

COMMUNITY FOCUS

HEATHWOOD HOMES — corporate



# FROM HOME TO COMMUNITY

by hugh heron

The new-home building industry is about a lot more than building new homes! A house is a home in one sense and people are also happiest when they feel a sense of belonging in their surroundings, which is an expanded concept of the word. That's why builders and developers call our collections of homes "communities."

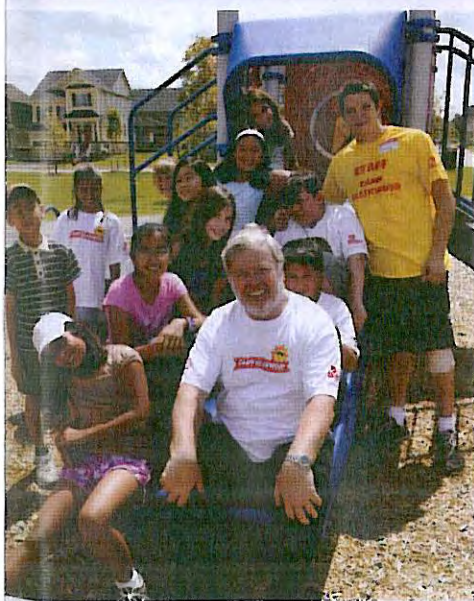
Nurturing an atmosphere of a true neighbourhood takes forethought, planning and creativity. Physical amenities that create a sense of belonging and encourage interaction include distinctive entry gates, parks, more intimate street patterns and the like. Over the years at Heathwood, we have also come up with many things beyond the brick and mortar of homes to help bring owners and their families together. In low-rise neighbourhoods, we hold homeowner seminars and get-togethers both before and after occupancies begin.

In 1979, Heathwood was a pioneer in providing both physical amenities and onsite community events at master-planned Maple Ridge. I remember one where we brought in Spiderman from New York to make an appearance. In the 1980s, we constructed our sales centre in Scarborough to be used as a community centre and when the homes were complete, we turned it over to the city. It is still in use today.

A more current example is Traditions in Milton, where we have turned our sales centre into a community centre where we arrange events and hold programs for residents. The centre has turned out to be a meeting place for families of all ages. In the summer, we even held Camp Heathwood – a day camp for neighbourhood kids – and as this major community grows, we will continue to find new ways to boost community spirit.

This type of thing is happening across the Greater Toronto Area in both large and small communities and we are thrilled to see that the concept has even been adopted for high-rise condominiums. A few now have a resident services director who helps to schedule activities and outings for suite owners.

This built-in focus on community is especially important to immigrants, who often look to their neighbours here as extended family members. I grew up in Scotland and when I immigrated here in 1967, I found it a challenge to adapt to the Canadian way of life. And although some may argue this point, I came here from an English-speaking country. For those who have to learn our language as well, it can seem lonely. Gatherings in new-home neighbourhoods can begin building community spirit even before the homes



are constructed and as these collections grow, so can the activities offered.

These are exciting times we live in. The GTA is expanding in population and we have a wonderful mosaic of residents from various countries and cultures. As we continue into the 21st century with our lives so hectic and overwhelmed with technology, opportunities for face-to-face interactions with friends are more important than ever before.

Builders and developers have a responsibility to do what they can in the way of building communities as well as homes. When new homeowners and their families can connect through common interests such as sports events, cooking classes, gardening seminars, book clubs and whatever else creative organizers can dream up, it helps to promote our Canadian way of life, which is envied around the world.

Hugh Heron is Principal and Partner in the Heron Group of Companies and President of Heathwood Homes, as well as a former Member of the Board of Directors of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. and a past president of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.