

## From bedside to brushstroke: Island Health nurse turned artist brings healing to new hospital space

by Paula Smith

A familiar spirit of care is taking on a new form at the future Quw'utsun Valley Hospital / Quw'utsun Hulutun-ew't-hw, this time through art.

For April, a former Island Health registered nurse, contributing to the new hospital by creating a mural is more than a creative opportunity. It is a full circle moment.

"I began my career as a Registered Nurse with Island Health and I truly enjoyed getting to help and support people during vulnerable moments and being part of their healing journeys," she says. "Transitioning from nursing to art wasn't a departure from care, but an evolution of it."

After years working in acute and community care, April followed a parallel passion for art that gradually became her full-time focus. Now based in Nanaimo, her work draws deeply on the natural beauty of Vancouver Island, forests, oceans and the sense of connection they inspire.

### A meaningful contribution to a generational space

The new mural, commissioned by Island Health, in partnership with the Cowichan District Hospital Foundation, will form the backdrop to a donor recognition wall in the Community Hall at the hospital's entrance, a place where many journeys will begin.

"Knowing this work will be part of a space where so many life moments unfold is something I don't take lightly," April says. "Having worked within Island Health, this project feels especially full circle for me."

### Art as care in healthcare spaces

April's clinical experience continues to shape how she approaches her work, especially in healthcare environments.

"I understand firsthand the emotional weight that hospitals can carry for patients, families and staff," she explains. "I'm very intentional about creating work that feels calming and grounded."

She sees art not as decoration, but as an essential part of the care environment. "Health care spaces are often cold, sterile and can feel scary. I am a big believer that health care spaces need art - it can make people feel more at ease, more hopeful and that they are in a space of care."



April Lacheur, commissioned artist

### Rooted in community and connection

The piece will reflect both the natural landscape of the Cowichan Valley and the spirit of community behind the hospital's development.

At its centre is a powerful symbol: a nurse log, with roots that nourish new growth.

"This symbolizes the support that the foundation and the donors provide over many generations, as well as the renewal and growth the new hospital will bring," April explains.

Surrounding the central image will be a forest scene, featuring interconnected trees and pathways representing continuity, memory, and shared experience.

### Creating space for pause and reflection

In environments that can feel intense or uncertain, April hopes her work offers something simple but meaningful. "In a hospital setting, art can offer a moment of pause, reflection, or even just a breath," she says. "For staff, it can be a small but meaningful source of reprieve and restoration."

Ultimately, her goal is grounded in the same purpose that guided her nursing career.

"I hope it reminds people however subtly that they're not alone, that community is all around them and that there is hope, even in challenging spaces."