



Wanda Smith in her studio, the place where the creative magic happens. (Photo by Steve Smith)

Appreciation for ICU care in surviving a life-and-death situation launches ambitious fundraiser

Wanda Smith hopes to raise \$25,000 for the new Cowichan District Hospital

DON BODGER / Feb. 8, 2022 9:40 a.m. / [COMMUNITY](#)

It's payback time!

Chemainus resident Wanda Smith has long been so appreciative of the incredible health care professionals who saved her life, she just had to do something. Thus, she created a fundraiser in support of the Intensive Care Unit at the Cowichan District Hospital, with the goal of raising \$25,000 by the time the hospital opens in the fall of 2026.

And with Valentine's Day just around the corner, Smith's been working overtime on creating wonderful cards for the occasion and selling them for \$13 apiece to go towards the fundraiser.

"Have you or your loved ones ever needed the highest level of advanced emergency care in an Intensive Care Unit?" Smith asks on her Cowichan District Hospital Foundation fundraising page. "Since the start of the COVID pandemic, we are more familiar with ICUs than ever before."

But, first, we take you back to an unexpected health crisis Smith experienced four years ago on Jan. 24, 2018. She had only been living in Chemainus with husband Steve for six months after 31 years in Victoria.

Smith recalls that fateful day after travelling to Richmond for a conference she was leading for provincial government employees and easier to host in Vancouver/Richmond than on the Island.

"I didn't feel good," she said. "I went to work out in the gym that morning before the conference started."

Sometime between 3 and 5 p.m. Smith fell unconscious to the floor in her room. Her supervisor had tried to contact her by text, but was unsuccessful and when she still hadn't heard from Smith by 5 p.m., had hotel staff open the door to her room.

"Had she not done that, I wouldn't have made it," conceded Smith.

She was rushed to emergency at Richmond General Hospital and into the ICU where she was put into a medically-induced coma.

There was no response the first three days, she was put back under on the fourth day and then miraculously woke up on the fifth day.

What caused Smith's medical emergency wasn't readily apparent.

"I did have an acute sodium deficiency," she noted. "Other than that they didn't know what was going on."

The best a neurologist could determine is Smith had a freak epileptic seizure, even though she had no history of epilepsy, combined with the sodium deficiency.

Her prognosis was regarded as grim at one point and her recovery considered a miracle. And Smith hasn't encountered any problems in the four years since. She went on anti-seizure meds initially, but weaned off them.

Every year on the anniversary, she's given back. The first two years were in the form of a donation from Wanda and Steve, plus \$5 Starbucks gift cards distributed within the Richmond ICU.

"I gave them out to all the staff, I was so appreciative," Smith noted.

She has decided to expand those horizons to the Island where she lives, with a donation and Tim Hortons gift cards at Cowichan District Hospital in 2021 and Nanaimo

in 2022 plus the start of her big fundraising campaign for the Cowichan District ICU.

“I felt it worked out really well I could spread it locally,” said Smith. “What a great way to give back to my local community. I feel I really need that purpose to give back, pay it forward, so to speak.”

She’s been making specialty cards for more than 20 years and figured that would be the perfect avenue to launch her fundraiser through the Wanda Smith Sentiments Poppy’s Cards for Caring campaign and especially with Valentine’s Day coming up.

“It’s just really exciting,” Smith said. “It feels a bit ambitious I decided to do this.”

But being in a potential life and death situation left a lasting impression about the hard work of medical professionals.

The fundraiser is off to a good start with \$1,133.50 raised as of Monday, Feb. 7.

“Let’s work together to raise these funds, you never know if you or your loved ones might need the ICU one day,” summed up Smith.

“I specifically wanted something for ICU like a tangible piece of equipment, but they don’t know yet.”

That’ll all be determined in due time.

Anyone interested in taking card classes or purchasing cards can contact Smith by email at wandafaithsmith@gmail.com, with all proceeds going to the fundraiser.

Donations can also be made directly to the Cowichan District Hospital Foundation at [**https://donate.cdhfoundation.ca/PLMC2fkug**](https://donate.cdhfoundation.ca/PLMC2fkug)

The fundraiser will go on through upcoming occasions, with cards available for Easter, Mother's and Father's Day and beyond, for a variety of prices.

FUNDRAISING HOSPITALS



Another example of Wanda Smith's pop-up cards for Valentine's Day, available for \$13 each in her ICU fundraiser campaign. (Photo by Wanda Smith)



A sample of Wanda Smith's pop-up cards for Valentine's Day that she's selling for \$13 each, with all proceeds going towards her fundraiser. (Photo by Wanda Smith)



Wanda Smith's fundraiser for the Intensive Care Unit at Cowichan District Hospital is off to a great start. (Photo by Don Bodger)



Neighbour Doug Fitzpatrick, who's also a member of the Copper Canyon Band in Chemainus, with Wanda Smith. Fitzpatrick was the builder extraordinaire of her goal thermometer. (Photo by Lynn Fitzpatrick)



Wanda Smith in her creative space in her home. (Photo by Don Bodger)