

# Clayton News-Star

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## **Town's hospice contribution helps get ball rolling**

Town leaders deserve praise for committing \$100,000 in funds to the hospice house that Johnston Health (formerly Johnston Memorial Hospital) will build in Smithfield to serve the needs of terminally ill patients in our county.

The funds will be disbursed over four years and will earn the Town of Clayton naming rights to the children's playroom in what will be the county's first hospice facility, to be built on a 7.4-acre site on the former Bingham Park property on Hospital Road behind the hospital's main campus.

Hector Perez, executive director of the foundation securing funds to build the hospice, said Clayton has been a leader among county municipalities during the fund-raising drive. Clayton so far has joined Smithfield – with a \$100,000 pledge – and Four Oaks – with a \$15,000 commitment – in ponying up money to construct the 12-bed facility. (The county government also has committed \$250,000 over five years.)

Perez said that, thanks in part to Clayton's example, he has had "very positive" conversations with officials in Benson, Pine Level, Selma and Wilson's Mills about making contributions to the project. The goal, Perez said, is for all 10 towns in the county to make donations that are more or less proportionate to the size of their populations.

It's not just government officials who deserve kudos. Perez said Clayton resident Lyn Austin "has been just super" as the chair of the planning committee for the hospice house (she's now the regional chair for the western part of the county). The volunteer efforts of Durwood Stephenson also deserve special praise, Perez said.

The fund-raising goal has been set at \$3.8 million. So far, Perez said, about \$1.2 million has been raised.

Perez said his foundation wants to begin construction on the hospice next spring and finish it in spring 2010.

But before that can happen, other donors must step forward. In addition to local governments, the private sector must chip in.

Some big players in the county economy – such as Novo Nordisk, which has donated \$100,000 – already have made significant contributions. Now is the time for others to consider what they can do to aid this worthy cause.