

# Developing a Social Conscience

In every sense, The Daniels Corporation builds communities

By Sarah B. Hood

**MANY MEMBERS OF** the GTHBA support Habitat for Humanity, but for The Daniels Corporation, the cause of putting families in homes is integrated into every level of the business. Daniels has an innovative approach; they are currently working on two projects in association with Habitat for Humanity Toronto, including one on the north side of Lakeshore Blvd. between Islington and Kipling in Etobicoke.

The project encompasses a 13-storey, high-rise market condominium, as well as seven market town-homes and 10 homes that will be sold on subsidized terms to families that would otherwise not have been able to afford them. "We're a developer/builder, so we have done the development on this land, which Daniels has owned since the late 1980s," says Martin Blake, vice president of project implementation for The Daniels Corporation.

"To us, it makes perfect sense to have a mix of incomes and a mix of uses in the neighbourhood. It is a very good urban philosophy. We just finished a group of market town-homes along Lakeshore Blvd., and it's hugely popular. It speaks to how different ownership can mix within a community and thrive," he adds.

The Habitat project is part of Lakeshore Village, which Daniels has been developing since the 1980s. "It speaks to the Daniels corporate philosophy, which is trying to find a mix of housing within the GTA. We have a division called Daniels First Homes that is dedicated to increasing the level of affordability for first homes," says Blake.

"We have done a number of developments to improve affordability, so it's a natural evolution to partner with Habitat," he continues. "Our goal is to find first-time homeowners who will later become second- and third-time homeowners."

With the federal/provincial Affordable Housing Program, Daniels has created "The Daniels Triple 5," a program that allows buyers to purchase homes with a 5 per cent down payment, which is matched both by Daniels and by government.

"The Daniels portion is a five-year loan at 5 per cent with no payments until the end of the fifth year. The government portion is also a loan, but if in 20 years the purchaser is still living there, the loan is forgiven."

These units go on sale at the last minute. "People actually line up so they can make sure they get their unit. We've done this a number of times in our low-rise communities, and we

typically find that we sell out in the first weekend," says Blake.

"Daniels is a unique builder in that we take a lot of our direction from two partners: Tom Dutton and Mitchell Cohen, who came to the private sector after spending a lot of time developing co-operative housing. We were the largest builder of non-profit housing in the early '90s; we developed and built over 3,600 units," Blake says.

Blake personally worked with Habitat even before coming to Daniels, beginning in 1995. One of his projects involved the conversion of a bar at Church and Gerrard in the downtown core into a women's shelter. Now known as "Mary's House," the shelter is operated by the Roman Catholic charitable organization called the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

So Blake speaks for himself as well as the firm when he says that, "It's easy for us to participate in these kinds of endeavors, because they fit with who we are."



Habitat for Humanity Toronto will build ten townhomes on the site of the Wave condominium tower. PHOTO COURTESY HABITAT TORONTO