

Perfect poinsettias

It takes a lot of work to make the 'Christmas flower' bloom on time, **H5**



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DREAMSTIME PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Christmas trees, twinkling lights and roaring fires make for a cosy, warm holiday glow, but could also create a huge fire hazard.

The gift of safety

It's a season of feasts, family and fun, but a few precautions can prevent it from also being a disaster

Every year, millions of us put up our Christmas trees, hang up our stockings, and wait for the Big Guy in Red to sneak in at night and pile up the presents. We spend quality time with friends and family, enjoy large meals, hot chocolate and sweet desserts.

For many of us, it's a mad rush followed by a serene calm in our neighbourhoods decorated by twinkling lights and hopefully a fresh coat of snow. We tend to stay inside more, cuddle up in front of the fire, and we feel safe.



BRYAN BAEUMLER

BAEUMLER continued on H11

BEYOND THE BRICKS

Lifetime of teamwork builds strength

Collaboration is basis for great communities, developer finds

ANNETTE MCLEOD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

There's a Catch-22 in the highrise development business that's hard to avoid: "You have to sell whole buildings to get construction financing to build whole buildings," says Brian Brown, vice president of Lifetime Developments.

Lifetime had been developing low-rise homes for about 20 years when, a decade ago, they realized it was getting harder to find large pieces of lands on which to develop large communities.

"We saw that the real opportunity was going to be highrise development in the downtown core," Brown says. "We began to shift focus."

Lifetime Homes became Lifetime Urban Development Group.

But developing a downtown condo project isn't like developing a suburban neighbourhood. There's no parcelling off sections to pay for the next phase.

It was then the idea of collaboration began to take hold. By entering into partnerships with compatible companies, Lifetime could stay true to its roots but still have the urban presence they were after.

"We have a very entrepreneurial culture in this company," Brown says.

LIFETIME continued on H11

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This condo looms large



CHRISTOPHER HUME

You've got to hand it to Brampton; there isn't a planning mistake in the book that the Flower City hasn't made — and still does. The sprawl, the decimated downtown, looming condo towers, the mega-developments... they're all present and accounted for in this community of 500,000.

The story has been repeated endlessly across North America, of course, let alone Southern Ontario. It's the one in which compact, coherent and often beautiful 19th-century towns tear themselves apart in pursuit of some illusion of modernity.

One after the other, finely grained main streets have been destroyed to accommodate the car and the misguided shipping malls that inevitably follow. Think of Brant-

ford, Hamilton, London, Barrie...

Brampton's only marginally worse than these other communities; though it does offer a disturbing glimpse into what our cities would look like if developers had even more control than they already do. Out here, nothing adds up. There's no sense of a larger understanding of what the city is about. It's a mishmash of intentions and results that has left poor Brampton looking ratty and unloved.

In recent years, the city has embarked on a plan to redo its downtown, especially the area around Queen and Main, old Brampton's main intersection. Though nothing has come of that yet, many doubt whether such large-scale projects are appropriate for a city so disconnected from its own urban reality.

The point here is to create a critical mass of amenities, attractions and opportunities, enough to bring life downtown and keep it there.

Needless to say, this will be a tall order for Brampton, a city most residents avoid in favour of the malls that sprawl beyond.

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CHRISTOPHER HUME PHOTO

CONDO CRITIC

The Renaissance, 11 George St.: Why the 27-storey behemoth occupies the site it does remains a mystery. Though close to the main corner of town, the building stands out in an older lowrise neighbourhood. There are other equally tall slabs in the general vicinity, but they don't make sense in such a setting either.

The building itself comes right out of the 1970s. With its precast exteriors, ersatz flourishes and tenuous relationship to the street, this overly large structure couldn't be more out of place. Height has its reasons, but bringing tall buildings to Brampton doesn't. This is one small city could accommodate a lot more smaller, more nuanced, infill before it needs to resort to this sort of thing.

Grade: C

Have a safe, happy holiday

BAEUMLER from H1

Unfortunately for some of us, this Christmas will be much more sinister. Statistically, a few hundred North Americans will spend Christmas huddling around a fire truck watching everything they have go up in smoke. Others will be injured by falling trees, electrical shocks or carbon monoxide poisoning. Investing a few dollars and a little time now can keep your family and your home safe.

If you have a real Christmas tree, be sure that it's well supported in a stand that won't allow it to tip over easily. Keep it far enough away from fireplaces and other heat sources that if it does topple over it won't come into contact with them. Also be sure to trim the bottom of the trunk and keep it watered — the humidity in winter is much lower, which will dry out your tree quickly, which means it's more susceptible to fire.

When it comes to lights, LED is the safest and most efficient — double bonus. You'll want to avoid plugging more than three sets of lights into an extension cord and don't use power bars. Check all wires and connections for damage to avoid arcing or overheating. If you prefer a fake tree, make sure it's CSA approved and fire resistant.

Because we're home more for the holidays, heaters and fireplaces get more use than normal. Make sure any heat source is at least a metre away from any combustibles, has a working thermostat and tip-over shutoff feature. Check any electrical cords and be sure they are in good shape, and that you're not overloading your electrical system with armies of space heaters plugged into the same circuit.

Make sure your gas fireplace is in good working condition, and that you (and your spouse/partner/kids/roommates) know exactly where the gas shutoff valve is — you don't want to be searching for it while flames are shooting into the room.

If you have a wood-burning fireplace, don't keep combustibles in the area and ensure there is a screen or other device to keep sparks and coals where they belong. Be sure the flue is open and never use gasoline or any other accelerant to light an indoor fire.

Have your chimney cleaned and inspected regularly by a professional — creosote buildup or cracks in the pipe are huge fire hazards. Make sure your fire is completely out and cold to the touch before closing the flue and going to bed. Invest in a few fire extinguishers and make sure everyone knows where they are and how to use them.

If you don't already have them, install carbon monoxide detectors. Carbon monoxide is tasteless, odourless and colourless and is called the silent killer for a reason. Any fuel burning appliance or fireplace in your home creates carbon monoxide, which is why it's so important that all appliances have an exhaust vented to the outside that is intact and not blocked by bird's nests, snow or other debris.

Wood burning fireplaces should have a fresh air intake vent, or should not be operated without a window open to allow gases to escape. Competing exhaust fans or vents can draw CO back into the room, and leave you susceptible to carbon monoxide poisoning. In low doses, CO can cause headaches and shortness of breath. Medium exposure to CO can cause dizziness, vomiting, confusion, drowsiness or fainting, and high exposures can cause unconsciousness, brain damage and death — all before you see, smell or taste anything.

If you have children, talk to them about safety during the holidays. Teach them how to call 911 as well as where to find and how to use a fire extinguisher. Come up with an escape plan in the event of fire and practice it with them.

Prepare yourself to have a safe and happy Christmas! Bryan Baumlner is the host of *Disaster DIY* (weekends at 1 p.m.) and *House of Bryan* on HGTV. His column appears every two weeks in *Homes & Condos*. You can contact him via his website www.baumlner.ca.



AARON HARRIS FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Michael Pearl, from left, Sam Herzog, Brian Brown and Mel Pearl of Lifetime Developments on the rooftop of the Victory condo overlooking the skyline.

Teamwork takes 'strong work ethic'

LIFETIME from H1

"We've never intended to grow to 100 people. Our size allows us to make decisions quickly and to be more creative in our decisions, to explore social marketing, to do things that, if we were larger, might be too risky. Partnering allows us to pursue best practices, to spread the risk and play on our strengths.

Their most recent partnership is on Karma at Yonge St. and College St., which brings Lifetime together with CentreCourt Developments.

CentreCourt founder and president Andrew Hoffman was at Menkes Developments when they worked with Lifetime on the Four Seasons Hotel and Residences in Toronto, and Brown says they knew Hoffman's new company would be a great fit.

Hoffman's background in law and connections to some strong institutional financiers was distinct from the experience and expertise Lifetime would bring. Lifetime is particularly strong with the zoning and development side, Hoffman says, while CentreCourt's strengths include the fiduciary aspects and reporting obligations.

Once the partnership was in place, it was time to add to the team.

"We sat down with Andrew and laid out a road map of what we wanted to achieve," Brown says. "What did we want to design? What did we think would work best with

the neighbourhood, and where was the neighbourhood going? What influence would it have on further development? We really looked at the project in a holistic way, not as a piece on its own."

The pair thought immediately of architectsAlliance, and interior design firm Ceconi Simone.

"It used to be that when a building was designed, all the structure was in place, and then we would come in as interior designers and it was almost as if it were pre-existing, so far as it was impossible to make changes," says Elaine Ceconi.

"In the last four to five years, the interior designers are brought in almost right after the architects and engineers. Moving a column one foot might make the difference between a unit working and not working."

"Choosing the right partners is so important," Brown says. "We need a group that is respectful of each other, believes in each other and is open to change. If we can't cooperate, then the process slows down. It starts at the top — when you find someone who shares your vision and the goal you want to achieve — but it touches every level, the architects, designers, engineers and trades."

"You don't have to agree to every decision at the outset if you have respect for each other, but ultimately only one decision can be

made. You need healthy debate and dialogue and to come to a conclusion you can both live with and feel good about," Hoffman says.

"It's really about putting the best project forward," Ceconi says. "It doesn't matter whose idea it is or where concepts come from. You put the egos aside and really focus on putting out the best possible product — the building, suite designs, kitchens and bathrooms, pal-

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BRIAN BROWN
LIFETIME DEVELOPMENTS

ettes, materials, down to the amenities, which are really important in projects these days. It really differentiates the project you're working on from the one next door."

In an age when social media is growing exponentially, the final partner in a modern collaboration is the public. Lifetime recently relaunched their website (www.lifetimedevelopments.com), which now includes a blog, and are on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

"It's important to engage your audience," says Wattshala Chantha,

social media and communications specialist at Lifetime. Chantha says the company has successfully used social media to vet floor plan choices on The Bond, another Lifetime development. "We didn't say what they were for. Brokers, bloggers and the public all helped us decide which elements were working and which weren't."

"Better developments take openness with those involved. Your architect, designer, and marketers all have strong involvement, but the community is another involved partner," Brown says.

"Social marketing has allowed us another layer of input. It helps shape the amenities, the marketing. At The Bond, we put in a golf simulator. At Karma, a karaoke room. Amenities that are unique for each community."

Part of the strategy for public involvement at Karma centred on charitable involvement, befitting the project's name. The developers are donating \$5 to charity for every registration on its website (www.karmacondos.com).

"Collaboration takes a strong work ethic, high attention to detail, and applying what you've learned from past experiences in an effective way," Hoffman says.

"Having a common outlook on how to deal with roadblocks and having healthy debate. As long as you can talk it through you'll be successful."