

Around the area

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Rideau Regional Centre was home

Smiths Falls institution still houses 435 people

The practice, in Ontario, of institutionalizing people with disabilities will come to an end in 2009, as the provincial government closes its three remaining facilities and replaces them with a network of community programming.

Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello announced in September that Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, the Southwestern Regional Centre near Chatham and the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia will all be closed.

All three facilities house more than 1,000 adults. At one time there were 18 institutions that

provided care to more than 7,000 people in Ontario. Rideau Regional, the largest institution of the remaining three, has a \$40.8 million budget, employs 837 workers and cares for 435 people.

The government said it will replace the institutional system with a \$110 million network of community programs for families and organizations that provide care for people with disabilities.

Remaining residents of these institutions will relocate to group homes and facilities by 2009.

The move of closing facilities like Rideau Regional has been heralded by Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley. Paul Melcher, the executive director for the association, said clos-

ing these facilities is a step in the right direction in recognizing people with disabilities deserve the same opportunities like everyone else.

It is not known how many people from Renfrew County will be impacted by the closure of the three institutions. However, the local association believes it has assisted in bringing home more than 40 people back to their home communities in the last 25 years.

Daily Observer staff writer Valerie McLaughlin spoke to two men and their families who have close ties to Rideau Regional. John lived in the institution for 34 years. Larry spent most of his teenage years in the Smiths Falls facility.