

REAL CHALLENGER

Gary Switzer has taken on complex building of Massey Tower, H14

35 YEARS



Top 10 New Home Buying Tips



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NEW IN HOMES & CONDOS



Xpress will be built on Yonge St. from the Hillcrest Mall, which will be revitalized to become the town centre's retail hub.

Xpress to Richmond Hill

New transit lines and updated official plan mean development is booming along Yonge St.

DUNCAN MCALLISTER
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It's hard to imagine that this once sleepy rural town is where the David Dunlap Observatory was erected in 1935, far enough north of the light pollution emanating from the bustling new metropolis of Toronto.

But that was then. Now, enroute to Richmond Hill, travelling north on what is now known as Old Yonge St., one sees the results of years of urban sprawl, which has left a succession of bland strip malls, car dealerships and concrete block apartment buildings. Nothing

much has changed here in decades.

This strategic stretch of the Yonge St. corridor is about to undergo a radical makeover. The town has finally approved a new official plan, which has been in development for the past six years. The vision is to create a high-density urban zone from a swath of underdeveloped suburban Yonge St., a concept that will see intensification surrounding three intersections, called Key Development Areas: Highway 7, 16th Ave. and Major Mackenzie Dr.

XPRESSION continued on H19

NIAGARA FALLS

From the first tee to the falls

Thundering Waters is walking distance to both attractions

DAN O'REILLY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

For the residents of the new Thundering Waters community in Niagara Falls, it will always be a short walk to the falls or — in the other direction — to the first tee.

Located just over a kilometre west of the falls, this two-phase 171-lot community of single-family homes and townhomes is being built on the par Thundering Waters Golf Club. It's the first "signature course" by professional golfer John Daly who was actively involved in the design.

Bringing the community on stream was a lengthy four- to five-year process which required overcoming several planning and design challenges, says Crystal D'Cuhna, sales manager with Mountainview Homes, the builder and developer. But the wait has been worth it, she maintains.

Flanked by a protected green space to the north, Thundering Waters has been configured in such a way that many of the lots overlook either the ninth or 18 holes. The clubhouse is in the same area as the homes, and buyers have the option to purchase a membership, says D'Cuhna.

But golf is not the only attraction and a love of the game — or even a mild interest — is not a prerequisite for wanting to live there, she says.

THUNDERING WATERS continued on H16

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» HOMES & CONDOS

From suburban to a 'new kind of urban'

XPRESSION from HI

One of the first of the many residential projects in the makeover is Zancor Homes' Xpression, a 452-unit condominium complex designed by Quadrangle Architects, located across from the Hillcrest Mall. With two 15-storey towers, a six-storey podium, three tiered terraces and green roofs, the complex will contain 17,000 square feet of commercial space at street level. The building will reside on a strip of land along Yonge St., nestled alongside an established residential community of 20-year-old townhomes just north of 16th Ave.

Fabrizio Cortellucci is the youthful president of Zancor Homes, a family-run business that has been active in the lowrise construction sector for the past 35 years. The Cortellucci family has a respectable track record of building high-quality, single-family dwellings in such notable GTA suburbs as King City, Brooklyn, Mississauga and Brampton. This is their first foray into highrise and they're looking to do more of them.

Xpression's lavish presentation centre is on the site of the first Harvey's restaurant in Canada. The well-appointed model suite displays a series of rooms with rich finishes and luxurious fixtures that you'd expect to find in downtown Toronto. "These standard finishes are light years ahead of anybody in the 905," says John Pennachetti, project manager for Zancor.

The condo complex faces Yonge St. and in the rear of the building will be a courtyard with elevated terraces. Amenities include exercise facilities, a steam room, an indoor swimming pool, a lounge, bar and theatre. The suites, designed by Tomas Pearce Interior Design Consulting, will have floor-to-ceiling



Xpression will have a six-storey podium and three terraces.

windows and wide-plank laminate flooring in all living areas and bedrooms. Every suite has a generous balcony.

And it's an affordable alternative for first-time buyers and empty-nesters. The average townhouse in Richmond Hill will run around \$500,000, Cortellucci says, but the suites at Xpression will range from \$200,000 to over \$500,000, and will include a parking space and storage

locker. Xpression will be completed to coincide with the first phase of the transit expansion.

Suites will range in size from 353-square-foot studios to 1,174-square-foot two-bedroom units.

RICHMOND HILL Mayor David Barrow and Planning Commissioner Ana Bassios have engaged the community extensively over the years to assure buy-in for the new

official plan. With the provincial Greenbelt Plan and the protection of the Oak Ridges Moraine, land options are limited for a growing urban centre. "Richmond Hill is trying to protect the moraine and, generally, residents realize that we just can't keep building in green fields. In fact, we literally can't build in green fields because of the Greenbelt Act, so they are quite prepared to see some intensification," says Barrow.

The key enabler that will make all this possible is a series of planned transit expansion initiatives approved and financed by various levels of government. It will include the eventual extension of the Yonge subway line to Richmond Hill and it's this transit expansion that is driving the growth.

It is "how we transition from being a suburban municipality into a new kind of urban that isn't neo-anything. It is a new kind of urban that looks forward to creating a livable community in the 21st century," says Bassios.

There are two major transit initiatives planned for York Region. First will be the bus rapid transit, or BRT, with a widening of Yonge St. and a

dedicated transit lane. The next phase will see the extension of the Yonge subway line to Richmond Hill Centre terminal, an existing regional transit hub at Hwy. 7.

"The fact that the province, through Metrolinx, has approved our Viva transit, our bus rapid transit lanes, which go along Highway 7 and Yonge St., this becomes a growth area for Richmond Hill," says Barrow. "I would venture to say that there are about 3,500 condos in various stages of approval on the Yonge corridor right now."

One of the major anchors of the new redevelopment initiative is the planned renovation and repositioning of Hillcrest Mall as the retail hub of the town centre.

Throughout the transformation process, Bassios stresses the importance of respecting Richmond Hill's unique character. "Each area of the town, whether it's the business park, or the downtown, or the Richmond Hill Centre, has an identifiable character and a sense of place, and what we're looking to do is enhance those positive features and build on them."

» For more information, go to xpressioncondos.com.

Kingmeadow Community Preview Launch This Weekend



Renderings and images are artist impressions. E. & O. E.

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ASK JOE

Looking for signs of a grow-op

JOE RICHER
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Q: What are the warning signs that the house I'm interested in was a marijuana grow-op?

A: When houses are used for a grow-op, they undergo significant renovations that require a lot of repairs to correct. Often, the current homeowner only does cosmetic touch-ups to hide the modifications and damage before they're put up for sale.

A registered real estate professional must tell you if they know the house is a former grow-op. Trouble is, the warning signs can be tough to spot. A home inspection is the best way to determine if the property was a grow-op because the inspector is better able to identify potential structural damage and unusual or modified wiring. Here are some other warning signs to look out for:

- » Mould in the corners where the walls and ceilings meet.
 - » An unusual number of roof vents or signs of roof vents.
 - » Fresh paint on window frames to cover damage caused by high levels of humidity.
 - » Evidence of tampering with the electric meter or the area around it.
- If you have a question for Joe, email askjoe@reco.on.ca. Joseph Richer is RECO's registrar and is in charge of the administration and enforcement of all rules under the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. You can find more tips at reco.on.ca, follow on Twitter @RECOhelps or on YouTube at youtube.com/recohelps.



TORONTO POLICE PHOTO

Recognize the signs that a house was once used as a grow-op.