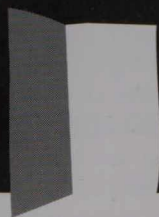




Homes



for elderly Chinese in Canada meet growing need

BY MURRAY CORNISH

"If you could look into the eyes of an elderly Chinese man or woman - lonely, alienated, in need of nursing home care," reads the brochure introducing the Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation in Toronto, "You would understand why we seek your help."

There are more than 35,000 people of Chinese origin over the age of 65 in the greater Toronto area alone. In excess of 1,000 of these seniors are on waiting lists for nursing homes and hundreds more are confined to institutions that have difficulties understanding their language, culture or special needs.

Dr. Joseph Wong, chairman of the Wellness Foundation, first encountered the disturbing plight of Canada's aging Chinese population when he worked in the country's nursing homes over a decade ago.

Elderly Chinese patients who could speak little or no English would sometimes be wrongly diagnosed as senile or ignored when they couldn't communicate, anorexic when they refused to eat Western food and in some cases restrained physically or by drugs when they became angry and frustrated.

Those experiences left a lasting impression on Wong.

"There is a desperate need for these people to be adequately cared for in a culturally and linguistically appropriate environment," he stresses.

In September of this year, Phase One of Yee Hong Villa, consisting of a 130 unit, CDN\$20 million seniors apartment building and 25 family townhouses will be completed in the north Toronto district of Scarborough.

Phase Two, a 90-bed nursing home and senior centre is scheduled to open in April of 1994 at an additional cost of CDN\$10 million.

The Ontario housing ministry will contribute CDN\$20 million and the Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation has thus far raised CDN\$5.5 million.

"It is gratifying that even in these difficult times people have reached deep into their pockets," notes Wong. "These peo-

ple have thankfully realized the great need, which grows more urgent day by day.

That need was dramatically underscored, when in February, 500 seniors turned out in the season's most severe snowstorm to attend the first of four meetings at which details of applying for residence in Phase One were presented.

The only other facility for elderly Chinese in Ontario, the Mon Sheong Home in Toronto's Chinatown district, was set up in 1975 through the efforts of the Mon Sheong Foundation, a Chinese Canadian volunteer charitable organization, with the assistance of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Ontario's Ministry of Communication and Social Services.

The Mon Sheong Home is a residential complex and not a nursing home, although over the years a number of beds have been converted to extended care level.

"There are expansion plans underway," says chief administrator K.W. Cheng, "but there are close to 200 people on the waiting list and average waiting time is over two years."

The Montreal Chinese Hospital, certainly the oldest of its type, was founded in 1918 to care for the Chinese community during the great influenza epidemic.

Run by the Montreal Chinese Hospital Corporation, the present day hospital provides long term care to the elderly population, particularly those of Chinese or Sino-Vietnamese origin, who have lost their ability to function autonomously.

Attempting to serve the entire province of Quebec, the Montreal Chinese hospital is heavily dependant upon donations as well as projects and functions organized by The Montreal Chinese Hospital Foundation. ♦

