



Tehshakotitsén:tha Kateri Memorial Hospital Centre

Established 1905

KMHC marks 40th Anniversary of Historic *Hospital Agreement* between Kahnawake and Quebec

For immediate release

(Kahnawake – 23, Onerahtokha/April 2024) Tehshakotitsén:tha Kateri Memorial Hospital Centre is pleased to commemorate a significant event that is important not only to this organization, but to the entire community.

Wednesday, April 24th marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the agreement between Kahnawà:ke and Quebec that resulted in the construction of a new hospital to replace the original facility that was in operation since 1905. The document was signed as a nation-to-nation agreement after intense political negotiations between the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke (MCK) and Quebec's Parti Québécois government headed by Premier René Lévesque.

By the late 1960's it was clear that the original 33-bed facility no longer met the needs of the growing community and had become increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain. Locally, efforts to rectify the situation had been ongoing for many years, but changes in health jurisdiction added to the difficulties to make any improvement to both the building itself – and healthcare in general. Canada off-loaded most healthcare responsibilities to the provinces during that same time period, but Kahnawà:ke's relationship with the province at that time was almost non-existent, as our relationship had always been with the Federal government. To put it bluntly: it was a frustrating time.

That changed in the early 1980's, when the Quebec government finally agreed to meet with the MCK (on KMHC's behalf) to find ways to address the many challenges that stood in the way of replacing the original building. One of the main stumbling blocks was that, by law, Quebec could not enter into an agreement to fund the project unless the KMHC became incorporated – which was a non-starter from the Kahnawà:ke. The negotiations with Lévesque government were successful and, by virtue of the historic *Hospital Agreement*, Quebec enacted legislation that created a new relationship based on mutual respect and understanding. With that, events moved fairly quickly, and the new facility was opened two years later.

"The 1984 *Hospital Agreement* is a cornerstone to everything that has followed," said Kim Martin, KMHC Chairperson of the Board of Directors. "Not only did it provide the community with a brand new hospital, but it created a new and better working relationship with the province that continues to this day."

“It is so important that we acknowledge the people who made this happen, from the original building committee formed in 1971 to those who sat face-to-face with Quebec,” stated Executive Director Valerie Diabo. “We were exceptionally fortunate to have Franklin Williams, Donald Horne and the late Myrtle Bush – who were Council Chiefs at the time – as our negotiating team. We must also remember others who played key roles throughout the process: our late Executive Director June C. Delisle, who was perhaps our strongest advocate for years before (and after) the agreement was signed; the KMHC boards of directors throughout those years, who provided full support; the MCK, who showed exceptional leadership throughout; and, finally, we must acknowledge the late René Lévesque and his government, which had the foresight to work with our community, rather than against us. The fruits of their labor is something that continues to resonate today and, for that, we should offer a collective Niawehnkó:wa (thank you).”

A commemorative event will take place on April 24th to celebrate the anniversary. This will be recorded and made available to the community via YouTube on the KMHC Facebook page. Additionally, a video production is being produced to depict the historic significance of the *Hospital Agreement*. The video will also be made available using the same resources.

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