

HOMES & CONDOS



RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

The city's inventory of trees on both public and private lands stands at about 6 million today, covering 19 per cent of the city land mass.

The transforming power of trees

*"Trees can make kings into gods
And lesser men into kings."*
— Dean Hole

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night with this idea. It has rattled around in my head for several years, like the last toffee in the tin.

I imagine the City of Toronto — my city for six generations — with air twice as clean as it is now, shaded paths for walking and biking, shaded streets with happy sounds of children playing in front yards, and parks with similar sounds. I imagine the sweet smell of tree blossoms, fruit hanging high where blue jays dive from the sky in search of food during late fall and winter. I imagine tourists stopping, pointing with interest at features of our city that its citizens take for granted.

The year in this imaginary tale is 2050, the year Toronto celebrates the doubling of its tree canopy. That is to say the doubling of the canopy since its low point in 2012.

About eight years ago, I received a call from Bill Stensson, the president of Sheridan Nurseries (www.sheridannurseries.com). He asked me if I would join a volunteer board of a new not-for-profit foundation called The Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation (www.torontoparksandtrees.org). It was the brain child of then deputy mayor and tree advocate Joe Pantalone. I said yes.

Each month for six years I took the subway down to City Hall for an 8 a.m. meeting to discuss our plan to gather funds that would be invested in the planting of trees and the greening of our parks. Each year we raised a couple hundred thousand dollars and parsed it out to 20 or 30 community-based organizations that used the money for its intended purpose. This was fun: I met some wonder-



MARK CULLEN

ful people and learned a lot, including how things work at City Hall.

As time passed, the administration changed hands, Pantalone lost his bid for mayor and he resigned from the TPTF. The foundation continued its work. But the idea in my head began to develop: what if we took *all* of the not-for-profit organizations that are currently planting trees and maintaining mature ones in Toronto and asked them to work together?

There are several such organizations doing some very impressive work.

- Any land owner in Toronto can contact LEAF and arrange for a free consultation on the most appropriate trees for your property. They will even deliver a tree and plant it for you at a discount. Go to www.yourleaf.org.
 - Trees Ontario (www.treesontario.ca) and Tree Canada (www.treecanada.ca) both have programs that encourage the planting of trees, as do Park People (www.parkpeople.ca) and the Ontario Urban Forest Council (www.oufc.org).
 - The Living City Foundation (formerly the Conservation Foundation associated with the Toronto and Region Conservation) also plants and maintains trees on their property (www.thelivingcity.org).
- In spite of all of this effort the fact remains that our inventory of trees on both public and private lands stands at about 6 million today,

covering 19 per cent of the city land mass. In the early 1960s that canopy stood at about 40 per cent.

Last year, Toronto planted 110,000 trees and was barely able to respond to all the requests for tree trimming of existing mature trees. To stop the decline of the tree canopy in the city, we need to plant 250,000 each year and money needs to be set aside to save as many of our maturing ash as possible, before they are lost to the emerald ash borer (more on that in a future column).

TORONTO TREE CANOPY COALITION

The idea is to test the theory that by working together these organizations can accomplish much more than by working independent of one another. The newly formed Toronto Tree Canopy Coalition will follow the blueprint developed over several years by the City of Toronto staff and adopted by council.

A meeting took place in November last year with the CEOs and executive directors of 12 not-for-profit organizations to discuss how the concept would work. What we came up with is a vision of an organization that will function as an umbrella — or “canopy” — over existing not-for-profits in the field (pardon the intentional pun). The TTCC will oversee the distribution of privately donated funds to the people who are already organized and committed to getting the job done.

It will provide governance by holding stakeholders accountable to professional standards for planting and maintenance.

The key to this idea is providing private donors and government sourced funders with the very best value for their money. The TTCC can provide assurances that donations have been matched wherever possible and that trees are planted precisely where they are desired by the donor.

Funds held by the TTCC will be applied for and granted based on these principles:

- Existing funds elsewhere are being levered to the fullest extent possible.
- Applicants for funds must agree to established professional tree planting methods.

- Professional follow-up maintenance standards must be followed.
- Volunteer efforts, which are often substantial, will be valued and accounted for.

OTHERS INVITED IN

The TTCC is not an exclusive club and will not exist in a vacuum, independent of government, other not-for-profit organizations, volunteers or private donors. Anyone who shares the vision of a greener, cleaner Toronto can join in. We can roll out the concept to Markham, Mississauga or Oakville (and I hope that we do). All we need is the will to get organized and get to work. Frank Scarpitti, the mayor of Markham, has expressed an interest in spearheading the GTA campaign to extend the idea outside of Toronto.

Here in Toronto, the idea is supported by the chair of the parks and environment committee, Norm Kelly, councillor for Scarborough East. I expect, as word gets out, there will be more councillors wanting to get on board.

THE VISION

Finally, the vision for the TTCC is very simple: “To create a healthier, cleaner, more economically independent city through the doubling of the city tree canopy.”

If this is an idea that interests you, please contact me at www.markcullen.com. Go to “contact us” and leave a message. I would be pleased to hear from you. It is time to share this dream.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Q: I planted a six-foot white pine this fall. I notice the snow collecting on the branches causing them to bend. Is this a problem?

A: It is a good idea to gently brush heavy snow from the branches of young evergreens. A heavy snowfall can cause branches to bend out of shape. The branches don't always bounce back. If the snow is heavy enough it can cause the branches to break.

Mark Cullen is an expert gardener, author and broadcaster. You can sign up for his free monthly newsletter at www.markcullen.com, and watch him on *CTV Canada AM* every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. You can follow Mark on Twitter @MarkCullen4 and Facebook.

CHARITY

The value of good karma

RYAN STARR
SPECIAL TO THE STARR

Andrew Hoffman has just witnessed the value of good karma.

The president of CentreCourt Developments had offered to donate \$5 to local charities for each person who registered on the website of his company's latest project, Karma Condos.

CentreCourt is developing Karma, a 50-storey, 495-unit glass tower at 21 Grenville St., in partnership with Lifetime Developments.

The condo's charity/marketing campaign generated a great deal of interest in the project — more than 3,000 people registered on the Karma website. “That's a record,” Hoffman says. “It's a significant increase from what we would normally see on a condo campaign.”

He notes that on another recent CentreCourt project, Peter Street Condos, there were around 900 registrants. “The Karma campaign really created engagement amongst a broad group of people,” Hoffman says.

With the developers donating \$5 for every Karma Condos registration, the initiative raised over \$15,000 for three local charities: Wellspring, a network of community-based cancer support centres; Sketch, an organization that provides opportunities for homeless or at-risk youth to engage in the arts; and Ronald McDonald House Toronto.

Hoffman says CentreCourt and Lifetime Developments will be topping up those funds with an additional \$30,000, giving the three charities \$15,000 each.

Funds for Ronald McDonald House will go toward the adoption of a private room at its new 96-room facility on McCaul St., the largest Ronald McDonald House in the world.

At the downtown Toronto Wellspring Centre, funds will help purchase specialized rehabilitation equipment. Sketch will use the Karma money to furnish a studio for theatre arts, martial arts, dance and meditation.

“The campaign created positive buzz for the project and it also created awareness for the three charities,” Hoffman says. “They saw a great amount of activity on their websites, and resulting interest in their charities.”

Karma Condos saw a great deal of interest, too.

Available suite ranges are from 500 square feet to just under 900 square feet. Prices range from \$380,000 to \$650,000.

Karma is designed by Architects-Alliance and Cecconi Simone did the interior design. Highlights include nine-foot ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows with north- and south-facing views.

Karma will have retail space at the base of the building, some of which will be incorporated into a preserved heritage home that currently sits on the site.

Hoffman says the plan is to start construction this summer.



Worth Seeing This Week



Ajax
Carruther's Creek Village H3

Brampton
Trinity Village H3
Mattamy Homes H8
Mattamy Homes H9

East Toronto
Port Union Village H3
Upper Beach Villas H3

Maple
Sorrento Village H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H3

Markham
Mattamy Homes H8
Mattamy Homes H9

Milton
Jasper Village H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H3
Mattamy Homes H8
Mattamy Homes H9

Mississauga
Central Park III H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H18

North York
Oakdale Village H3
Weston Village H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H18

Richmond Hill
Dunvegan Heights H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H3

Stouffville
Heritage Estates H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H3

Toronto City
Viewmark/Conservatory H3
Viewmark/Conservatory H18



BUILDING A GREATER GTA
Building Industry and Land
Development Association

BILD New Home Profile



The Oakridge Model

The Oakridge is a splendid example of the value-added homes you'll find at award-winning Summerlea, Empire Communities' master-planned community in Binbrook. Just minutes from Hamilton, Summerlea is a quaint, vibrant neighbourhood offering the best of country living with all the amenities of the big city right around the corner.

The Oakridge is a spacious 2,013 sq. ft. semi-detached home with 2-car parking. The elegant interior features a double door entrance, 9' ceilings throughout the main floor, a spacious Great Room with the option for a fireplace, a convenient laundry room, a gourmet kitchen with an island and a large sunlit breakfast area with 6' patio doors that lead onto the back deck. Another special feature of this home is the large Family Room, situated on it's own level

between the main and 2nd floors, with grand high ceilings and window seat — a perfect oasis for quiet reading.

Upstairs you'll find 3 bedrooms including the luxurious master bedroom with an oversized walk-in closet and a spa-inspired ensuite, complete with an oval soaker tub, separate shower and his & her sinks. The Oakridge is luxury made affordable, starting at just \$289,990.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT US AT
empirecommunities.com

4 Kaufman Drive, Hamilton • 905-692-6000
OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK: Mon-Thurs 1-7pm,
Fri 1-6pm Sat, Sun & Hol 11am-5pm