns' closed churches and even empty stores. There are many advantages to bringing training to where the students are, said Joyce, including reducing the need for students to travel or relocate while they study. Students trained locally regularly land a job locally afterwards. LPNs are in high demand and have excellent job prospects, he added.