

Erin Mills homes create buying frenzy

Joseph Chin
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At first glance, it looks like a mini tent city. But the shivering occupants aren't refugees from an earthquake or some other calamity, nor are they lovers of the outdoors jumping the gun on camping season.

Instead, they're braving the weather and the curious stares of passersby to be first in line to buy a townhouse in Erin Mills.

The bravest – some might say craziest – is Baz Munshi, who showed up at the Daniels FirstHome site, near Winston Churchill Blvd. and Eglinton Ave., more than a week ago. By the time the 130 fully-built condo units finally go on sale Saturday morning, Munshi will have been in front of the line nearly two weeks. But Munshi insists he's not mad as a March hare.

"They're good, quality homes, and well worth the hassle," he says.

Munshi should know. He's a repeat offender who bought into phase two of the community some three years ago. (FirstHome is now in its seventh phase.)

"This time I'm looking into buying a place for either my dad or my brother," says Munshi, who's beginning to look a little worse for wear after nine days sleeping in his car, parked directly across from the entrance to the development.

Occasionally, he's spelled by his father or brother so he can go home and grab a shower.

Munshi is so determined to protect his front-of-the-line status that he roams the site, clipboard in hand, to make sure there are no queue jumpers. New arrivals are given a number, which, at last count, exceeds 300. With the help of two other hopefuls, Jim Ghimery and Jennifer Hicks, he takes roll call every two hours. Three absences, and you're sent to the back of the line.

"It's to maintain control and security," explains Hicks, who arrived on the second day and is 45th in line to get a crack at the homes.

The self-policing annoys some late-comers, but Ghimery says most people have bought into the process.

"Daniels has told us they will honour the list, and it's working well," says Ghimery, bundled against the chill in a well-insulated parka and several layers of underclothing.

Saturday will tell. That's when, at 8 a.m. sharp, the door to the sales centre will open and the homes will go on sale on a first-come, first-served basis.

Before then, on Wednesday, prospective buyers will get an opportunity to walk through the completed homes and get their hands, for the first time, on the price list. Right now, all they know is that prices start at \$139,900. Hicks admits all the nights she's spent huddled in her pup tent could be for naught.

"For all I know, the prices might be out of my price range. I'll be disappointed, but I met some great people and we've become like a community. So, in that sense, it will be worth it. However, I have my fingers crossed."

Don Pugh, Daniels Corporation's vice-president, says the company tries to make the peculiar situation as comfortable as possible. The builder has been known to provide washroom facilities, bottled water and even the occasional dinner.

The Erin Mills FirstHome development, he notes, has been extremely popular.

"One of the many ways we provide astounding affordability is by building the homes before they are offered for sale. This provides new homebuyers the opportunity to walk through the completed townhomes, and to move within 30, 60 and 90 days. And when it's your first home, that's an exciting proposition," says Pugh.

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Roll call. Hopeful homebuyers flock a new Daniels development of condominiums and townhomes on Destination Drive in Erin Mills on Tuesday. Alex McTaggart, one of the group's self-appointed organizers, takes a roll call to ensure the sequence of the places in line. *Staff photo by Rob Beintema*