

Doncaster Ballyhoo

THE LAURENTIAN WATERFRONT AND RECREATIONAL PROPERTY SPECIALISTS *WINTER 1994*

While the purpose of this newsletter is to inform you as to developments in the real estate community in our area, it sometimes becomes important to inform you about the community itself, and its workings.

Over half of the recreational properties in the MRC des Laurentides are in and around Ste. Agathe. As well, over half the population is comprised of recreational users. Of those recreational users, an estimated 75% are people who declare English as their first language. It is clear from these figures that the English-speaking second-home residential population is very important to the local community.

Last fall I was asked to sit on the Board of the Ste. Agathe Chamber of Commerce. As is true with anyone else who accepts such a position, I had my own agenda and was happy to accept the position offered in order to advance my causes.

Part of my personal agenda is well advanced. As founding president of the Ste. Agathe Heritage Committee, I have been working for seven years to promote and preserve Ste. Agathe's architectural heritage. Last Fall three of our committee members, not just myself, were elected to the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, and since then the Board has declared architectural heritage to be one of its major priorities. On this topic we have a lot of momentum, as is witnessed by the some twenty-five heritage renovations of commercial properties that have been carried out in the last three years (not to mention residential heritage renovations).

The other item on my agenda is to promote greater communication between the English-speaking and French-speaking communities. Remembering the figures quoted above, it is probable that more than one in three people you see in Ste. Agathe on the weekends is English-first-language. Not surprisingly, then, I was very excited by the creation of the Hiawatha Festival of the Arts. The inspiration of Lou Gordon, it is a performing arts festival that is not based on language, it is an initiative of the English-speaking community, and it is a fantastic event.

These, then, are among my priorities. As a result, when I was asked three weeks ago to head a fund-raising team for the Ste. Agathe Hospital Medical Foundation, I felt obliged to decline. I did, however, accept to work on a team dedicated to raising funds in the English-speaking community if they would set up such a team.

Last year 4% of the money raised for the Medical Foundation at the hospital came from people who corresponded in English. As a member of the fund-raising committee I was allowed to see the list of donors, and I was very impressed and proud to see how many of those people I know, how many receive this newsletter, how many are clients of ours.

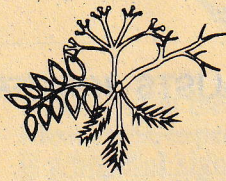
We all use the hospital at one time or another, and I can personally vouch for the quality of service that we receive. The Ste. Agathe hospital is a first-class institution that has attracted a first-rate staff of medical personnel who have come to Ste. Agathe for the same reason as so many of us: the quality of life we have here.

Please respond to the request that we have included in this newsletter, whatever the amount you can give, and please, if you are English-first-language, don't be shy to respond in English.

- Joe Graham

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I LOVE MY LAKE



In the last issue of the Ballyhoo we discussed what we as individuals have done and can do to protect the environment of the Laurentians. The R.A.R.E. group has proven to be a useful rallying point for individuals committed to preserving our lakes, rivers and forests. Another

important grouping, in existence for many years, is F.A.P.E.L..

F.A.P.E.L., another of the acronyms so beloved of bureaucrats the world over, means "Fédération des associations pour la protection de l'environnement des lacs". This para-governmental group was formed as a lobby and information grouping of the individual lake associations which have sprung up over the years in Québec. The premise of the organisation is that local associations are formed to protect the environment of their lakes and that a federation of these associations would carry more weight with the authorities. In addition, it provides a base from which to carry out public information and education programmes aimed at increasing awareness of the issues.

Based in Montreal, F.A.P.E.L. has encouraged local groups to:

- replant indigenous vegetation on lakeshores
- publicize their objections to acid rain causing practices
- participate in water quality analysis
- inventory and classify septic installations
- monitor lake water levels

The results of their efforts include:

- greater public awareness of the need to protect our natural resources
- reduction in the number of lakes permitting motor boats
- greater control over the standards applied for septic systems
- the "rebirth" of lakes long thought lost to overdevelopment
- more information provided by the provincial government including many publications which help to properly plan docks, replant shorelines, install septic systems and to nurture local flora and fauna, to name a few.

The work of F.A.P.E.L. has been significant in the battle to save our lakes, both large and small. Two examples:

Lac des Sables (Ste - Agathe). A.P.E.L. Lac des Sables is currently trying to raise public awareness of a proposal by the city of Ste-Agathe to extend its sewer and water lines into Greenshield's Point and to the Belvoir area on the south shore of the lake. The city has applied for approval for its plans to the MRC des Laurentides. The submission has been opposed

by the A.P.E.L. for reasons not immediately obvious: The extension of sewer and water facilities implies increased urban growth, which - by existing standards - can take place on extremely small lots, thus increasing the density of residential development. The pressure of this increased density on local flora and fauna is not difficult to imagine. For example, without sewer and water lines, the average lot size is about 40,000 sq. ft., while with full services, this lot size could be as small as 5,000 sq. ft., allowing eight times the population!

Even if we assume our municipal leaders are in the forefront of those sensitive to the need to protect the environment, the cold fact remains that in order to finance the installation and upkeep of these systems, lot sizes will have to be reduced, if not to 5,000 sq. ft. then surely to less than the 40,000 which is currently the case.

The campaign being mounted by A.P.E.L. des Sables is a relevant and important response to an issue which might not otherwise have been raised.

Golden Lake in Val-David is a small lake, fed by underground streams and springs, crystal clear and perfect for swimming and canoeing. Because the early settlement of this lake was by working class Montrealers rather than the wealthy who settled around Lac des Sables, houses were placed on relatively small lots and, in this case, the introduction of sewer and water services probably served to halt the deterioration of the quality of the lake.

In recent years, residents have shown an interest in rolling back some of the more serious damage done to the ecology of the lake. One such effort was the campaign about five years ago to replant indigenous shrubbery along the lake's edge. It seemed evident to association members that lack of natural vegetation on the lake's edge, vegetation replaced by lovely if sterile stone retaining walls and lawns running down to the water, were allowing excessive warming of the lake and more than normal evaporation during particularly hot summers. That year, Golden Lake was one of several in the region that - due to the strong campaign waged by F.A.P.E.L. - benefitted from an extensive replanting programme.

As with other efforts by environmental organizations, successful programmes of the past tend to make us a little complacent. This must never be the case, the recent example of Lac des Sables is ample evidence of that.

So what can you, the part-time or full-time resident of the Laurentians do to contribute? Joining one or more of the relevant associations would be a good start. With membership comes information on important issues which concern us all and, most important, a sense that we are doing something positive to ensure that we hand to our children a world a little better than it was when loaned to us.

- Michael Averill

WHAT'S IT WORTH

or

How to Price It

It is important to know what your property is really worth when the time comes to sell. Choose an asking price based on a likely selling price, or, if no realistic asking price is satisfactory to you, you must question your motives for selling.

The spread between asking price and bottom line is the single most important element in determining not only how long your house will be for sale, but also how much it finally sells for: The greater the spread, the less you might get. A purchaser may not waste time bidding if he thinks the vendor's price is out of line. Conversely, if the asking price is realistic, he must anticipate competition.

You may be tempted to put a high asking price on your house feeling that people will make offers, and there is time enough then to decide what to do. What happens in most of these cases is buyers just don't make offers. People will still visit, and they might even agree that it's a beautiful property, but the best purchasers do not like to be rude, and will decline to make a bid if they feel that the asking price is far from where they see the value. The purchasers who are not shy to be rude may still bid. More often than not, though, your property will simply sit without a bid.

Traffic is slow in recreational property, and the buyers generally come up only on the weekends, and when a house remains unsold, a buyer feels no urgency to act. Eventually such a buyer will even dismiss a house without remembering that it was because the price was too high. He will have simply classified it in a category with the houses he rejected. Your property risks being for sale for a long time without offers, and you may begin to feel discouraged and negative. You may get the occasional low offer from that rude buyer. Eventually you may change agencies, hoping that will help. Finally someone will make a low bid and the agent will express a fear of losing the buyer. She will remind you that all the offers have been in that range, and that, therefore, proves the price. It may be the only offer received in two years. You may find yourself

making a counter-offer half way between, even though in the past you would have refused to respond at all.

When a property comes on the market for sale, it is an event. When it has been offered for a few years on the market, it becomes more like that old vegetable left over in the back of the fridge. It becomes virtually invisible. If you find yourself in this circumstance, and you have a buyer toying with you at half-price, it is not too late to create an event, and it is as important to the marketing as making the counter-offer is to selling the house. One way to do this is to lower the price to the exact same number as your counter-offer. Tell the agent to make sure the purchaser is told that you have reduced the price and to get back to any previous visitors and tell them as well. Tell previous agencies too, or ask your agent to, if you prefer. The purchaser would like nothing more than to be your only suitor, to go away and believe you really need him. By creating this new event, you are increasing the likelihood that he will have competition, and even if it doesn't generate any, it will certainly underline to the purchaser that your obligation to him is limited to the counter-offer.

Your reaction to this recovery strategy may be that it just creates a new asking price, and could simply generate still lower offers, but fight it and be prepared to take the chance. Your only obligation is to accept the asking price, and making the asking price attractive is going to bring you buyers.

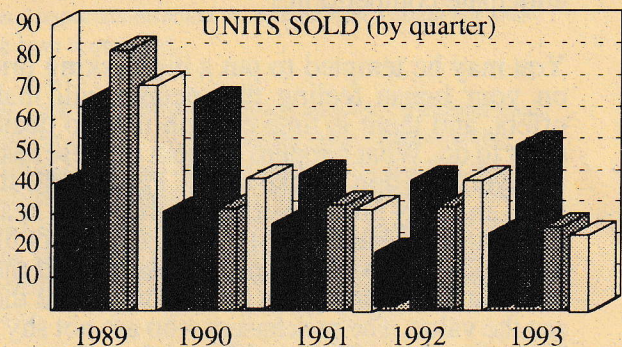
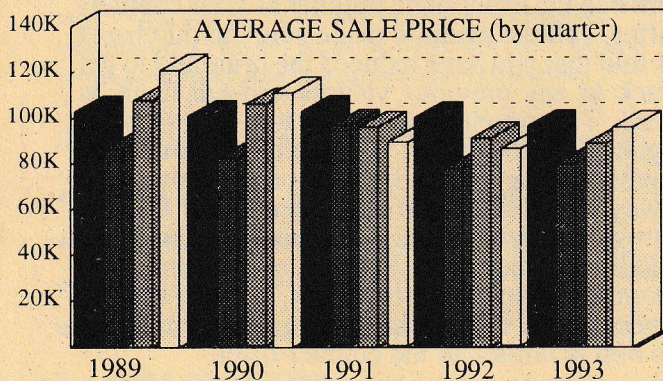
Clients often tell me, as a way of justifying too high an asking price, that they only need that one buyer, but this is not true. You need to create an atmosphere in which the buyer realises that if he doesn't act, someone else will. You need to keep your property on his mind even after he leaves. While you may feel you can depend on its intrinsic beauty and value to do this, it won't stay on anyone's mind if they all feel it is priced way beyond its market value.

- Joe Graham

MARKET TRENDS

In looking at the graphs below, you will note that average prices increased in the last half of 1993. Most sales, especially in the fourth quarter, are of recreational rather than primary residences. This is a hopeful sign for 1994. However, if you are planning to sell, pay careful attention to the Units Sold graph. While the average prices are moving back upwards, the number of properties actually changing hands is very small. There are buyers out there, willing to pay for what they want, but they are demanding greater quality and are willing to pay a premium for properties in prime locations, with up-to-date subsystems and features.

-Sheila Eskenazi



Back issues of the Doncaster Ballyhoo are available from our office. Give us a call or drop in and we will be happy to supply you with any issues you may have missed. If you know of anyone else who you feel would enjoy receiving the Ballyhoo, please let us know and we will gladly add them to our mailing list. Also, we would appreciate your letting us know if we don't have your correct address so that we can keep our list up to date.

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