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Good day for a long drive

EDITORIAL

Olympic gold medals are heavy. At least the ones Rosie MacLennan owns are. Heading towards Tokyo 2020, the King native is the two-time defending Olympic champion in trampoline ? the first Canadian athlete to defend a gold medal in the Olympics.

I met with her at the Glen Eagle Charity Classic for Bethell Hospice Aug. 10 and was given the opportunity to hold her medals. Each one feels substantial, solid, and worth winning.

There's a story on the fundraiser elsewhere in this paper so I won't go on about the tournament in this space, but I do wish to talk a little about what hospices mean to residents and their families as the end of a life nears.

I first learned about what a hospice is when I worked for a community newspaper in the west island of Montreal in 2001 or so. The notion of a hospice wasn't well known back then and so the director wanted to start getting people educated because its own life expectancy was tied partially to government funding, partially to private donations and fundraisers. It couldn't survive without ordinary people digging deep to help, but it needed publicity for that to happen.

I asked if I could talk to a resident, which is to say a person who has only weeks or even days to live. It wasn't an easy request to make, but it was easy to fulfill. A man who would die about a week later was more than happy to share his experience. He raved about the care he was receiving and the relief that he would die in a proper bedroom with pictures of his family on the night table beside him instead of a sterile hospital room, along with all its foreign noises, odors, and endless activity.

His room at the hospice wasn't home, but it was like home, and that comforted him greatly. He wasn't afraid of dying, but he had been concerned about how he would die. On that day, he wasn't concerned any longer.

His story had the impact we all hoped for, and a year later some of us from the paper organized a fundraiser of our own, called WestFest (I'm sure there must have been some trademark violation there, but we were too dumb to think of it) which raised almost $40,000 for the hospice and the nearby hospital.

Eventually, I moved on to other cities and other jobs. Even the newspaper, the West Island Chronicle, which won Best Newspaper in the Quebec Community Newspaper Awards five years running, was picked apart by its corporate owners until it was shuttered, not even a shadow of its former self.

The hospice, however, is still there and still doing the important work it needs to do. And so is Bethell Hospice doing that work. I've been offered a tour sometime soon and I'm eagerly looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to speaking with the volunteers, the angels who craft the magic that makes residents and their friends and families as comfortable and worry-free as possible. It's not easy to work in a place where people are always going to die, especially after you get to know them and a bond is forged.

Rosie MacLennan is from these parts, and she's sponsored by Bolton's Fines Lincoln. A local golf club went to great lengths to put on a good show. And they all did it for the local hospice because they know how important it is to the community.

This is one of those good news stories that community papers can still share. It's been a dark couple of weeks around here as far as crime is concerned, but the fundraiser ? and the triumphant return of Midnight Madness ? have been a strong antidote for that.