

NEWHOMES

Welcome to Mister Law's neighbourhood



MARTIN SLOFSTRA
EDITOR'S
NOTE

It's one of the first things you notice when you enter the lobby of the Living Water Resorts in Collingwood, Ont. A sign says: "Larry loves his people and you will too," referring to Larry Law, president and CEO of this resort.

A little hokey, perhaps, but if you spend a day with him in person, you learn that he absolutely lives by it. The greeter at the concierge desk, the hostess in the restaurant, staff in operations or management — many of whom I meet on this day — Larry seems to know everybody by name and they all respond warmly.

It struck me later this can be a pretty tall order given he runs a large operation with 600 employees, building up this business after first falling in love and acquiring the former Cranberry Resort while on a family trip in the early 1990s.

He also has quite the story to tell. His credentials as a builder of new homes in the GTA was firmly established as the master developer in the renowned Cornell project in Markham from 1997 to 2003.

He is also a devout Christian, and not at all shy when it comes to sharing how his beliefs shape his business practices, not only in the way he treats his employees — he is deeply dedicated to what he calls "heart-centred relationships" — but how he plans to go forward and build more communities.

Law says his perspective all changed when he lost his wife to cancer in 2001. Almost 20 years later, he is well on his way to building quite a legacy giving time and energy to several local causes and charities.

"We all work for a common purpose — to make the world a better place to be," he says.

Remarkable personal transformation aside, I get the sense Law wants to take it even further, spending a lot

of time thinking how communities of the future will look like and how development should be done.

So, on this cool, overcast January day, we take a tour of Living Water properties. While driving around, he draws attention to details such as large porches and nicely landscaped and accessible common areas, saying he got his inspiration from the open, nature-inspired communities in California.

Law, who has a degree in architecture, says these features are essential to promoting a community feeling because "it gets people out of their homes and meet their neighbours."

As for the future, the plan will be to develop more neighbourhoods, each with a strong sense of community, a goal even more reachable given Collingwood is a boom town

and its reputation for being a four-season playground is of appeal to everybody from young families to retiring empty-nesters.

What those model communities of the future will look like remains to be seen.

At lunch, he slips me piece of paper which lists some of those elements. It is divided into two categories, one for Collingwood and one for Living Water Resorts, and it includes: year-round natural playgrounds, family-loving environments for like-minded but different groups of people, open spaces for nature-lovers, and many more.

The sense I get from Mr. Law is there are many more good things yet to come, but also, my little day-trip to his neighbourhood has made for a nice start to the new year.



Larry Law, president and CEO of Living Water Resorts, will often go for an evening walk on his property located on the shores of Georgian Bay.

2020 must be the year of action on housing in the GTA



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"May you live in interesting times," goes the expression, and we may well live through very interesting times in 2020 when it comes to housing and the economy. The coming year needs to be the year that governments and citizens focus on dealing with the housing supply shortage in the GTA. Fortunately, 2020 may provide several opportunities to start to address this generational challenge.

Let's first look at some of the challenges we face in the housing market and in the economy. Sales data for the GTA's new home and resale markets for the last two quarters of 2019 show a return to inflationary pressure on prices, after a moderation in 2018 and persistent housing supply shortages. Simply put, demand is picking up, prices are responding and supply continues to fail to keep up with demand.

The Canadian economy is showing signs of slowing, including the shedding of more than 70,000 jobs in November and the slowing of GDP growth due in part to trade tensions amongst large Canadian trading partners. Interest rates lowered somewhat in 2019, lowering mortgage rates.

With the economy slowing, the Bank of Canada is likely to maintain its neutral to negative bias. Shortages of skilled labour and trades are a persistent issue for the building and land development industry in our effort to increase supply.

Still, I am optimistic for 2020, because I believe these challenges will also present opportunities to close the housing supply and affordability gap. First of all, there is now a broad consensus that the building of much-needed new housing supply has been inhibited by layers of time-consuming bureaucracy and slow approvals.

These barriers should start to lessen in 2020, as municipalities update their policies to meet new requirements under the Ontario government's Housing Supply Action Plan and changes to expedite

Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT) hearings, which aim to increase housing supply by cutting red tape and speed up approvals.

Lower interest rates provide prospective home buyers with lower borrowing costs, easing the barrier to entry. In a slowing economy, government spending on infrastructure and job skills training provides stimulus and a bridge back to growth and job creation.



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All three levels of government have the perfect opportunity in 2020 to focus on city-building infrastructure such as transit, water main enhancement and waste water capacity and treatment, which in turn supports and enables housing creation.

To help more Canadians find good jobs, governments could give more support to training for the skilled trades. The building industry is one of the few where well-paying jobs are unlikely to be moved offshore.

Building houses, townhouses and condo apartments provides jobs, tax revenue and investment opportunities, in addition to providing the housing supply required to ensure the GTA remains an attractive and desirable place to live.

The signals in our economy and the housing market point to interesting times in 2020. Let's seize all opportunities to make this year the year of housing.

Dave Wilkes is President and CEO of the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD), the voice of the home building, land development and professional renovation industry in the GTA. For the latest industry news and new home data, follow BILD on Twitter, @bildgta, or visit www.bildgta.ca.