

# Doncaster Ballyhoo\*

THE LAURENTIAN WATERFRONT AND RECREATIONAL PROPERTY SPECIALISTS

WINTER 1993

**T**he purpose of this newsletter is to keep you informed on issues of interest and importance to recreational property users, past, present and future. We offer this newsletter as a service to our clients and as a vehicle for them to communicate ideas and news to community members.

We were very encouraged by the response to the Autumn '92 Ballyhoo. We received thanks, encouragement and inquiries about our real estate services. We are convinced, as a result, that we are on the right track. Among the communications that we received were literally dozens of requests to help dispose of properties in the old **Belvoir Park** development off Tour du Lac Des Sables in Ste. Agathe North. As a result, we examined the problem and concerns and are using this space to respond to the owners.

These lots were sold approximately 20 years ago to people all over the world. There are some 600 cadastered subdivisions held by about 250 different owners. For the most part these subdivisions are substandard in size, although technically buildable, and are unserved. While some entrance roads were built and some of the other roads were roughed out, for whatever reason the developers seemed to have abandoned the project long before completion. As a result it is virtually impossible to sell these lots individually.

We have examined the options and we feel that the best solution for the many owners of this land is to find a manager (a company set up for that purpose) that will receive the various lots and issue preferred shares to the landowners for them. We are also exploring the possibility of offering receipts against income taxes for property owners who are willing to donate their land to an international charitable foundation. At this time we have put together a team that is hoping to communicate directly with those people who have responded to the Ballyhoo in the near future. The intention of the team is to examine the viability of re-activating the development, although because of the now much more demanding municipal code this will mean road and subdivision changes and some road building.

We invite owners of land in this project who have not yet communicated with us to do so.

Copies of the previous issue of the Doncaster Ballyhoo are available by contacting us at the address or phone number on the back. Your comments, questions and suggestions are always welcome.

- Joe Graham

*\*Clamorous attempts to win customers or advance a cause; blatant advertising or publicity.*



# SEPTIC SYSTEMS ..... NOT JUST A HOLE IN THE GROUND

One of the early and guiding principles of this newsletter was the notion that it should be composed of articles of a length suitable for reading while otherwise occupied. Most of us have experienced the reflex of gauging the length of an article in the hope of being able to digest it, so to speak, in one sitting. In this vein, thoughts on the nature of rural plumbing systems seem appropriate, especially since it is probably in this area even more than in snowmaking that the Laurentians reflect the state of the art.

Knowledge of the functioning of septic systems is useful to the Laurentian property owner, as might not have been the case say, thirty years ago. In fact, useful doesn't begin to express it. Without a good sense of what a system can and should do, the Laurentian property owner can find him/herself in great difficulty, legal and otherwise.

As a youngster, I remember that septic systems - if they were indeed called that - were small neighbouring buildings tucked discreetly away in the woods. Maintenance took the form of pouring lime in the hole periodically and every once in a while filling the hole in with earth, digging another and dragging the little building to sit over it. Definitely low tech and definitely uncomplicated to maintain.

As indoor plumbing became more and more the norm, other solutions had to be found as people became more reticent to trudge out to the outhouse to answer nature's call. Some of the solutions were ingenious, others downright dangerous. This was before environmentalism and ecology were commonly used words. The early systems amounted to not much more than holes in the ground, usually lined with rocks, sometimes with logs. Whatever went in seeped into the ground - hopefully never to be seen again. Microbial action in the effluent ensured that much of the solid waste was converted into liquid.

Slowly however, tanks filled up, backed up or just stopped up. Municipal inspectors began combing beaches looking for defective systems and engineers got into the act. Municipalities began to enact far more stringent regulations respecting septic systems, insisting that there should be absolutely no deleterious effect on the environment as a result of their operation. Eventually standards were established for all conceivable terrains. In some areas holding tanks are now required, especially where the soil or the size of the building lot would

not support a proper drainage system. Even a residence with a properly functioning drainage field is now required by most municipalities to pump out the septic tank once every two years for year-round residences and every four years for seasonal ones.

This new-found concern for the environment led to the creation of a wide range of solutions by some of the Laurentian's more energetic and creative entrepreneurs. Experts such as Plomberie Raymond and Ed LeSaux offered varieties of tanks, drainage fields, dry wells and

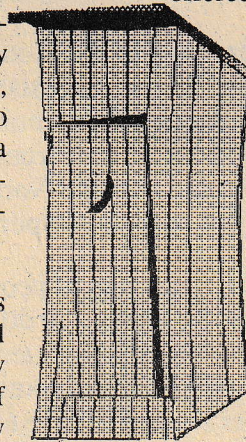
pumping systems to meet the new requirements of the municipalities. Concrete tanks and brand new plastic pipes and loads of sand and gravel were trucked into the woods beside chalets all around the Laurentians as happy vacationers signed cheques and spent worry-free days on the lake. Not satisfied with the relative progress being made in the area of public hygiene, other local businesspeople began looking for even better ways to deal with municipal waste.

Recently a small rented car carrying a number of Chinese experts stopped and asked directions. It seems they came from China to examine the innovations that Maurice Poulin had incorporated into his waste treatment system. They were not disappointed. Sani-Laurentides is a world leader in this area. Technology takes us another step forward and, with a little entrepreneurship, a thriving, ecologically sound business is created, serving the community and the environment.

Sani-Laurentide's system is based on the premise that something good can come from almost anything, even ..... The service provided by his company is essentially similar to that provided by any septic tank cleaning company. The difference is that rather than just dumping the collected material, it is treated and sold as fertilizer. These new techniques have been recognized and written up all over North America and abroad.

Although this article quite likely falls under the category of "all I ever wanted to know but....", and is likely to provide the source of innumerable puns of questionable taste, we feel that it is a subject to be seriously dealt with. That being said we are certain that you the reader will have enjoyed this short but informative walk through the world of rural plumbing and we trust that you have found the time doubly well spent.

- Michael Averill





# What's it Worth?

or

## Does Uniqueness Add Value to a Country Property?

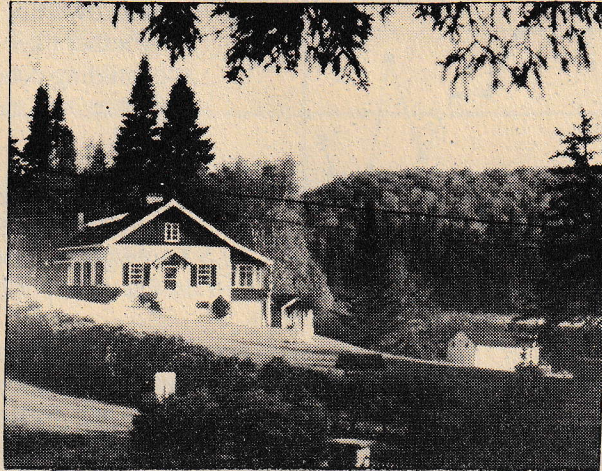
In our last newsletter, I shared with you a simple rule of thumb that I use in trying to determine the value of country property. I mentioned the important ratio of 1 to 4 in terms of the raw land value to the total investment.

This time I would like to address the question of uniqueness and its relative merits. From time to time people will consult me prior to building or to renovating their cottage, or sometimes upon a visit to a cottage, I will be presented with innovative architectural designs with the full expectation that I will be wildly impressed. Sometimes I am. Particularly in houses designed by the architect Len Warshaw. Most of the time, however, I am presented with what I call "One and Only's".

When designing a country house, uniqueness is rarely a good investment. Imagine how hard it is to sell a house in which the kitchen counters and staircases were built for a couple both of whom are over six feet tall. In such a house you are likely to find that the windows give most people an excellent view of the sky, and your feet will not be able to climb the staircase in the natural, unconscious way that they do on a standard staircase.

People often build the country house to express their unique interests or fetishes, and the more unique they are the harder it is to find another one who will want to buy the house. Whereas it might be beautiful to visit, or sufferable to rent, it might be hard to unload.

A good exercise is to imagine the raw land, say a buildable waterfront lot with a good frontage, sunny exposure and a gentle slope. It is a sought-after item. Ten out of ten buyers looking for a waterfront lot will be pleased. Next, imagine the model of home that will be placed on the land.



While nine out of ten buyers might be happy with a 1 1/2 storey cottage on this location, perhaps one in fifty would prefer a tower. If you build the tower, you might need fifty times the number of showings before the house sells.

Some years ago I was asked to sell a house that was in a secluded area on

a dozen acres of land. The owner was an artist who had given an architect friend a completely free hand in the design of the house. The architect incorporated cathedral ceilings, a sunken livingroom, a mezzanine and a modern, open master bedroom into a house with strange shaped windows and a flat roof. By the time I got to see the house, the exterior finishing was fading and the years had given the building the distinct aura of an administrative building attached to a hospital. To add to the effect, another artist, a friend of the owner, had built a classical square log house across the valley. Most every visitor asked with a longing look if the log house were perhaps for sale.

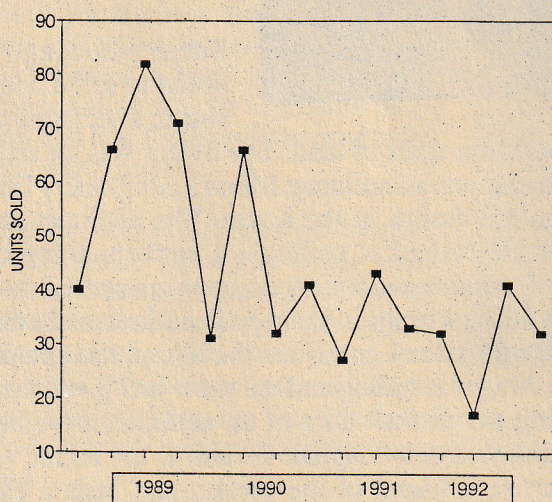
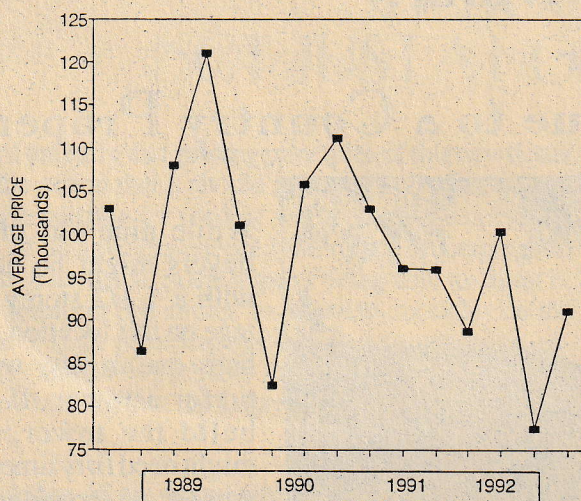
The classical, not the unique, is the theme to explore in designing and building your country property. This even applies to the neighbourhood. If you want a bungalow, don't build it in a development of log homes. Examine the other houses on the lake or in the project and see if you can discern a theme.

Most people will tell you that they never built their house to sell it, that they built it for themselves. The one who built the house for himself and made it a monument to the classical at the same time will sell the most easily and for the highest price. There is an irony, nevertheless, in the fact that so many people wish their country houses to be unique that the classical often end up being the only ones to fit that description!

- Joe Graham



# MARKET TRENDS



The data for these graphs have been drawn from the reports prepared at the Terrebonne registry office of all sales of houses registered in the given periods. It included all transactions not registered at \$1 in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts and Ste-Agathe-Nord for properties listed in the report as dwelling units. No reference is made as to whether there is one or more dwelling unit in the building concerned, so single family homes, duplexes and even apartment buildings are included.

The top graph represents the average price registered for all the units sold in the period and the lower graph shows how many units transferred in the same period.

Note that the average price dips in the second quarter of most years while the number of units sold rises. This can be attributed to the fact that this is the traditional time for people to trade up from rental accommodation to their first homes which are usually in the lower price range. The high average prices reached in the third and fourth quarters of 1989 and 1990 reflect the peaks of the recreational market when many waterfronts sold throughout the region. We can see that this market has been much quieter over the last two years. The downward trend of the market is illustrated by the fact that both the annual highs and lows have declined over the few years shown.

- Sheila Eskenazi

IMMEUBLES  
**Doncaster** Inc.  
REALTIES  
Courtier - Broker

150 Principale,  
Ste-Agathe-des-Monts  
Québec J8C 1K3  
Fax: (819) 326-8829  
Tel: (819) 326-4963

**Joe Graham**  
- Broker  
**Sheila Eskenazi**  
- Managing Director

**Michael Averill**  
**Michel Fuller**  
**Mrs. Libby Millar**  
- Agents -



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