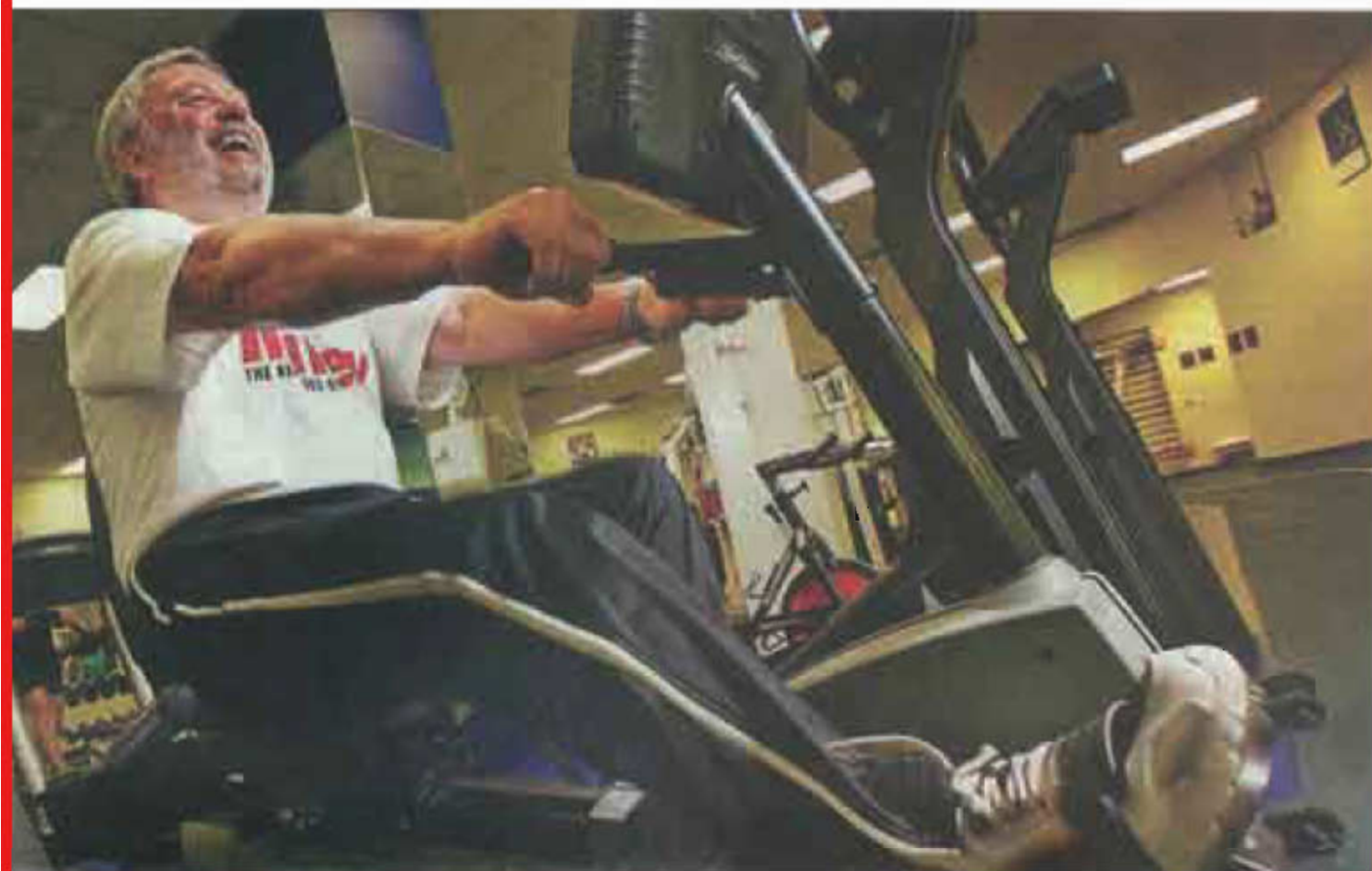


BEYOND THE BRICKS



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And the beat goes on

Secret to developer's success turns out to be no secret at all: Perseverance, hard work and 'a 100 per cent positive' attitude.

GALE BEEBY
REAL ESTATE EDITOR

Hugh Heron could make most athletes feel like underachievers.

At 70, the President of Heathwood Homes still works out in the gym several times a week, runs several other companies and is active in a number of charities, most notably the Mikey Network, which places cardiac defibrillators in public places.

"I ran my first marathon when I was 60, with a time of over seven hours," he says proudly. "That is the biggest achievement of my life."

Twice a week, Heron leads the Mikey Walking Club from his North York office and gets employees to pony up \$10 to join him on the two-kilometre walk, with the money going to the Mikey Network. The charity has helped put cardiac defibrillators into schools, workplaces and public access areas through Canada. Heron says the weekly walks with his employees are good for both business and his health.

"We've learned to talk and communicate, and we get heart healthy at the same time," says Heron, his thick Scottish brogue still very much in evidence after 40 years in Canada.

Known for his boundless energy and enthusiasm – not to mention a mischievous sense of humour – Heron has worked tirelessly to build a positive reputation for his companies and the industry as a whole.

David Horton, executive director of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, has known Heron for more years than he can remember.

"His sense of humour is renowned, I've commented to him that he will never grow up, to which he responds, 'Why would I?'"

But Heron has impressed Horton with more than just his wry jokes and charitable works.

"Hugh has provided the residential construction industry with a credible and strong voice in Ontario," says Horton, who points out that more than 700 people turned out to pay tribute to Heron at a 70th birthday bash last February, raising some \$100,000 for the Mikey Network.

"He is the champion of the best interests of our consumers, our labour force and is a real community builder in the truest sense."

But don't let his impeccable grooming and fine suit fool you; Heron grew up in the working-class dockside district of Glasgow and left school at 15 to become a shipwright's apprentice, where he learned the meaning of long hours and hard work.

He came to Canada in 1967, in part because of the excitement of the Centennial celebrations here and wage and price freezes back home and because of sage advice from an unlikely source.

During lunch at a chic Yorkville restaurant recently, Heron explains.

"I was going to immigrate to either Australia, the U.S. or Canada," Heron says while enjoying mushroom soup. "But my dentist – okay, it was Scotland, he was really just a tooth extractor – told me that Australia was a long way to go and an even longer way home if it was a mistake. The United States was a good place to go but would require a lot of hard work. But Canadians, he said, were like Americans, only with class."

"That clinched it for me," says Heron with a grin.

And although Heron is a proud, kilt-wearing Scot, it's his adopted country that makes him smile.

"This is the greatest country in the world," he says, "and multiculturalism is one of the best things about Toronto. Everybody talks to each other, there is real dialogue, and we all try to get along."

When Heron first arrived in Toronto he got a job with builder Costain, a company he had worked for in Scotland.

In 1979, he launched Heron Homes, and the rest, as they say, is history.

As he moves on to the vegetable risotto, Heron, who wants to be known as a community builder as well as a builder of quality homes, practically glows while talking about his latest development, Traditions in Milton. It boasts "wonderful street patterns and old-fashioned entry gates to the community, just like an old English village."

There are over 500 units – singles, semis and townhomes, plus a seniors' building with 160 units that will allow residents to walk to Milton's Main Street.

"It took 22 years to get this community approved because it sits right under the escarpment," Heron notes. "We worked with the conservation people, the city and Halton Region to create a project with balance."

"There is no point in creating friction. It won't achieve anything."

That seems to be Heron's mantra.

When talking about a 56-unit infill project in Uxbridge, he says his relationship with that town council is "first class."

"It's still a small Ontario town," he says, "and they are not into the politics and procedures. It made for an excellent working relationship."

While waiting for coffee, the conversation turns to the mortgage problems in the United States and the recent move by the Canadian government to end zero-down, 40-year mortgages.

"Any length of mortgage is fine," Heron says, "if people qualify. The problem with the subprime loans in the U.S. is that they were going to people who wouldn't normally qualify for a mortgage."

But, he says, there has to be a way for young people and first-time buyers to get into the market, because they feed the market from the bottom up, working their way up into bigger homes as they get older.

"It's like being late for the train with a first-class ticket. You may have to run and jump on at the back, but that ticket allows you to walk through each car until you reach the front."

"That's what home ownership is about. You get on the train by buying a small condo, then you sell it and move up."

"You can continue to do that until you are living in first class."

Over the years, Heron has served as president of the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association (now BILD); president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association; chair of the Ontario New Home Warranty Program (now called Tarion); and served on the board of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

"My involvement in these organizations has strengthened my love for Canada," he said in February at his 70th bash at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel. "I've worked with people from different nationalities, cultures and religions, and when you think of the problems in other countries, it's remarkable how well we all get along."

Horton has similar praise for Heron himself.

"Hugh Heron rates five-star status," Horton says. "He is a kind and remarkable humanitarian and philanthropist. I know first-hand he is exactly the same guy in public as in person. He tells everyone to always have a good attitude and always do your homework."

And in fact, attitude is a recurring theme during our lunch conversation.

"If you assign a number to each letter of the alphabet," Heron explains, "an A being 1 and Z equaling a 26, then 'attitude' adds up to 100."

"A 100 per cent positive attitude is what I expect from myself and from those around me," he says.

Heron ends our luncheon date with this parting shot:

"I am the luckiest man in the world – I'd fall into the septic tank and come out with a salmon. Not bad for a wee boy from Glasgow!"

Thankfully, I hadn't ordered Scottish salmon for lunch.

Development Details

TRADITIONS

Location: Main St. west of Bronte St. in Milton

Number of homes: 542

Types of homes: Single, semis and towns

Size range: 1,241 to 3,090 square feet

Price range: \$293,900 to \$692,900

Sales office: 3136 Main St. W., Milton, 905-876-3140, or heathwood.com. Open: Monday to Thursday 1 p.m.-8p.m., Friday noon to 5 p.m., and Saturday, Sunday and holidays 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

TERRACOTTA

Location: Mavis Rd. and Highway 407 in Mississauga

Number of homes: 187

Types of homes: Condominium townhomes

Size range: 1,533 to 2,046 square feet

Price range: \$293,900 to \$677,900

Sales office: 7581 Chinguacousy Rd., Mississauga, 905-874-4741, or heathwood.com. Open: Monday to Thursday 1 p.m.-8p.m., Friday noon to 5 p.m., and Saturday, Sunday and holidays 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

COUNTRY LANE

Location: Bloomington Rd. and Cemetery Dr., Uxbridge

Number of homes: 59

Types of homes: Bungalows, two-storey homes

Size range: 1,794 to 5,000 square feet

Price range: \$477,900 to \$811,900

Sales office: Cemetery Dr., Uxbridge, 905-862-0474, or heathwood.com. Open: Monday to Wednesday 1 p.m.-8p.m., Thursday and Friday by appointment only, Saturday, Sunday and holidays 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

CHURCHILL

Location: Winston Churchill Blvd. and Eglinton Ave. W., Mississauga

Number of homes: 550

Types of homes: Single

Size range: 2,301 square feet (everything else is sold out)

Price range: \$499,900 to \$569,900

Sales office: 3015 Eglinton Ave. W., Mississauga, 905-607-3939, or heathwood.com. Open: Monday to Wednesday 1 p.m.-8p.m., Thursday and Friday by appointment only, Saturday, Sunday and holidays 11 a.m.-6 p.m.