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HUGH HERON

ON-SITE INSIGHT

The more things change...

Everything evolves, including the new-home industry

Recently, I was listening to a radio show and the announcer was making fun of the way people dressed in the 1970s. Back then, we thought that bell-bottoms and miniskirts would always be "in" — but those trends led to others, and so the fashion world goes. Change is a constant in that industry, as it is in most. People may think that things will stay the same, but tomorrow always comes.

Just look at what else has changed since that time. In the 1970s, computers were huge. They took up entire rooms and had to be on 18-inch raised floors to accommodate all the cabling underneath. They were programmed with punch cards, the rooms had to be air conditioned to keep the computers from overheating, and you would wait a long time to receive

the information you wanted. They may have looked impressive, but today's hand-held computers have far more capabilities than those old, giant mainframes. And if there's one thing we've learned, it's that today's computers will soon be obsolete, too.

Remember pocket calculators? When the first ones were released in Canada in the 1970s, they were bulky and expensive and had very few capabilities. Nowadays hardly anyone adds up columns of numbers; people usually leave that to their computers.

And remember when car phones were big and clumsy, and we had to use a rotary dial to make a phone call from home? Now you can buy a palm-size unit that is a cell phone, camera computer and MP3 player all in one. MP3s — who would have imagined that back in

the '70s, when we used record players spinning vinyl discs at the speed of 78 rpm? Now a little 2-by-2-inch bit of plastic can hold thousands of songs.

Another field that has changed dramatically is medicine. Christian Barnard performed the first heart transplant in 1967. It took nine hours and a team of 30 people to accomplish. Today, many organs are successfully transplanted. People routinely undergo bypass surgery and are out of the hospital in a few days. It's amazing. And who would have thought decades ago that we'd have public-access defibrillators like the Mikeys we place in various locations (through the Mikey Network) so that people who experience sudden cardiac arrest in public places have a second chance at life?

Yes, change is inevitable, even

Giving back to the community with heart

In 2003, the Heron Group and Heathwood Homes established the Mikey Network to honour the memory of former partner Mike Salem, who experienced sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) and died on a golf course in 2002. This non-profit charitable organization promotes heart-healthy living and places public-access defibrillators called Mikeys in high-risk public places. In Mike Salem's name, the network



works with community partners to offer a second chance at life to people of all ages who experience SCA. To support this worthy cause, visit www.mikeynetwork.com.

in the new-home industry. When I first started building in the 1960s, no one wanted open-concept designs. When I worked with Costain, we had one model with only a railing between the kitchen and the family room; buyers told us they wanted a wall there because it would hide an untidy kitchen. Today, open-concept is the norm, with furniture used to delineate living spaces. Families like the spacious feel and the togetherness it brings.

Which brings me to the things that haven't changed — the importance of family and desire for home ownership are two of them. Each year, hundreds of thousands of immigrants come to Canada because they see the opportunity for a better life for their children, and most of them want to own a home. This is the dream of many

Canadians, as well. And historically, despite the occasional bumps in the market, real estate is one of the most solid financial investments people can make. I'm proud to be part of an industry that helps to make this dream come true.

The evolution of technology, social norms and all other aspects of our lives will continue. People often say they don't like change, but where would we be without it? Wherever the future takes us, however, we'll always need a sense of family and a home to make our lives complete.

Hugh Heron is president of Heathwood Homes and a member of the board of directors of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well as a past president of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.