

HOMES & CONDOS



BILL TAYLOR FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Roshan Amendra, Jen Moore and Lineen Doung are getting attention from one side of King St. but not the other.

MARKETING

Dancing in the streets

CentreCourt Developments hires 'flash trio' to create buzz for Peter Street Condominiums

BILL TAYLOR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

When good balloons turn bad . . .

It's inevitable they're going to be trouble. Whenever a couple of hundred bags of helium are gathered together, they just naturally misbehave.

They go pop, their strings get entangled so you can't hand them out — "Does anybody know where I can find scissors?" someone asks plaintively — and, inevitably, several dozen break free and make a run for it.

They end up caught in phone wires at the corner of Bay and King streets.

"At least it's a good location," says Danny Roth.

"And you can see the logo — P.S. I love you."

That's "P.S." as in Peter St. Or, to be more exact, Peter St. Condominiums, a CentreCourt Development project at the corner of Adelaide St. W. — 40 storeys and 429 suites, with "tentative occupancy" in December, 2014.

According to CentreCourt president Andrew Hoffman, 85 per cent of the units are sold.

According to publicist Roth, something new was needed to goose interest in the remaining 15 per cent. As always, the buzzword is "buzz," even in a sales climate where the *Toronto Star* can run a headline: "Condo sales as hot as the weather."

Hence the balloons and the little flash mob embarking on a series of 15 performances, entitled "P.S. . . . I Saw it on the Street," over three

days around the downtown core.

Apart from the people handing out T-shirts and balloons (someone found scissors), it's actually a "flash trio" of professional dancers, Roshan Amendra, Jen Moore and Lineen Doung, doing a 15-minute acrobatic hip-hop routine.

Amendra starts off sweeping the sidewalk with a broom, segueing into some fancy dance moves. Moore, wearing hospital scrubs and "talking" into a cellphone, is passing by when she's dragged into the action. And, waddayaknow, she can dance, too!

Finally, Doung, masquerading as a computer geek, breaks in to protest that they're disturbing the peace and winds up breakdancing.

"I give Danny credit for a lot, but this was my idea!" Hoffman insists. "It made sense for this project. It's a downtown thing, a little bit organic, not too rehearsed, constantly changing."

A flash mob has to think on its feet to deal with everything from renegade inflatables to unresponsive passersby to recalcitrant security people chivvying you off their corporate turf.

Today the one security man who shows up is curious but friendly — the mob moves across the street anyway — and though the number of people who stop to watch don't quite qualify for crowd status, Roth is pleased with the number of cellphone cameras in use.

"That's what'll send this viral," he says. "Giving someone a balloon or a T-shirt doesn't make him want to

buy a condo.

It's a "typical Toronto audience — they don't want to get too close."

Some stride resolutely by, not even turning their heads. One guy, though, almost walks into a light pole, his eyes are siveled so far sideways. As the dancers really start throwing themselves and each other around, more and more people stop to watch. Some even applaud.

As the routine winds down, Amendra says, "Hey, where did my dancers go?" and looks around. A woman, who's closer than most, exclaims, "Oh, no, he's coming for volunteers" and starts backing up.

Amendra takes the line and uses it in the next performance, outside Metro Hall.

"Every time is a little different," he says.

This is all in a day's work. The dancers are with Flasharilla, which bills itself as "Out-of-the-box ideas . . . an interactive way to market promotional campaigns."

But aren't flash mobs getting a little . . . old?

"A lot of big companies use guerrilla-style marketing," says Scott Cavalheiro, Flasharilla's creative director.

"We're selling entertainment, emotional involvement. We've been doing this for almost three years and it's pretty steady. So no, I can't say it's getting old."

Roth and Hoffman are pleased with how the first of the 15 shows has gone.

"We don't expect it to drive sales," says Hoffman. "It's all about awareness."

"It gets tougher to stand out," adds Roth. "You make your initial splash with a condo project like this but then you have to reconnect, get people's attention. It can't just be white noise."

As the group walks along King St. to Metro Hall, three young women, each with an intact "P.S. I love you" balloon, are standing outside a law office taking pictures of each other "to put on Facebook."

Roth beams. Maybe the balloons weren't such a bad idea after all.

OPINION

Housing is the foundation of our society

Affordable housing benefits the city including the challenging social and environmental issues

NEIL HETHERINGTON
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

On Thursday, I was in front of the Executive Committee of the City of Toronto making a deputation on how best to solve our budget issues. Like over the 130 others signed up to speak, I made a case for what I am most passionate about — decent affordable housing.

The case to support any city program in the face of a large budget deficit is a challenge. While there is broad disagreement on how we got to this financial crisis and how to solve the problem, the issue itself has not come up for debate. Therefore, Mayor Rob Ford is put in a position everything the city spends money on is legitimately on the table up for review and debate.

The provincial housing strategy has clearly indicated that affordable housing is best delivered at the local level, and is to be financially supported by both Ottawa and Queen's Park. It was good news last month when the federal government renewed its commitment to affordable housing to the tune of \$1.4 billion to local housing initiatives.

While the funding is in place for housing from the federal and provincial governments, we have seen in our not too distant past, with two provincially funded nursing positions, that this does not necessarily mean that the city will implement the program.

Here's the case to help insure that we never let that bit of local history repeat itself. Let's look at one of the line items in the KPMG cost-cutting report. Should the city refuse to take the federal/provincial funding in order to save a reported \$500,000?

To answer that question, we need to know what we get for that money. In the last rendition of the program the answer was a staggering 2,000 affordable homes — 700 affordable home ownership, like those built by Habitat for Humanity, and 1,300 affordable rental units, like those recently opened by Patricia & Bathurst Developments.

On a per home basis, what does that work out to? The city spent a meagre \$200 per home to administer this program. How can that possibly happen? Core funding is coming from the federal and provincial governments. The city is also dependent on partnerships and innovation from the private and non-profit sector. A \$200 investment in the city's affordable housing office for this program translates into a

housing unit that is valued at least over \$200,000 — seems like a no-brainer and a brilliant investment. But there's more to it.

Ford consistently indicated during the campaign that we do not have a revenue issue, but rather a spending problem. It is worth our time, therefore, to turn away from the expense side of the income statement and look at revenues.

Each year, just the homes that have been built by the dedicated Habitat for Humanity volunteers will return to the city just under \$1 million in tax revenues and savings from social housing each year. Add to it approximately \$7,000 per new home that Habitat for Humanity Toronto must pay in permits and fees to construct the developments. Simply from a financial, bottom-line perspective, the city is dramatically better off by investing in affordable housing.

It would, however, be a mistake to debate the issue from a financial perspective in isolation. When there is decent affordable housing

City is dependent on partnerships from the private sector

in this city, we share other benefits that solve challenging social and environmental issues. Good affordable housing solves

the need to have food banks and breakfast programs. Good affordable housing also reduces gridlock when families do not need drive an hour to work each day to get to a home they can afford. Indeed, good housing is the foundation of a society that when done right, treats many of poverty's symptoms — not to mention providing dignity to those in need of it.

The job that I have as CEO of Habitat for Humanity in Toronto is to leave the organization in better shape than when I started. That's the job of all CEOs, and it is also the job of our mayor and elected officials.

When Ford was first elected, John Tory commented that all Torontonians need the mayor to succeed, because if he fails it means we, as a city, have not moved forward. Tory is right.

It seems to me that the question of good affordable housing development in the context of budgetary cuts transcends left-of-centre or right-of-centre politics, but rather becomes a question of movement forward or backward in policy development.

Neil Hetherington, the CEO of Habitat for Humanity Toronto, writes an occasional column on issues of poverty and homelessness. For more information, go to www.torontohabitat.on.ca.

Worth Seeing This Week

Ajax

Carruther's Creek Village H3

Mississauga

Central Park North H3
Central Park III H3

Brampton

Walnut Grove H3
Trinity Village H3
Mattamy Homes FDT H6
Mattamy Homes FDT H7

North York

Oakdale Village H3
Weston Village H3

East Toronto

Port Union H3
Upper Beach H3

Richmond Hill

Dunvegan Heights H3

Stouffville

Heritage Estates H3

Maple

Sorrento Village H3

Milton

Jasper Village H3

BUILDING A GREATER GTA
Building Industry and Land Development Association

BILD New Home Profile

Fern Cottage at Mackenzie Ridge offers a Lush Country Lifestyle

Opening Fall 2011

info@townwoodhomes.com
mackenzieridge.com

Nestled just above Toronto in the idyllic community of Maple you will discover Fern Cottage, a sublime example of the classical estate homes offered at Mackenzie Ridge.

Set amongst a canvas of lush trees and gently rolling hills, Fern Cottage is priced from the \$800's and ranges in size from 2,565 sq. ft. to 3,590 sq. ft. with your choice of 4 or 5 bedrooms. The magnificent 40' home design backs onto a beautiful wooded landscape. You'll be spoiled by its visionary kitchen with island, pantry and built in Wolf and Sub-Zero appliances; a sunken Great Room, a library, spacious bedrooms, with ensuites and walk-in closets; and family rooms with, well, plenty of room.

This stately home is designed with an impressive list of standard features, far above what others would consider upgrades. Fern Cottage is one of the final releases from Mackenzie Ridge, an upscale neighbourhood with plenty to offer, like parks, shopping, community centres, schools, theatres, galleries and much more. To see how you could be living, visit Townwood today.

MACKENZIE RIDGE
ESTATE HOMES

TOWNWOOD

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