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## Celebrating 40 years of family at Overlander Residential Care

KAMLOOPS – When Sharon Lyall began working at Overlander Residential Care four decades ago, recreation therapy was still a relatively new concept in health care. Recreation employees were responsible not only for providing entertainment options for residents, but also hands-on daily care, meal service, and physiotherapy programming under the direction of contracted physiotherapists.

Now, as Interior Health celebrates the 40th year of the residential care home, Lyall, who is the last of the original staff members, marvels at how recreation therapy has evolved over the years. Today, she and her colleagues still help with meals, but they spend the majority of their time brightening residents' days by taking them fishing, on picnics and scenic drives, and bowling. They coordinate Overlander's gardening, painting and woodworking programs. They also serve as a surrogate family for those who call Overlander home. And while much has changed at Overlander, that family feeling has been a constant.

"I love my job. I really feel like I make a difference in the lives of the residents I look after," says Lyall, who was first hired as an 18-year-old nursing care aide before moving to the recreation department two years later. "Overlander has been very good to me. It has been my family. It isn't just a job, it's a part of my life. If it was just a job, I wouldn't have been here this long."

Overlander Residential Care celebrated its 40th anniversary this week with a host of activities for residents, their families, and employees and volunteers past and present. A timeline shows the care home's evolution over the years, and memories of the past are displayed around the facility. The Overlander Extended Care Hospital Auxiliary – also celebrating its 40th anniversary this year – held its annual Wheel-a-thon fundraiser on Tuesday. The party wraps up this afternoon with a Heritage Tea.

There is much to celebrate at Overlander, which welcomed its first residents on Jan. 4, 1977. Back then, the 100-bed facility was known as Overlander Extended Care Hospital.

Today, the care home's complement is 183 beds, with specialized, resident-focused care ranging from residential, to palliative, to those with complex and changing behaviours and physical disabilities. Throughout, Overlander has maintained its original philosophy of providing a home-like environment by eliminating "hospital-like things such as uniforms, white linens, and restricted visiting hours" for families.

"Health care has changed over the decades, with more people living at home longer with supports before entering full-time residential care. But places like Overlander still hold an important place in the continuum of care for older adults," says John O'Fee, Interior Health Board Chair. "I'm proud of all the staff, physicians, administrators, auxiliary members and volunteers who work at Overlander and I want to congratulate them on their 40th anniversary of providing care to residents in Kamloops."

"It's the people who work alongside me at Overlander that make this place so special," says Denise Slevin, Overlander Residential Care's manager. "They strive to ensure that every resident living here experiences excellent quality care in an environment that is as close to home as possible. Because, for our residents, this is home, and they deserve to feel safe and loved here. I want to thank our staff for making a difference in people's lives, each and every day."

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To learn more about Residential Care in Interior Health, visit  
<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourCare/HousingHealth/ResidentialCare/Pages/default.aspx>.

**A backgrounder follows.**

*Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 740,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca), follow us on Twitter [@Interior\\_Health](https://twitter.com/Interior_Health), or like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth](https://www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth).*

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## Backgrounder

- Overlander Extended Care Hospital was officially declared open by R.H. McClelland, Minister of Health, on Dec. 11, 1976.
- The first residents of the original 100-bed facility were welcomed on Jan. 4, 1977.
- Corene Lindsay was Overlander's first administrator. She was succeeded by Karen McLelland, Louise Johnson, Shirley Bengert, Linda Crossman, Susan Rolph, and Denise Slevin, who is the current manager.
- The Overlander Extended Care Hospital Auxiliary was formed on Jan. 27, 1977. It still operates today, generously supplying equipment and funds for comfort items at the residential care home. Current Auxiliary president Em Hammer was a former Overlander nurse and then volunteer manager before she retired in 1993.
- In the 1980s, Overlander expanded to include additional space for those with extended care needs and complex and changing behaviours.
- In 2003, now under the governance of the newly created Interior Health, the facility's name changed to Overlander Residential Care.
- Also in 2003, the Liberty extension opened with eight beds allocated to support the needs of young adults with physical disabilities who required ongoing 24/7 care.
- In 2009, the Blueberry gardens project revitalized the outdoor space for Overlander's dementia care unit. Beautiful flower beds, a garden, walkways, patio and benches were all added thanks to funding provided by the Stollery Charitable Foundation and the Overlander Auxiliary.
- In February 2017, Overlander's Trinity Unit opened after four residential beds were redesignated as community hospice beds. These beds are among the first embedded and integrated community hospice bed units within Interior Health facilities and were made possible due to a collaboration with the Kamloops Hospice Association. They are part of a broader strategy to enhance palliative care across Interior Health.
- Today, Overlander has a total of 183 beds.
- Overlander's original philosophy of providing a home-like, non-hospital environment for residents has remained over the last 40 years. That focus is evident throughout the facility, which features puzzle nooks, hallway alcoves, sitting areas, a chapel, greenhouse, dining areas, outdoor courtyards, and The Gathering Place multipurpose room for everything from "restaurant night" meals to recreation programming.
- Overlander also has approximately 150 volunteers, including students and teens, under the direction of Volunteer Resources manager Donna Lofstrom-Bell. She began in this role in 1993, taking over from the retiring Em Hammer (now Auxiliary president).