



THE AUROREAN PROGRESS EDITION

Introducing the AUROREAN Progress Edition

*An annual report highlighting
local businesses in Aurora*

MR MENSWEAR

prides itself
in helping
gentlemen
make the
right clothing
choices.

Mike Rathke, owner of the men's boutique, has been assisting guys build fashionable and functional wardrobes for over 30 years.

The store has all your necessities from clothing for formal events to business casual, weekend apparel, outerwear and accessories.

MR Menswear's current location was meant to be.

In 1993, while living in Brampton, Mike was thinking of opening up an espresso bar in an old gas station. He and a real estate agent drove up from Brampton and looked at the "old" Petro Canada on the corner of Yonge Street and Church.

20 years later, he moved into that exact location. It is now a beautiful building with ample parking.

"Aurora is a great little community," says



Rathke, who has lived in Aurora with his wife and two daughters since 1996.

Mike has always been in the menswear business. Fashion and assisting gentlemen with their clothing needs has always been his passion. After graduating from a retail management program, Rathke started working at a high-end menswear store. While there, he

fine-tuned his sense of style, the art of tailoring and service skills.

Besides owning MR Menswear, Rathke also owns and operates Mr. Wardrobe Consultant, another option he offers to those gentlemen who do not like, nor have the time, to shop.

"In today's business world, it's hard enough to find time for lunch, and just about impossible to focus your time on updating, replacing or even adding to your wardrobe," says Rathke. "Unfortunately few men have the time or the know-how to build such a wardrobe."

Making the right clothing choices and proper tailoring can accentuate a man's best features. Option #2: Let Mike help you all in the convenience of your own home.

After people hearing Mike's story about battling and being a cancer survivor at the age of 19 and going for the dream, Mike says "Unfortunately, there's not enough good stories; I am one!"

In addition to helping gentlemen look their best, MR Menswear and Mike focuses on the community in which he lives and work by making donations to Southlake Regional Health Centre, the Stronach Regional Cancer Centre, the York Region MS Mandarin Walk-A-Thon, and various other local charities that support the fight against cancer.

"I am a very fortunate cancer survivor," says Rathke. "It feels good to be able to give back."



MR MENSWEAR is located at 15117 Yonge St. in Downtown Aurora (2 blocks South of Wellington)
For more information, call Mike at 905-713-1501 or visit www.mrmenswear.ca

By Angela Gismondi

Backyard Pool and Spa Company has moved.

Now located at 1 Vata Court in Aurora, at the corner of Edward Street and Vata Court, just east of Yonge Street, the new 13,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility features more space and increased visibility for the business.

BACKYARD POOL & SPA opens new location in Aurora



“We’re investing in brick and mortar,” said Don. “In an era when people are cutting back, we’ve got a big, new facility. We’re growing with the community and we needed more space to serve the customers better.”



“We’re in a brand new facility,” said Don Smith, owner of Backyard Pool and Spa. “It’s a stand-alone building with ample parking and an enlarged showroom to serve our customers better. We wanted to offer our customers a better shopping experience. That’s a big deal for us.”

“We’re investing in brick and mortar,” said Don. “In an era when people are cutting back, we’ve got a big, new facility. We’re growing with the community and we needed more space to serve the customers better.”

Backyard Pool and Spa is celebrating 23 years in business in Aurora this year and is one of York Region’s leading and largest pool and spa companies. The full-service company has 20 full and part-time staff and serves York Region and the surrounding area. Their showroom features the complete line of MAAX spas, along with the newest in the Power Pool Swim Spa line from MAAX.

Born and raised in Aurora, Don has been providing customers in the community and beyond with top quality pools and spas for over two decades. He bought out his partner in 2007 and became the sole owner of the business. His two sons and his sister also work for the company, making it a true family-run business. With a background in retail and years of experience managing a big box store, Smith always wanted to open his own business. Along with hot tub sales, Backyard Pool and Spa offers year-round water testing with a full line of water chemistry products. They also sell pool liners and safety covers, filters, pumps and heaters.

They have a full in-house service team and a licensed gas filter. Trained service technicians have years of experience in all facets of pool and spa service, including the opening and closing of pools and hot tubs. Many of the staff at the store have also been working there for years and are very experienced, knowledgeable and focused on customer service to help people enjoy their pools and hot tubs year after year. The company was recently recognized for outstanding sales and service by MAAX Spa by winning the Gold Retailer Award.

Backyard Pool and Spa has expanded their product line and now carry gourmet BBQ grills. They are Aurora’s only Weber Alliance Dealer, with a complete selection of grills. They also carry the Big Green Egg, a premier charcoal grill.

“We have been very successful by offering big box pricing with hometown service,” Don stated. “We’re not just a pool and spa company anymore. Our reputation comes down to selling quality products at competitive prices and we continue to provide knowledgeable service. We are experts in our field and we continue to grow with our customers, offering the latest products and service ideas. I would like to thank all our customers for their continued support.”

Backyard Pool and Spa supports a number of local sports teams in the community, as well as charitable organizations such as Hillary House and The Aurora Food Pantry. They are also active members of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, participating in a number of events, including being a Signature Sponsor at this year’s Chamber of Commerce Aurora Home Show.

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For more information, call 905-713-2317, email backyardpoolandspa1@rogers.com or visit www.backyardpoolandspa.ca.fvbgjk,hg



Owner, Vicky Roblin



Vicky with daughters Danielle (left) & Katelyn

Spar-Clean Inc. celebrates 20 years in business

Spar-Clean Inc. has been locally owned and operated since 1996. Having been in business for this length of time, they have developed a commitment to act with honesty and integrity at all times in all aspects of the business, to be professional in doing their job, and to deliver a consistent, high level quality of work.

Owner Vicky Roblin is proud of the success of her locally owned and operated business and is strongly committed to delivering both residential and commercial clients superior cleaning services.

"I have had the privilege of learning every aspect of starting a company and with hard work and dedication, we now have a strong and sustainable business," said Vicky. "As the owner of the business, I greatly value the relationships I have built with our clients as well as take great pride and care of the business."

Drawing from previous experience in real estate and marketing, the single mom began the business in 1996 solely as a one woman business. Vicky directed herself away from her full-time job as a real estate agent, to become an entrepreneur to give her the opportunity to spend more time to raise her twins.

The business has now grown to employ between 10-12 cleaners including 1 office staff and has continued to increase their client base. She even has some of the same clients she started with 20 years ago. "A special thanks to those who have been with me from the beginning and supported Spar-Clean Inc. through its growth and development," said Vicky. "I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of building the company and have embraced each step that was involved in getting me to where I

am today." Vicky is involved at every level, from attending all initial cleanings to being active in both the daily operations and the

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long-term goals for Spar-Clean Inc.

Servicing Newmarket, Aurora, North Richmond Hill, Bradford and surrounding areas, the home-based business strives to provide excellence with their cleaning services. The company offers free on site consultations to establish client needs. Vicky takes that personal one on one opportunity to meet with you to allow a personal connection to be made. "I think that it's important to develop a strong client relationship," said Vicky. "You have to build that trust. It's a huge undertaking for a client. By going through the home with them, you show the client you care. It's that personal touch."

Spar-Clean Inc. is fully insured and bonded.

The staff are well trained, friendly and professional. "Honesty, integrity and dependability, those are the traits I look for in the people that I hire," said Vicky. To put our

clients at ease, there are no contracts or commitments!

"We try to customize the cleaning to the client's needs while staying within their budget," said Vicky. Spar-Clean Inc. offers regular cleanings done on a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or on occasional basis. They provide move-in, move-out, post renovation, post construction, and spring and fall cleaning services.

Spar-Clean Inc. is a member of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, attends the Aurora Home Show and Aurora Street Festival, and is also a sponsor of the Welcome Wagon that aims at welcoming newcomers to town.



Left to right back row: Ashley, Christine, Catherine, Aimy, Susan, Middle row: Amanda, Angela, Barb, Front row: Katelyn (daughter, Filomena (office assistant), Vicky (Owner) and Danielle Daughter. Missing from photo: Judy, (15 years employee), & Alexia.

For more information about Spar-Clean Inc. visit www.spar-clean.ca



The Chicken Place starts new chapter

By Angela Gismondi



Portuguese Churrasco family is still going strong.

After the devastating loss of her husband Raymond last month, owner Cathy Ghandour is still serving up quality barbecue chicken at the restaurant at the corner of Wellington Street and Industrial Parkway in Aurora.

"We are moving forward and continuing the business without him but with the staff that we love," Cathy stated, adding she could not run the business without valuable staff members Clarissa Castoro and Aaron Popovich. "He (Raymond) loved waking up in the morning and coming here and I love coming here too. It's a great thing to do in every sense. We want to take this place to the next step with new, young energy and skills."

Cathy and Raymond took over ownership of the restaurant in 2010 after living abroad for 10 years. While Raymond, an entrepreneur, was new to the restaurant business, Cathy grew up working in the business as her parents owned a number of restaurants in the Greater Toronto Area.

"This was my comfort zone," explained Cathy. "I grew up working in small restaurants. It's sort of in my blood."

After looking all over the place for a good restaurant, Cathy and Raymond found exactly what they were looking for.

"We loved the location and we loved the food so we were immediately drawn to it," Cathy said. "I just loved the feel of it. We just loved the place."

It wasn't easy at first but the owners continued to produce good quality food and eventually built up a loyal client base.

"As with any small business, if you have a good product and service and work hard

enough, you will start to see results," Cathy noted. "We kept the original concept and didn't make too many changes. We believe if it ain't broke don't fix it. We wanted to keep the consistency and quality."

The Portuguese barbecue place prides itself on using fresh, quality, unprocessed ingredients with no sugar, preservatives or dyes. The preparation of the chicken with a unique blend of seasonings and spices sets it apart from other restaurants and the Piri Piri sauce is a "truly high quality item" Cathy said.

Every order is made fresh so The Chicken Place takes a little longer than take out at fast food restaurants. Customers are welcome to place their orders in advance over the phone so they are ready for pick up. Good things are worth waiting for, Aaron said.

"Our customers have become more patient over the years," he noted.

"People are recognizing the value of our product," Clarissa added. "Our customers are really loyal and we appreciate that. It's really nice when people support local businesses."

Customers are rewarded with a quality meal for the whole family.

"For the same amount of money or less (than fast food) you can serve your family a good, healthy, balanced meal," Cathy added.

Catering is also available. Portuguese chicken is great for entertaining guests, Cathy added.

The Chicken Place is located at 1 Industrial Parkway in Aurora. For more information call 905-900-0019 or visit www.thechickenplace.ca.

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Aurora Home Hardware

provides the personal, family touch!



With his down-to-earth approach to life, Stuart Barfitt doesn't fit the idea of a typical Aurora resident, but the area was much different when he first arrived from Newfoundland in 1948. He worked for Canada Packers for 18 years, then got into the hardware business when he bought a small hardware store in town. He joined Home Hardware in 1969 after a visit from Jeff Lee, the local Area Manager, and a quick trip to St. Jacobs convinced him it was the right move. Stuart has been retired for 20 years, although he still builds picnic tables in one of the many garages on his son Randy's property, that are sold in the store. His three sons, Russ, Randy and Robert, and their respective wives, now own and run the business, with 70 employees including a plethora of third generation Barfitts - Robbie and Carlie (Randy's two kids), John (Russ) and Calvin (Robert).

The business has had three locations over the years: the original 2,000 square foot store on Yonge Street, then a somewhat larger location at Yonge and Wellington that they moved to in 1974, and

their current 25,000 square foot store on Wellington Street East which was a farmer's field in 1986 when Stuart and his late wife Doreen bought the property. The family built the store from the ground up - literally. Doing virtually everything themselves with a little help from their friends, they levelled and compacted the ground, using an old back hoe that is a relic from another era, trucking infill—at one point there were 20 trucks pulling 100 tons of fill up Yonge Street. They installed their own water system. Randy did all the welding and at one point Stuart remembers even their Home Hardware rep pitched in - he turned up one day when they were working on the asphalt and someone handed him a pair of rubber boots. The entire project took about 10 months, and they worked through "probably the worst fall" ever and Stuart remembers often having to push the backhoe through the muck. They kept the old



store open and running throughout the building process, moving out the inventory in stages. One week they closed the old store on Saturday night and the next week they opened the new store on Monday morning. "Never missed a day," Randy says proudly.

The community has changed over the years, from a small town where they knew everyone who came through the door, to the upscale and affluent town of approximately 60,000 it is today. Like Stuart, the 25,000 square foot store takes a no-frills approach, a bit out of keeping with the genteel feel of the town, but not surprising given that the majority of their business is contractor-based. Stuart never actually worked in the current building, preferring to build a house a year, and occasionally working at night creating store displays. When they were kids, the boys worked in the store every day after school learning the business. Today the three sons have divided the responsibilities in a way that works for everyone, keeping all the Barfitts busy

and readying the third generation for the day when they take over the business, still a few years down the road.

Stuart and his boys reminisce about the early days in the original store. They still have the first dollar bill the business earned, to remind them of their start. The Barfitts have been part of a process of change that, in relatively few years, has taken them from a small, old fashioned hardware store where every bill was written and added up by hand, where they did not even bother with a cash register, to a large Home Hardware Building Centre with a lot of sophisticated systems. They built the business with their own physical labour and hard work year after year, so the sense of family values is strong even after all the years, all the changes and all the growth. When it comes to the important stuff, some things never change.

Today, the direction of the store has grown to the selling of windows, doors, custom kitchens, boutique vanities and more.

Visit Aurora Home Hardware for excellent customer service and a pleasant shopping experience.

Collaboration is "King" for Neighbourhood Network



Christine Stewart, Program Manager of The Network North Collaborative

By Brock Weir

With King on board, the Aurora-based volunteer organization founded by Magna International, is now connecting area volunteers with community partners – charities and non-profits – throughout Aurora, King, Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, and Georgina.

"We are always taking on new challenges so, in a sense, this was just another thing to take on," says Neighbourhood Network's Erin Cerenzia. "We are proud to say we have now grown by over 2,000 volunteers – and counting – since the end of 2014. It is amazing for us to be recognized and have amazing support from our municipalities. To become that go-to volunteer agency is a huge accomplishment and something we have been continuously working towards and striving to achieve.

"With the number of volunteers registered with our organization, we have turned the corner and have become that resource for anyone in the community who is looking to get involved."

With their current roster of volunteers, over 25 volunteers could theoretically be partnered with each of Neighbourhood Network's community organizations, a staggering statistic when one considers most of these groups have very little funding to run the integral programs that often form the bedrock of their respective municipalities.

Neighbourhood Network held an all-day conference earlier this month to make these bonds even stronger.

Held in Mount Albert, "community collaboration" was the theme of the day. They recognize that success in this day and age often hinges on working together.

"Unfortunately, we are in a situation now where there are struggles financially in terms of fundraising for local charities and non-profit groups," says Ms. Cerenzia. "The more that groups can collaborate and work together the

better opportunities they will have for success."

The event brought together representatives from philanthropic organizations, media, and all levels of government to brainstorm ways of strengthening these bonds.

Neighbourhood Network has seen this collaboration in action amongst the younger volunteers as well.

They are currently accepting applications for the annual Give Back Awards, the \$500 bursary awarded to twenty graduating students from secondary schools in the Neighbourhood Network catchment area. It is not a scholarship which recognizes prowess in the classroom or sports field, but rather the myriad ways in which students contribute back to the world around them.

Looking back to last year's record number of applications, Ms. Cerenzia says although she normally feels very connected to the local community, these students put things in perspective.

"It is just amazing that people so young are finding ways to get out there – even organizing a car pool service [to get to their volunteer opportunities]," she says. "They get out there and do what needs to be done. They are truly an inspirational group everyone can aspire to be like."

With King Township in the mix, the net of the Give Back Awards is cast even wider, now reaching upcoming graduates of King City Secondary School, Country Day School, and Villanova College.

"We're finding it more and more challenging from a selection committee standpoint each year to make these selections," says Ms. Cerenzia. "When you're in a role like I am where you're out in the community working with partners and charities, I personally feel very engaged," says Ms. Cerenzia. "But, what stands out to me when I read the stories of these applicants, is the thousands of collective hours they are volunteering, and the ways they are going above and beyond to give back [beyond their 40 hours]. It is astounding!"

"This is just a really great opportunity to recognize even more students for what they are doing to help out."



Neighbourhood Network is experiencing another year of exceptional growth, thanks in no small part to their recent expansion into King Township.

For more information on the Give Back Awards or any other Neighbourhood Network program, visit www.nnetwork.org

Aurora Landscape

*continues growth
of high quality
outdoor design and
construction services*

By Angela Gismondi

For over 40 years, Alan Trimble, owner of Aurora Landscape, has specialized in creating unique outdoor living spaces where his clients can relax, entertain family and friends and enjoy the outdoors.

Towards that same goal, Trimble, a landscape architect, is now also building both front and back porches in combination with patios and decks.

“Aurora Landscape is unique in offering this range of services,” said Trimble. “I’ve been building porches for over 20 years now but the demand has increased a lot in the past few years. A porch is a really nice place to enjoy the outdoors, but to be successful, it must be fully integrated into the design of the house and landscaping, and then built with care and precision. That’s what I do well.”

The concept of having an outdoor room has become increasingly popular in the last few years.

“It’s about maximizing your outdoor living space,” said Trimble. “With an outdoor room, you get so much more usable area for eating, entertaining and relaxing. Traditional patios and decks are wonderful for outdoor living but a porch also allows you the option of open sides, bug screens or seasonal glass windows that allow 75 per cent ventilation when they open. You can use it three full seasons of the year.”

Porches can be built to match the style of a house or add an architectural feature.

“A front entry porch constructed with timber framing really adds curb appeal to an otherwise ordinary looking house and a craftsman style porch adds interest and character at the back,” Trimble explained. “Porches can be modern and elegant or woodsy and rustic or anywhere in between.”

As for decks, most of Aurora Landscape’s clients are opting for Ipe and hardwood decking or

low maintenance PVC products. Ipe is a unique material that lasts 40 years or more outdoors without any chemical treatment. The price is similar to – and sometimes lower than – the best quality cellular PVC decking. Cumaru, Tigerwood and Sandeka hardwoods are also excellent chemical-free long lasting decking.

“Glass railings, especially the type with no rails, help to preserve the view,” Trimble added. “And I use an all Canadian supplier so prices haven’t gone up.”

In addition to patios, porches and decks, Trimble also offers traditional landscaping services - design, project management, and construction of walkways, driveways, retaining walls and steps, cabanas, gazebos, pergolas, arbours, and sheds, planting and outdoor lighting.

“Landscape work should be designed carefully for you, built with quality materials and with one company that is completely in control of the project from start to finish,” said Trimble. “As my mother taught me, any job worth doing is a job worth doing well.”

Trimble is a trained professional with a degree in landscape architecture and has over 40 years of experience in the field. He graduated from the landscape architecture program at the University of Guelph in 1974, gained experience working for several small companies, then started Aurora Landscape in 1976. Trimble also teaches courses in landscape construction in the apprenticeship program at Humber College and in continuing education at Landscape Ontario.

“I love teaching,” Trimble commented. “The students keep me sharp and I stay on top of new trends, changing techniques and evolving technology.”

Trimble is looking forward to the spring. He has several projects booked but enjoys each project as a new challenge.

“What I want to create is a nice home for a happier and more peaceful life,” Trimble stated.

Trimble serves Aurora as well as the greater York Region area.

For more information on Aurora Landscape Contractors, call Alan at 905-888-9500, email auroralandscape@gmail.com or visit www.auroralandscape.ca



The Aurora Chamber of Commerce is making some big changes

By Angela Gismondi

Since appointing interim General Manager Sandra Watson in November, the Chamber is focusing on serving the needs of the business community in Aurora.

“Our mandate is simple – it’s to represent the business community,” said Javed Khan Chair of the Chamber’s Board of Directors. “We are looking at reinventing ourselves and looking at our business model in the community. We’re here to deal with anything related to business – we’ve got your back. We represent the business community whether they’re a member or not.”

“We want to be the first ones you think of when you think of business,” added Javed.

Their first order of business was to create a strategic plan.

“It’s our vision to help us with what activities we’re going to do in the next two years,” explained Javed, adding the plan will help to laser focus in on budgets and advocacy as well.

The first presentation on the strategic plan got a lot of people talking. Many members and non-members came out to participate in the conversation. Based on feedback taken from that presentation, the Board went back to the drawing board and revised the plan to focus on three main objectives.

“That has been our promise,” said Javed. “We told them we would have a strategic plan that reflects the fruitful conversation we had.”

“We have three core strategic objectives right now,” added Sandra. “We will build around those objectives. We need to develop this plan to support us to the next level.”

The overlying theme is “back to business” – starting with a clean slate and build a strong foundation.

“We’re going to focus on activities that are

centered around business issues, issues that are more meaningful and that people are going to learn from,” Javed said.

Another objective in the plan is to form a partnership with the Town of Aurora.

“There is a gap we need to fill when it comes to our friends on John West Way,” said Javed. “We want to get back to being partners with the Town. We want them to think of us when issues arise instead of finding out about it later – we want to create that kind of relationship. We firmly believe the business community needs to be heard.”

The best way to do that, they thought, was to have a Town liaison on the Board. Doug Nadorozny, the new CAO at the Town of Aurora, seemed to be the perfect fit for the job. At the Mayor’s Luncheon held recently, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe announced the CAO will be the new town liaison on the Aurora Chamber Board.

“That’s a massive win,” Javed said, adding Doug has been involved with the Sudbury Chamber and has experience running his own business. “If there is anyone at the Town we need to partner with, it’s that gentleman.”

Overall, their goal is to make the Chamber more relevant in the community. As with most Chambers, the Aurora Chamber is dependent on membership.

“Our Chamber is struggling with find ways to be relevant within our community,” said Javed. “All Chambers are, no matter where you are in the province.”

They want to let their members know the Chamber comes with some perks. Membership gives you access to substantial savings from their national and local partners.

“Taking advantage of these benefits can quite



Javed S. Khan, Sandra Watson

Aurora Chamber of Commerce gets back to business

often cover the cost of your membership,” Sandra noted.

Saving programs are available with Grand & Toy, Esso, Purolator and UPS, just to name a few. There is also the Chambers of Commerce Group Insurance Plan, providing affordable and flexible coverage at stable rates.

The Chamber has a number of events coming up including the Home Show, taking place April 15 to 17 at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex. The Aurora Chamber’s annual Street Festival is happening Sunday, June 5.

They are also planning to bring back events such as going to member businesses for networking and having educational luncheons

with speakers who are well known in the business community.

“We’re looking for creative ways to do networking events,” Javed said. “We want to introduce new events without losing touch with the ones that our members have come to love such as the golf tournament, the networking breakfasts, the Street Festival and the Home Show.”

The Chamber is also thinking about reinstating the Business Achievement Awards in a fresh and creative way.

“It is on the table for consideration,” Sandra commented, adding a decision has not yet been made on the matter.



The Aurora Chamber of Commerce office is located at 14483 Yonge Street in Aurora.
For more information call 905-727-7262 or visit www.aurorachamber.on.ca.



Great shoes and service sets Omars Shoes apart

Mae, Daughter Saarah and Raz Khamissa

By Angela Gismond

The family-run business is a one stop shop, specializing in comfortable, stylish and brand name footwear for men, women and children, while also offering a wide variety of fashionable clothing and accessories from every day wear to special occasions.

A lot has changed since Omars first opened its doors 46 years ago. The business was started in 1968 by Omar and Amina Khamissa, who decided to open the family shoe store in a 1,200 square-foot store front on Yonge Street in Aurora. They are still located in the same plaza to this day.

Over time, the small mom and pop business outgrew their location and expanded into a 7,000 square-foot facility. The store is now operated by Omar’s son, Raz Khamissa, his wife Mae and their daughter Saarah.

One of the largest shoe stores north of Toronto, the shop boasts professional shoe-fitters and a wide selection of shoes for all ages and foot types and quality brand names such as Birkenstock, New Balance, Rockport, Clarks, Merrell, Sorel, UGG, Bostonian, Johnston and Murphy, Timberland, Blundstone and many more. Omars goes that extra step to ensure that children are carefully measured and fitted with good-quality shoes that provide room to grow. They are known for comfortable shoes and specialize in fitting shoes for orthotics. Omars also carries wide and extra wide sizes.

“One of our knowledgeable sales staff will help you get the right size and the right fit,” Raz explained. “Our staff are well trained in fitting shoes. You are dealing with people with experience which gives you comfort that you will find the right shoe. If we’re out of something, if it is available, we will bring it in for you.

We also do special orders. If there is something we do not carry, we will special order it in for you at no extra cost.”

Customer service, knowledgeable staff, quality products and greater selection are the secrets to Omars success.

“We like to treat the customer how we would like to be treated when we go shopping,” said Raz, adding that they have loyal customers. “Some people have been shopping here since we opened. We’re at the stage now where we’re serving the third generation of customers.”

Raz and Omar came to the conclusion years ago that if their prices are the same as all the other retailers, including the ones in the mall, then they needed to ensure that their service is what stands out. And that is what separates Omars from its competitors. If you look at Omars regular priced items, they are the same as all the competitors and are following the suggested retail given by the brands.

“There are so many big stores out there,” stated Raz. “It’s nice to know you’re supporting an independent retailer that is part of your community. It’s the small stores that can offer that old fashioned service. We are a shoe store with a clothing department that specializes in jean fittings for men and women. One stop shopping can fit you out from head to toe. We have great shoes and unique stuff. Once we get you in our store, you’re hooked.”

The Khamissa family has lived and worked in Aurora for years and has supported local groups and sports teams.

“I have grown up in this community, my children have grown up here and we feel like we’re part of it,” Raz said. “We support as many local organizations as possible – hockey, soccer and high school sports.”

Omar’s Shoes is located at 14800 Yonge St. – Unit 118.
For more information call 905-727-9391 or visit www.omarsshoes.com.



The Cowen Real Estate Team

A name you know...people you trust

The family-run business is led by Susan Cowen, who has been an agent with RE/MAX Hallmark York Group for the past 30 years. Her husband John joined her in 2006 from the corporate world and their son Andrew, started his career with her in 2008.

Susan got into real estate after having their first child. Previously working for a professional accounting firm, while taking courses. “After a year at home, I didn’t want the daily commute to Toronto and missed the business world. I always had an interest in real estate, and the idea of flexible hours seemed appealing,” said Cowen. “That thought, looking back, was hilarious! Real estate is an on-call, 24/7 business.”

She has seen a lot of changes in real estate over the past three decades. She recalls when mortgage rates were over 22%. She remembers a time when ‘tear sheets’ of new listings were delivered daily to the offices, filed by hand in a binder, followed by thick MLS books delivered to the office weekly. What a different pace it is

today. Susan and Andrew believe in serving people in their areas of expertise. Susan has lived in Aurora for 35 years.

“We pride ourselves on being extremely knowledgeable in our areas of service and don’t believe the client is best served by going outside one’s territory;” added Susan, whether it be a buyer or seller.

“Susan has developed business and personal relationships with realtors over the years in other areas, and we are a member of a group of top RE/MAX agents from across the country. We have monthly meetings and are constantly passing referrals back and forth,” Susan added. “This ensures clients are well looked after and served by the best. Clients appreciate having a warm introduction to someone in their new area of choice that we know personally, and isn’t just a name picked off the internet.”

One of Aurora’s top real estate agents for 30 years, Susan serves Aurora, Newmarket, East and West Gwillimbury, King, Whitchurch/Stouffville

and north Richmond Hill including Oak Ridges. The team offers a full service real estate package.

“We’re with you from the beginning of the process through to closing and beyond,” said Susan. “I’m always thinking of the client’s best interest, whether they are buyers or sellers. Personable client service, knowledge and experience are what leads to constant repeat and referral business.”

“With the amount of information and technology available to everyone, it’s easy to be overwhelmed,” Andrew said. “One of our jobs is making sure the important information doesn’t get lost in the shuffle, so you can be confident and knowledgeable about your decision.”

“Experience pays,” Susan added. “Whether it is experience in handling general real estate issues, negotiations, avoiding legal issues, building code regulations etc., we have the knowledge to handle anything that might arise during the process. Buying or selling a home can be a complicated matter and is the largest financial decision most people will make. You need experience on your side.”

She prides herself on her strong negotiating skills and continually learning and updating her knowledge. “Technology, regulations, education requirements, and much more are constantly shifting in this industry and we go above and beyond, constantly upgrading ourselves by taking advantage of new courses to keep up with the changes and requirements,” said Susan.

It helps that nobody sells more real estate than RE/MAX, she said. RE/MAX is the #1 name in

We’re with you from the beginning of the process through to closing and beyond,” said Susan. “I’m always thinking of the client’s best interest, whether they are buyers or sellers.



real estate and brand awareness. Susan is in the top 1% of 18,000 RE/MAX agents in Canada. RE/MAX also has a large presence around the world and listings with RE/MAX are available in 134 countries and in 41 different languages! With the huge impact that immigration has on real estate in the GTA, this allows homes listed with the Cowen Team to be marketed to a global audience.

“Years in the business have enabled us to build up a wealth of excellent contacts such as stagers, photographers, contractors, movers and mortgage experts, inspectors and lawyers to help you

every step of the way,” said Andrew.

Among her many awards, Susan is the only Realtor in the Aurora office to receive the RE/MAX Circle of Legends Award. She is also a member of the Hall of Fame and received the RE/MAX Lifetime Achievement Award.

Through RE/MAX, the Cowen’s are supporters of the Children’s Miracle Network, with a portion of each transaction going to the cause. They have sat on a number of fundraising committees for Southlake Regional Health Centre and have been actively involved in many aspects of community life, sponsoring sports teams, helping to raise donations for the Cancer Foundation and Heart and Stroke research. They also support the Access to Better Living and Employment (ABLE) Network and the Aurora Cultural Centre as well and numerous other various fundraisers. Susan is an active member of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.



Cowen Team sales representatives can be reached at 905-727-1941
info@susancowen.com or by visiting the website www.susancowen.com



PICKERING COLLEGE

Learning For Life. Creating The Future.



Pickering College's
Junior School
builds a foundation
for lifelong learning



Pickering College simplifies
life for busy families, offering:

- Before & after school care
- Daily fresh snacks and hot lunch (served family-style)
- Gymnastics program
- CanSkate program
- Swimming lessons

Pickering College offers a dynamic and nurturing learning environment where children's curiosity is stimulated, leadership skills are cultivated, and fun-filled interactive learning is meaningful and focused. In Junior School (JK-Grade 5) small class sizes provide an ideal setting for building a foundation for lifelong learning, as students develop confidence, social conscience and acquire the skills and knowledge for success. Through the school's fully-integrated Global Leadership Program, students study the world around them in authentic ways that elicit their curiosity and wonder. They explore global challenges close to home and develop a deep understanding of issues and take action. Through collaboration, Pickering's youngest students learn to understand different perspectives and communicate their new-found knowledge to a variety of audiences, including by live broadcast on the school's CRTC-licensed radio station, 102.7 CHOP FM. Within the curriculum, strong emphasis is placed on teaching public speaking and presentation skills. Students are provided with opportunities to communicate to small and large groups of students and adults, in formal and informal settings. Most importantly, they speak about topics that motivate them to learn and they, in turn, inspire others with their enthusiasm. Global Leadership in Junior School – The Foundation Years – focuses on inquiry, creativity and collaboration. In each grade, students undertake age-appropriate inquiry and the school's faculty tie classroom lessons to outdoor education, whenever possible. Eight areas of focus have been identified, which are prioritized in all subject areas:

- Leadership
- Global awareness
- Design and build
- Public speaking
- Technology
- Environmental stewardship
- Outdoor education
- Language, empathy and perspective

Each grade participates in an interdisciplinary environmental inquiry. Here, the students identify and investigate an issue, generate questions and explain its significance. Students have many opportunities to be involved in student leadership, including serving on the Junior School's Student Committee, Green Team as well as through Learning Buddies and peer mentoring.

All Junior School students participate in the FIRST LEGO League (FLL), working together in small groups to design and build a Lego model. This year's challenge for Grades 1 and 2, Waste Wise, is where students collaborate to design and build a tool that can be used to eliminate garbage. In Grades 3 to 5, students participate in a challenge called Trash Trek, using LEGO MINDSTORMS® robotic technology.

Outdoor education experiences abound, both on campus and at the school's outdoor education property, Blue & Silver. Students experience nature by using their senses, making observations and developing a confident relationship with the world around them.

Expectations for academic achievement in Junior School are set high, yet balanced with a rich curriculum of competitive and recreational athletics, chess, music, drama, visual arts, Lego club, reading club and exciting excursions.

"If you are looking for a deeper educational experience for your child – an experience that sees and inspires the unique inner potential of every student – then I encourage you to start here," says Peter Sturup, Headmaster at Pickering College. "Our teachers create a caring, compassionate, safe yet challenging environment in which our students feel empowered to take risks and are encouraged to lead. Truly, we are a school unlike any other."

Pickering College is an independent co-educational day and boarding school located in Newmarket, ON.

Boys and girls learn best together

When Pickering College was founded in 1842, it opened as a co-educational institution. The school's Quaker founders believed not only in the equality of men and women, but also that they needed to study the same subjects. Although Pickering College has undergone many transformations over its 174-year history, it has remained committed to providing students with the best possible education. And that's why today, the school chooses to offer co-education. Citizenship is promoted best through a school that embodies as rich a diversity as possible because that's what makes a democratic society. Schooling is about social and emotional development, as well as academics, which is why both citizenship and democracy are pre-disposed to co-education.

Diversity of any kind, when integrated into an educational environment is the essence of real-life education and is at the heart of character development. By providing students with real-world situations it opens their minds, dispels myths as well as fosters understanding and builds co-operation.

With a focus on individualized learning, Pickering students learn to confidently express themselves around the opposite sex, preparing them not only for post-secondary education and the workplace, but for life.

For more information go to www.pickeringcollege.on.ca or contact the Admission Office at 905-895-1700 or admission@pickeringcollege.on.ca.



You can **EAT IN** the restaurant or **TAKE OUT**. Delivery is also available to Aurora and south Newmarket and the surrounding area.

One-of-a-kind pizza at Santa Fé Gourmet Pizza

At Santa Fé Gourmet Pizza, customers get a unique pizza experience

Taste and flavor is what sets the pizza apart from all others.

In addition to the fresh vegetables bought locally and quality meats, the dough is freshly made daily in the store and never frozen. A unique blend of herbs and spices create a one-of-a-kind marinara sauce and 100 per cent premium quality mozzarella cheese tops off each pie.

"It tastes like its homemade and that's because it is," said Kevin Kelly, owner of Santa Fé Gourmet Pizza. "Every pizza is made with a delicious blend of fresh, quality ingredients. We try to do things in a traditional way."

With two locations in Aurora and Holland Landing, Santa Fe offers more than just pizza. Baked wings, homemade Italian sandwiches, pasta, panzerotti and cheesie bread are just some of the items on the menu. Some of their unique menu items include oceana pizzas which are topped with seafood, an East Coast style donair pizza and a delicious vegetarian selection, including the black goat. You can also build your own pizza. Their signature pizza, the Santa Fe Supreme, is one of their most

popular. It has eight toppings including pepperoni, bacon, Italian sausage, ground beef, green peppers, onion, mushrooms and pineapple.

Santa Fe Pizza first opened in Holland Landing in 1997. Kelly purchased the business with a partner in 2005. He was a quiet partner at the time. Eventually, Kelly committed himself full time to the business and expanded into Aurora in 2013.

"I left my full time job in product management and marketing after 20 years," Kelly explained. "The place in Holland Landing was for sale and I thought 'why not.' I was a customer and it is the only place where I bought my pizza. I thought the product was great and I wanted to do this full time. We left the recipes exactly the same because they're great."

He thought Bayview Ave. in Aurora was a great location for the new store.

"My son played hockey here and I liked the community and we knew a lot of people," said Kelly. "I thought it was a good market for a unique, home style pizza place. It really is a different tasting pizza compared to most places."

Why try Santa Fé?

"We're a small, independent local business and the pizza is great," said Kelly. "Almost everything is hand made and we use a lot of fresh products, cut by hand wherever possible.

It's a very traditional preparation of food."

Santa Fe Gourmet Pizza is located at 15480 Bayview Ave., just north of Wellington in Aurora. They can be reached at 905-503-3300 or visit online at www.santafe-pizza.com.



Jim Thomson

By Jake Courtepatte

Aurora Tigers owner Jim Thomson claims to be the only General Manager in the OJHL to fire himself.

"What's kind of funny is, it's sort of a joke around the League in a funny way," says Thomson, an ex-NHLer who purchased the club in the offseason. "There's so much going on, and so much to do, I found myself not getting important things done."

Upon his self-imposed restructuring, he handed the management reins to league veteran Thomas Milne, allowing Thomson to really work on getting a birds-eye-view of how the OJHL functions.

"Sponsorships, being out in the community, building the brand...we're up over a hundred fans per game since we took over."

It's an astounding number, considering league attendance in the 2014-15 season averaged around 230 fans, with the Tigers hovering just around that mark. With nightly attendance now often in the 300s for weekend games at the Aurora Community Centre, who or what is to thank?

The on-ice product, though still highly successful, is not the same bunch that breezed to the regular season OJHL title the previous season.

For Thomson, it's following a simple method: do as the NHL does.

"You're your own billboard. You don't know who you're going to meet. One of the things I learned in the NHL is to get yourself and your face out there. That's what I try to teach these

Community involvement is the key behind Aurora Tigers' success

"We run this team as close to the NHL as we can, from pre-game skates, to team meals. . . we do movie night, gym memberships. . . but getting out in the community is such an important part of it. It's what I did in the NHL.

guys. A lot of them are shy, or were shy, but we push them out into the community and it has done nothing but help them."

The Tigers franchise has shared a long and mutually-beneficial relationship with the Aurora community. You would be hard-pressed to be around town on a weekend and not see a young man with "hockey hair" wearing his Tigers jersey over his civvies at an area event. But this year's squad has taken it upon themselves to be leaders in the community.

"It's amazing when we go out around town, kids all know them because we've been at schools, at the mall, to the hospital. It's great when the kids go up and they recognize the players. It's good for their morale and it's good for the kids. I lived it, so I get it."

For Thomson and his team, the kids are the key demographic. Though a player that worked his way to the professional ranks throughout his career, it's hard to forget that everything begins at the grassroots level.



"They're a great group of guys. We must have run twenty minor practices where the guys go out with their equipment on, in their game jerseys, and the kids can relate to the players being on the ice with them. It's huge. Those kids now want to come see the guys that helped them."

Closing out their first season as the owners of a Junior A club, Thomson and his wife Rita can finally take some time to look back at what they've accomplished this year, as well as look to the future.

"It's a business you don't make money at, you have to understand that. If you break even, you're laughing. So, we've worked really hard, and the Town of Aurora has been unbelievable, by backing us with sponsorship, Mayor Geoff Dawe, Kim Teixeira down at the office booking ice, Kim and Greg McClenny...they've made our life really easy as new owners."

And if an attendance increase of almost one-third can happen in one season, is 500 fans per game such a lofty goal? The Cobourg Cougars, the OJHL's mostly highly-attended team last season, averaged just over that number.

"The players have come to me and said, 'it's nice to play in front of the Town of Aurora.' When we have more fans in the stands, the guys realize how important it is to be out in the community. We did a lot of functions this year, we pushed it hard, and I have to say the community has given right back."

Niche Decor: Ghostwriters to your own design story

By Brock Weir

A client's home or space is a blank page on which to tell their story, says Jean Bisnaire, founder of Aurora's Niche Decor.

The end result is how they want to live and how they want themselves – and their lives – to be represented. Sometimes, however, those looking to fill in their blank spaces, or overhaul ones in need of an update, can use a helping hand.

"Our job is to be their ghostwriter," says Mr. Bisnaire. "For us, a successful job is when the clients have dinner parties and their guests will say, 'Wow, this is so you!' I don't want them thinking, 'Who did you hire to do this space?'"

For Mr. Bisnaire, and Niche Decor's operations manager, Shima Yazdan, a sofa or a carpet in their expansive Aurora showroom is like that little black dress. Until it is punctuated with the perfect accessories, you don't truly appreciate it.

That is the Niche Decor approach: they're not here to sell you the LBD or just any sofa, they are here to sell you the whole package, a parcel that tells your story. As design experts with over 22 years of industry experience they have a knowledgeable staff that can help achieve the look you're after.

Niche Decor's story began in 1992 when Jean Bisnaire, an industrial designer by trade opened the first location in Richmond Hill to combine his custom



furniture work with custom interior design.

Moving to Unionville in 1994, they stayed in their small Main Street shop for nearly 20 years before moving north to Aurora in 2012, significantly expanding their operations from a 2,000 sq ft display floor to a 10,000 sq ft full service showroom providing endless possibilities for their growing client base.

Niche Decor takes great pride in the options they provide their clients. Mr. Bisnaire and Ms. Yazdan spend a significant amount of time going to trade shows sourcing the best products and are particularly proud of carrying approximately 70 per cent Canadian-made products.

"We are supporting our local economy, which is very important," says Ms. Yazdan.

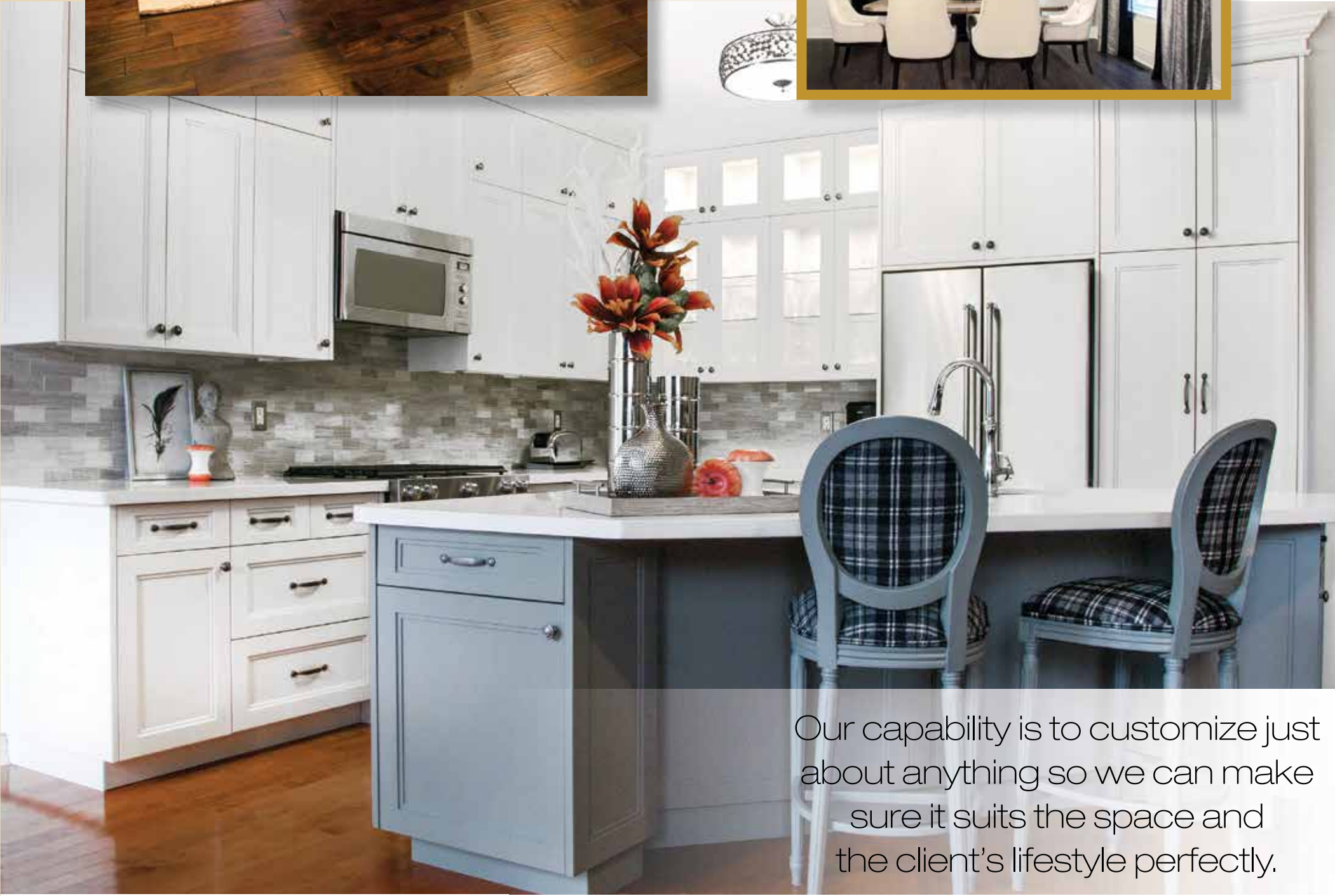
No matter how big their projects are becoming, Niche Decor welcomes any design challenge whether it is refreshing that out-dated en-suite bathroom or a grand and glorious gathering place, such as a banquet hall at a local golf course which is currently

a work in progress. They design and manage renovations of all kinds no matter the size. With their vast furniture showroom, they are able to furnish an entire home from window treatments, to lighting, to furniture and accessories.

"Our main business approach is anyone can have a store or sell furniture," says Ms. Yazdan. "We like to make sure the furniture works within the space in terms of materials, scale, budget, etc. Our capability is to customize just about anything so we can make sure it suits the space and the client's lifestyle perfectly."

"The showroom is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we can carry and our design portfolio really showcases our capabilities."

Adds Mr. Bisnaire: "A common misconception is that hiring a designer can be costly, but, we save you time and money by avoiding mistake which is priceless.



Our capability is to customize just about anything so we can make sure it suits the space and the client's lifestyle perfectly.

Photos by Joanna Katchutas

NICHE DECOR

www.nichedecor.ca
242 EARL STEWART DRIVE, AURORA ON L4G 6V8 905.727.2727

Anna Belanger and Martha Francis have a long-standing passion for window fashions.

The co-workers turned friends took over ownership of the company in 2013 after working there for a decade. Their first order of business was to make a variety of changes to improve the business.

“We used to sit at the desk eating our lunch and talking about the changes we would make if we owned the store,” recalled Martha, who is also an interior decorator. “We’ve made some changes including improving the layout of the store, bringing in new colours and changing our displays regularly to keep things current.”

The choice to start a partnership was a successful one and they never looked back.

“We’re the perfect team,” said Anna, adding she handles the business end of things while Martha takes care of sales, service and design. “We do complement each other in that way.”

Sunshine Window Fashions is one of the largest Hunter Douglas Gallery showrooms in the north GTA, and were just awarded with the 2016 Top Choice Award for best blinds/drapery in the Aurora/Newmarket area. They are a one stop source for quality custom window coverings including blinds, shades and shutters, custom drapery treatments, bedding, soft furnishings, headboards and re-upholstery. The business has been located in the same plaza on Yonge Street for 35 years and they are extremely proud to have served the Aurora and Newmarket community for over three decades.

In addition to offering years of experience, professional advice and product knowledge, they also have a highly knowledgeable and experienced team on staff including a certified installer.

“This is a family-oriented place,” said Martha. “We really enjoy what we do and the great team that we work with.”

The team at Sunshine is focused on customer service and creating a very professional and friendly experience for customers. That is the key to their success and what sets them apart from other window covering businesses and big

SUNSHINE WINDOW FASHIONS

brighten any room



Martha Francis and Anna Belanger

“Customer service is our main focus,” explained Martha. “You will always get quality products and great customer service at a competitive price.”

box stores.

“Customer service is our main focus,” explained Martha. “You will always get quality products and great customer service at a competitive price.”

“When the customers leave the store they’re not forgotten,” Anna added. “We want our customers to be happy and we want them to return.



It’s all about the little things. We do all the extras that the big box stores can’t provide.”

Every client is asked to fill out a survey after installation to help the business keep track of what they are doing right and where they could improve on.

“We want to make sure we get feedback from our customers and that they’re happy,” said Anna, adding they have a referral program where customers receive a gas card if they refer a family member or friend. “We want to make it a positive experience for them.”

Sunshine also offers a unique 20/20 Gallery Gold Guarantee. Once the installation of Hunter Douglas window coverings is complete, they invite you to enjoy them in your home for 20 days. At the end of this 20-day period, if you are not thoroughly satisfied with the way your new window coverings look, customers can contact Sunshine Window Fashions and they will work with you to replace your window coverings with your choice of any Hunter Douglas product.

“A customer can enjoy their product for 20 days and if they are unhappy we will replace it for them,” Martha explained. “There are not many companies that will do that. It gives people extra peace of mind and confidence in their decision.”

Sunshine also offers a complimentary in-home consultation. They are not exclusively residential and offer services for businesses, offices, condos and cottages. Their decorating team will bring product samples, design ideas and decorating expertise to your home or business and help you choose the right products to suit your needs.

“We realize how hectic and busy life can be for people,” said Martha. “We are here to assist everyone in finding the perfect option to suit their needs.”

In terms of community involvement, Sunshine supports the Aurora Tigers hockey team, Habitat for Humanity as well as being a member of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce. They also take part in the annual Home Show, the Aurora Street Festival and Shop the Neighbourhood.



Anna and Martha invite you to visit their store to discuss any of your upcoming window covering projects.



Sunlight at your command.

\$500 Rebate when you purchase[†] Silhouette[®] with PowerView[™].



HunterDouglas Gallery

Offer runs from January 1st to April 30th, 2016.
[†]Purchase a minimum of 4 Silhouette[®] with PowerView[™] and receive a \$500 rebate and an extra \$100 for each additional shade purchased or purchase a minimum of 4 Silhouette[®] with UltraGlide[®] and receive a \$250 rebate and extra \$50 for each additional shade purchased. Valid at participating retailers only. The rebate will be issued in the form of a Hunter Douglas Prepaid American Express[®] Gift Card. THE PROMOTION CARD is a trademark of The Hunt Group. All Rights Reserved. THE PROMOTION CARD is a Prepaid American Express[®] Card issued by Amex Bank of Canada under license from American Express. For full details, visit hunterdouglas.ca.

Sunshine Window Fashions is located at 15461 Yonge Street in Aurora. For more information, call 905-713-2862, email admin@sunshineblinds.ca or visit www.sunshineblinds.ca.



Whatever
the season...

JACK'S
LANDSCAPING
ESTABLISHED 1978

...has all your outdoor
project needs covered

Owner Jack Roeleveld started the business in 1978 but his love for landscaping started long before that.

"I started cutting grass when I was 13-years-old," said Jack. "I enjoyed doing it because I enjoyed the outdoors. When I finished school I decided I was going to do it until I figured out what I wanted to do when I grew up. Thirty-eight years later I'm still at it. It's been fun. Every job is a challenge and every day is a new day."

Over the years, the company grew from a grass cutting to a professional design build landscaping business.

"When I first started there was no such thing as trimmers, everything was done with clippers," explained Jack. "We watched the landscape industry grow into what it is today and it's been incredible. It's become a



Jack is very involved in the community. He is an active member of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and takes part in the Aurora Home Show. He also volunteers with Big Brothers Big Sisters of York and sponsors the children's Salvation Army hockey team.

"It's always great to see these little guys on the ice," Jack said.

"To be able to watch them brings a real joy to my heart."

Jack's Landscaping a Member of the Landscape Ontario, Horticultural Trade Association for 33 years.

initial consultation. A Certified Designer will come to your home to determine and discuss your landscaping needs. The designer will review your ideas while providing you with some of their own based on their expertise. Suggestions of the types of hard and softscape materials available to you will be discussed as well as what to consider in the way



of a budget. They will then work on some rough sketch ideas together to better help you understand what your proposed design layout could be. The next step, should the client choose to proceed, is to create a concept design on the computer and provide a quote for the project.

"We create an oasis that is suited to your lifestyle," Jack said. "We will utilize the space as best as possible and make it happen, whether it's a pool, entertaining area or a natural, manicured area. When it's finished and people are using the landscaped area it's really satisfying."

They now offer a variety of services including, carpentry (decks, fences, gates, privacy screens, pergolas, gazebos), retaining walls (all types), paving (interlock, natural stone wet or dry lay, asphalt), planting and sodding, lawn and garden renovation/rejuvenation, garden and lawn assessment/consultation, garden maintenance (of gardens installed by us), landscape lighting, tree stump removal, water features (ponds, waterfalls, fountains, bubbling rocks, hot tub installs), fireplaces/fire pits and outdoor kitchens.

They also offer winter services including extensive commercial snow plowing/removal, snow blowing, salting and lot monitoring.



JACK'S
LANDSCAPING
ESTABLISHED 1978
www.jackslandscaping.ca

For more information on Jack's Landscaping call 905-888-1664,
email info@jackslandscaping.ca or visit www.jackslandscaping.ca.



The government needs to do more to help people deal with public education on addictions to know there are many different ways to reach out to people.

Recovery threw a lifeline to Addiction Canada founder



By Brock Weir

As a Professional Football player, John Haines’ life was an endless round of parties. But the parties led to an early end to his football career and, very nearly, an early end to his life. His suspension and eventual ban from Professional Football due to drug and alcohol use, however, wasn’t the watershed moment that made him sit up and take notice that his addictions were spiraling out of control.

“I met someone who told me I better do something about my own problem with drugs and alcohol, but I never listened,” says Mr. Haines. “I thought I could change it on my own, and so I would remain sober for short periods of time. Eventually though I relapsed so bad it almost killed me. I had flirted constantly with starting, stopping and binge using. I became a chronic relapse. I had back-to-back impaired driving charges and in March of 2000 I blew five-and-a-half-times the legal limit on both occasions. Then, in April, I ended up in the hospital near death.

“I didn’t want to die.”

Three months later he came out of the hospital and, following outpatient treatment, has remained clean and sober ever since.

But, athletics had been his whole life.

When that was no longer a path open to him, he was left without a vocation, but his journey to recovery threw out another lifeline. After training with interventionists in the United States, Mr. Haines came home a certified drug counsellor and dedicated his life to helping others.

Mr. Haines is now the CEO of Addiction Canada, formerly Vita Novus (or “New Life”), a private drug treatment program headquartered on Edward Street in Aurora with treatment centres across Ontario and Alberta.

Beginning his work with drug intervention in 2004, Mr. Haines says he often worked with families seeking help for their loved ones and, following referrals to other facilities, heard back that their family member had relapsed.

“It was almost as if they were blaming me,” he says. “I heard this a few times until once more when a family said their loved one left treatment, went out, overdosed and died and blamed me. Finally, enough was enough. I decided to put together my own program, sold everything I had in 2006 and started my own treatment centre.”

Originally founded out of a rented building formerly used as a retirement home, the precursor to Addiction Canada rapidly expanded to larger facilities, including one in Stouffville.

By 2009, business began to grow exponentially as Ontario grappled with a rapid rise in the abuse of opiates such as Oxycodone and Heroin.

Those living with addictions – and their loved ones – were growing frustrated with other treatment programs, which included methadone treatments to wean users off withdrawals. In Mr. Haines book, methadone treatment is little more than drug replacement therapy and there is a better option.

“We have changed our program from a 12 Step program to an empowerment program I uniquely designed because the 12 step program founded by AA has a lower success rate,” he says. “We find that addiction isn’t a medical disease it was once [considered] and it is certainly not a mental health disease as it was classified. Now they are classifying it as a mental health condition.

“Addiction stems from concurrent disorders and cognitive effect. That is why we changed our programs to deal more with the psychological effects of one person’s life [which causes them] to reach for drugs and alcohol to self-medicate. The premise behind Addiction Canada is we can get to the root cause of the underlying issues so that they don’t need to self-medicate and, hence, stay in their addictions.”

Part of the appeal of private addiction treatment, according to Mr. Haines, is the option to get everything under one roof, from drug treatment, to counselling, to outpatient and therapy programs which, at each Addiction Canada facility, is facilitated by fully qualified and regulated doctors and nurses, and certified drug counsellors.

“In the last year and a half, we have really started to screen the people we bring on because of the change in our program,” he says. “As far as therapists and counsellors are concerned, there has been a stigma in the private sector and we have been attacked that anyone can open up a treatment centre because it is non-regulated. What they say is a bunch of ex-addicts are calling themselves counsellors and are working in treatment centres that are hiring them to counsel people to become better, which is a total crock.

“Within Addiction Canada, every single one of our counsellors and therapists hold credentials. In the last year, we have had to step up in order to facilitate this so we are never questioned again on who holds credentials. We welcome any governing body in Canada deciding to regulate private industry of addiction treatment. Until that happens, we are all going to be scrutinized and we’re going to be, for lack of a better term, put down and slandered.”

Mr. Haines says Addiction Canada cares about far more than making money – although making money is necessary in order to pay for good quality staff – and introduced a guarantee three years ago on their two- and three-month programs that if patients relapse once they go out, they can come back free of charge.

“We want to help them,” he says. “We don’t charge them the second time around if they relapse. The government needs to do more to help people deal with public education on addictions to know there are many different ways to reach out to people. There are a lot of families who are suffering and the government isn’t pouring out enough. Hospitals are inundated with this stuff and they just don’t realise how many people are actually dying.”

Addiction Canada’s Recovery Centre and Outpatient and Aftercare is located at the organization’s Aurora headquarters. They operate four treatment centres across Canada, including Muskoka, Edmonton, Calgary, and Glendon, Alberta.



“I didn’t want to die.”



There are a lot of families who are suffering and the government isn’t pouring out enough. Hospitals are inundated with this stuff and they just don’t realise how many people are actually dying.”

Thank you

**For Supporting
the Local Businesses
and Services
in Our Community**



Addiction Canada

Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Aurora Landscape

Aurora Tigers

Backyard Pool and Spa

The Chicken Place

Aurora Home Hardware

Jack's Landscaping

MR Menswear

Neighbourhood Network

Niche Decor

Omars Shoes

Pickering College

Santa Fé Pizza

Sean Herbinson

Spar Clean

Sunshine Windows

Susan Cowen



“Keller Williams put forward this image of family, business and helping to create a life worth living – and they do,” says Mr. Herbinson, noting their open book structure and profit sharing philosophy. “They are changing the industry”.

Sean Herbinson

BROKER

helps “create a life worth living”

By Brock Weir

A group flying in formation has often been a source of inspiration. For Aurora realtor Sean Herbinson, however, it is a concept which used to make the hair on the back of his neck “stand on end.”

It is not that he didn’t think this was something to strive for. Quite the contrary. But, in his experience, it was rare to see that ideal actually bear fruit.

Becoming a realtor with Keller Williams Realty Centres, however, gave this local resident new insight on the old ideal.

After a lengthy career in the local real estate market, Mr. Herbinson found himself drawn to the company’s win-win philosophy. Skeptical at first, he soon saw the plan in action.

“There are a lot of organizations out there that talk about caring about their people, putting people first, and caring about their customers, that the world is a grand place where love, peace and joy should permeate everything,” says Mr. Herbinson. “Those are things I actually believe in, but in the corporate world where money and egos are involved, it generally doesn’t work out that way.”

Born in Toronto, Mr. Herbinson spent his early years in King Township. He attended St. Andrew’s College before his father’s career took his family to England and young Sean into the very different culture of the British public school system.

He had to learn to play by the very stringent British rules, something that was not a natural fit, but after five years when they were bound for Canada again, he was sorry to leave.

But, after university he returned to London to begin an epic road trip from the British capital to Bombay, India, one he considers a life changer.

“I had my little western mindset blown wide open by so many things that were different,” he says.

It also gave him a different perspective on how business – and life – should be.

His first job was with Canada Trust. He went back to school and earned his MBA and then went back into the financial world as a lender with the Royal Bank.

Frustrated with banking, he drastically shifted his energy to a start-up wholesale flower business and later an in-home water treatment systems before taking the plunge into real estate nearly a quarter-century ago.

“Moving to Newmarket, and then back to Aurora, I started researching businesses, and after almost a full year I kept coming back to real estate,” he says. “Real estate? Real estate people had been my worst clients as a banker and I had a strong dislike for real estate people. It was horrific, but no matter which way I analysed it, the freedom I wanted, the unlimited income potential, it all kept coming back to real estate.”

With his real estate license in hand, he started working for local realtor Bob Armstrong. From there, he spent 15 years at Re-max, but always felt there was something more to pursue.

“I have always been looking for what I defined as ‘compassionate corporate capitalism’ or organizations which weren’t so bottom-line oriented without caring about the people who were involved,” he says . “For me, it is not really about being number one, but I love servicing my clients, and I love working in Aurora. It is a great place.”

Soon, Mr. Herbinson will be spending even more time in Aurora as Keller Williams Realty Centres prepares to open their new Aurora office at the southwest corner of Wellington Street East and Berczy Street.

“I am biased, but Keller Williams Realty Centres will bring a good, solid company to Town,” he says. “I think we will attract a number of agents from other firms who have been sitting on the fence. They have heard the [Keller Williams] concept and they are shaking their heads in disbelief like I did at the beginning. A real estate office comprised of the top players in Town will be better for the business community, and there is nothing wrong with an organization that puts family values first, a good strong business second, and has a spiritual component as well.”

It is this philosophy which might have other realtors shaking their heads, but has given Mr. Herbinson that bias towards Keller Williams.

“Keller Williams puts forward this image of family, business and helping to create a life worth living – and they do,” says Mr. Herbinson, noting their open book structure and profit sharing philosophy. “They are changing the industry. I have to believe that if you’re putting your customers first, and you’re not always putting your bottom line as the be all and end all, you’ll be successful. Making a commission is important, sure, but you have to make sure you’re number one with your customers and they’re number one with you. The positive energy level, as far as I am concerned, transforms the customer experience. It is kind of nice to deal with people who are happy and upbeat, flying in formation.”

A home-town boy – or close enough – Mr. Herbinson says he always enjoys working in Aurora. For him, it is “like old home days.”

“It is a comfortable slipper I have worn for 24 years,” he says. “Now our cultural mix has changed and it is an exciting environment to be in. I really enjoy working with our clients and their changing needs: buying as first-timers, having kids, trading up into something bigger. Now the majority of my business, and an exciting part of it, is taking people out of their often long time two-story home in Aurora and helping them make that next step.

“The fun stuff is making their dreams a reality.”