

BUILDING BY DECADES



DAVID WILKES
PRESIDENT & CEO OF BILD

As we researched this special feature for the Building Industry and Land Development Association's 100th anniversary, it became clear that issues of housing supply and affordability in the GTA have been with us for a long time. So have efforts by governments to invest in the construction of critical projects and infrastructure as a way to stimulate economic growth. Decade by decade since the early 20th century, both factors have profoundly influenced the ways cities and towns of the region have developed and grown.

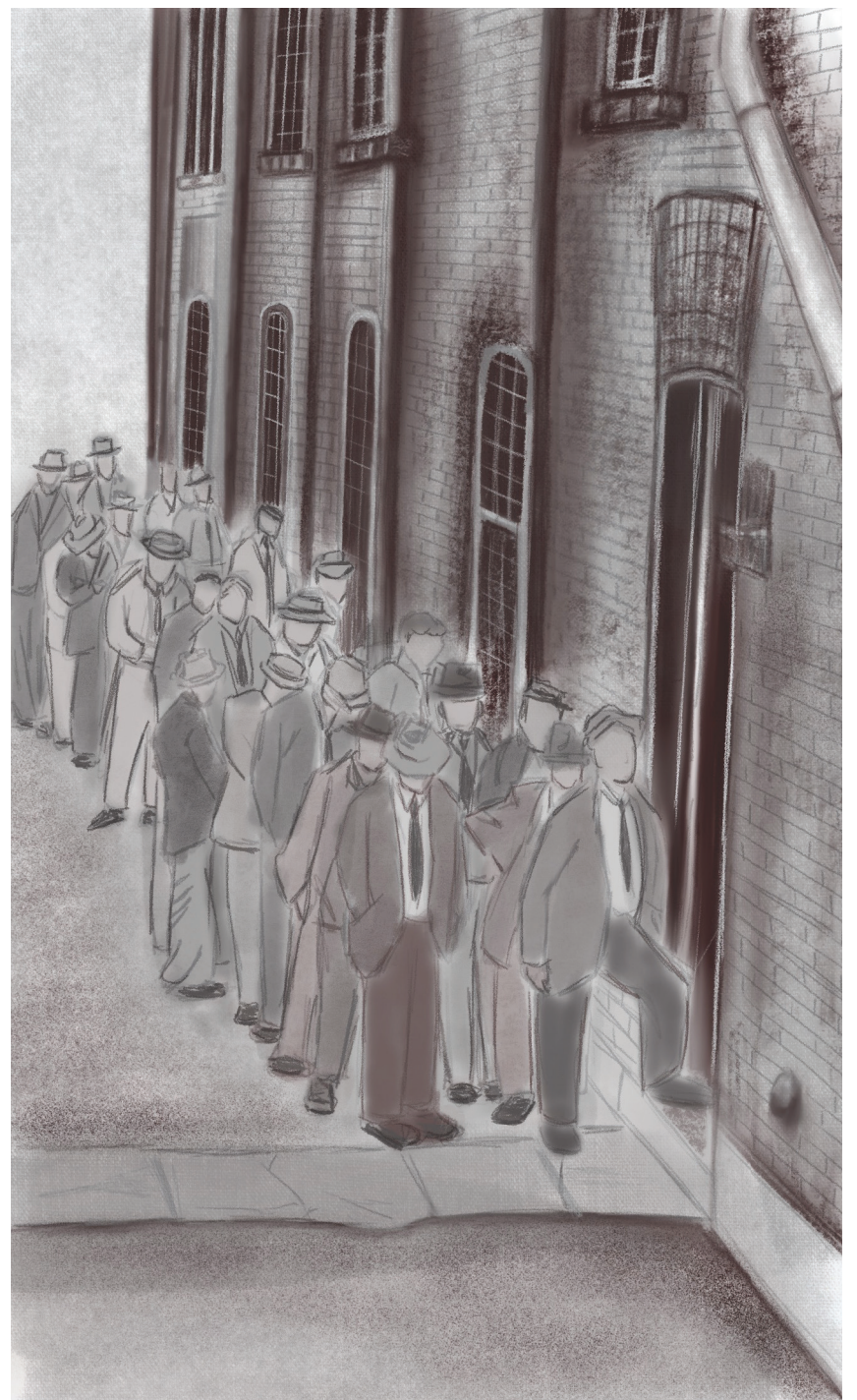
In the 1930s, the Great Depression brought unemployment and economic hardship to many in Toronto, despite the fact that the city was somewhat protected by having a more diversified and industrialized economy than other parts of Canada. When it came to housing, the headlines of the day would be familiar to today's readers. Young people lived with their parents longer and many people were poorly housed.

Governments sought to improve living conditions and spur homebuilding through legislation—a solution quite expected today, but novel at the time. The mid and late 1930s saw the implementation of Canada's first two pieces of federal housing policy designed to address housing shortages and stimulate much-needed employment. Unfortunately, this legislation and associated programs did not have sufficient time to have a material impact before the arrival of the Second World War in 1939.

Throughout this series, we will see that the patterns and pace of development in earlier decades have profound impacts on residential and commercial development later on. So it was with the 1930s. The decade of economic depression and the attendant constraints on housing supply, combined with the home front impacts and manpower and materials shortages of the war, meant that the city's housing inventory was under severe pressure in the 1930s and totally unprepared for the flood of demand that came after the war.

THE DIRTY THIRTIES

A decade of turmoil spurs public sector into action



A soup-kitchen lineup in Toronto, circa 1930s. Illustration by Suzana Esteves

There are bad times, awful times and absolutely terrible times. The 1930s were all three. The world, let alone Toronto, had never experienced anything like it. It began on 29 October 1929 with the sudden collapse of the New York stock market. Even then, few could foresee how much worse things would soon get. Canada, which was dependent on resource-based industries such as farming, fishing, forestry, logging and mining, was especially hard hit. Demand for its products fell precipitously. And in the days before the social safety net was a twinkle in even the most liberal eyes, that spelled destitution for millions of Canadians.

Total public and private spending in Canada fell 42 percent. Unemployment in the country hit a staggering 30 percent while wages dropped as much as 60 percent. As early as 1932, manufacturing was down nearly 60 percent from 1928. Average income had plummeted 55 per-

cent. Because of its diversified economy, Toronto was spared the worst effects of the Great Depression. Still, unemployment in the city reached 17 percent.

Even now, these years are called the Dirty Thirties.

In response to these economic conditions, the public sector adopted a more aggressively interventionist role in the economy. Governments – municipal, provincial or federal – could no longer sit idly by while countless Canadians lost their jobs and their homes and had difficulty putting food on the table. Overwhelmed by the enormity of the crisis, church and charities were unable to house and feed the poor, functions they traditionally handled.

Ottawa did eventually step in, but not before Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's reluctance to get involved cost him the 1930 election. His successor, R.B. Bennett, met a similar fate

(Continued on pg. 2)

THE BILD CORNERSTONE

Eaton's Store opens
1930

Bank of Commerce opens
1931

SCAN TO SEE OUR DECADE-BY-DECADE TIMELINE



1930s

1930

City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 7365



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(Continued from pg.1)

in 1935 when King was re-elected for a third term. By then, the worst of the depression was over. But neither King nor Bennett was able to slow the shift to populism that gave rise to political parties such as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (today's New Democratic Party), the Social Credit Party and a number of less successful left-wing organizations. Even Communism became viable. In 1937, party member Stewart Smith was elected to Toronto City Council where he remained until 1947.

As damaging as the '30s were, the city continued to grow, albeit slowly. The unveiling of Eaton's marvellous College Street complex in 1930 marked a major Toronto turning point. With its sleek Art Moderne lines, hyper-fashionable Round Room and much admired Eaton Auditorium, it instantly became an important social and cultural hub. The following year, Maple Leaf Gardens opened its doors. Then came the magnificent Canadian Bank of Commerce head office on King St. just west of Yonge. This 34-storey Art Deco tower was the tallest building in the British Empire, a title it held until 1962. As a statement of confidence in Toronto and Canada, it was definitive.

Sadly, the timing couldn't have been worse. The tower was a monument to a system that apparently had just collapsed. Two other remnants of better days – the Canada Life Building and the Royal York Hotel – were also completed in the '30s. The 1937 opening of the Toronto Stock Exchange's new premises on Bay St. was recognition that the TSE was now the third largest in North America.

On the other hand, residential development slowed drastically. In 1928, for example, the city approved 96 apartment buildings. In 1930, that had dropped to zero. In 1932, only one project went ahead, in 1936 there were five.

Inevitably, the depression seriously affected immigration to Canada, which was a major source of population growth. From almost 170,000 arrivals in 1929, the number fell to fewer than 12,000 by 1935. Not until the following decade did the influx of immigrants exceed 17,000. This led to

a proliferation of rooming houses across the city and severe overcrowding in poor neighbourhoods. These issues wouldn't be addressed until the '40s and '50s.

Through it all, life remained comfortable for the wealthy and those middle-class Torontonians able to hang on to their jobs. Falling prices for goods and services during the '30s meant that their money went further than ever. As a result, housing construction moved north of the



This 34-storey Art Deco tower was the tallest building in the British Empire, a title it held until 1962.

increasingly unsavoury downtown core to upscale neighbourhoods like Forest Hill.

Perhaps unexpectedly, a distinctly Canadian culture started to emerge in the '30s. Though popular entertainment was overwhelmingly American, major cultural institutions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board were founded. After World War One, though Canada's ties to Britain remained strong, the two countries slowly started to drift apart. Once Canada and the US signed a most-favoured-nation agreement in 1935, American influence soon replaced the UK's.

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, Canada quickly came to its aid. Controlling the war effort would eventually require government intervention into nearly every aspect of Canadian life.

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BEYOND THE CITY: MALTON IN THE 1930s

Once a quiet farming community, Malton took flight in the 1930s when farmland gave way to an airport and aircraft manufacturing industry. European settlement began around 1819, creating the Village of Malton in the 1840s with a cobbler, blacksmith and general store. Soon afterward, the arrival of the Grand Trunk Railway in 1854 provided local farmers with easy access to Toronto markets, stimulating economic growth. But when Brampton was awarded the county seat over Malton in 1864, Malton's newfound prosperity declined and its population dwindled down to about 200 people.

Its fortunes changed in the 1930s, when Malton shifted from agriculture to industry. Thirteen farms were selected by the Port Authority of Toronto to become the location of what would become a new world-class airport and aircraft manufacturing industry. Malton Airport – which eventually became Toronto Pearson International Airport – opened in 1939, with the Chapman farmhouse serving as its first airport terminal. Malton Airport also served as the site of the British Commonwealth air-training program during the Second World War, and Malton itself was home to wartime industries including Victory Aircraft, which produced the Avro Lancaster bombers and later, in the 1950s, the Avro Arrow, one of the most advanced aircraft of its era. To house residents, a subdivision with victory homes – known as Victory Village – was built in 1942 (by Wartime Housing Ltd.) for wartime workers and veterans.

After the war, Malton became part of the Toronto Township in 1952, and later part of the Town of Mississauga in 1967 (Mississauga became a city in 1974). Over the decades, residential construction ensued: the Ridgewood subdivision was built in the mid-1950s, the Marvin Heights subdivision followed in the late 1950s and the Westwood subdivision began construction in the mid-1960s. In 1968, Malton was included in the newly created Town of Mississauga, and its first mayor was fruit farmer Robert Speck. Aside from its proximity to Toronto Pearson, Malton served as an important transportation link between Toronto and suburbs, including Mississauga, Brampton and Vaughan, which continues to this day and emphasizes the important industry and commercial role of Malton.

Nowadays, Malton is bounded by Highway 427 to the east, Brampton to the north, Airport Road to the west and Toronto Pearson to the south. It's evolved into a working-class community, with first-generation Canadians making up more than half of its population. Sadly, there are few historic buildings left in downtown Malton because a gas main explosion in 1969 destroyed businesses and homes. But its history remains in other ways: with the opening of the Mitsubishi Heavy Industries airplane parts assembly plant and Bombardier's announcement to build a new global manufacturing centre for its next-generation global jets – heralding a new era of aviation.

THE BILD
CORNERSTONE

Maple Leaf Gardens opens
1931

The John Street Roundhouse opens
1931



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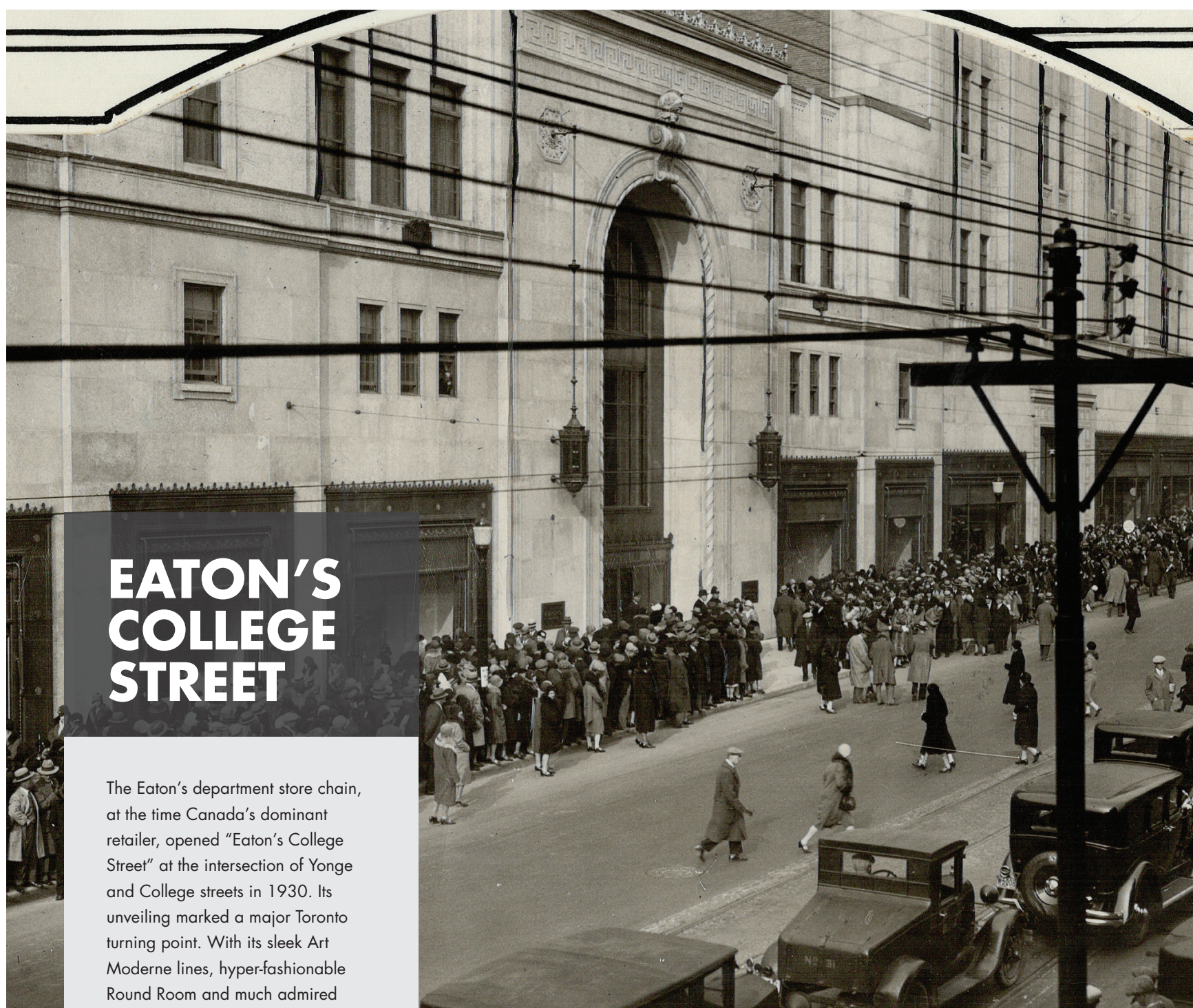
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TWO BUILDINGS 1930s



EATON'S COLLEGE STREET

The Eaton's department store chain, at the time Canada's dominant retailer, opened "Eaton's College Street" at the intersection of Yonge and College streets in 1930. Its unveiling marked a major Toronto turning point. With its sleek Art Moderne lines, hyper-fashionable Round Room and much admired Eaton Auditorium, it instantly became an important social and cultural hub.

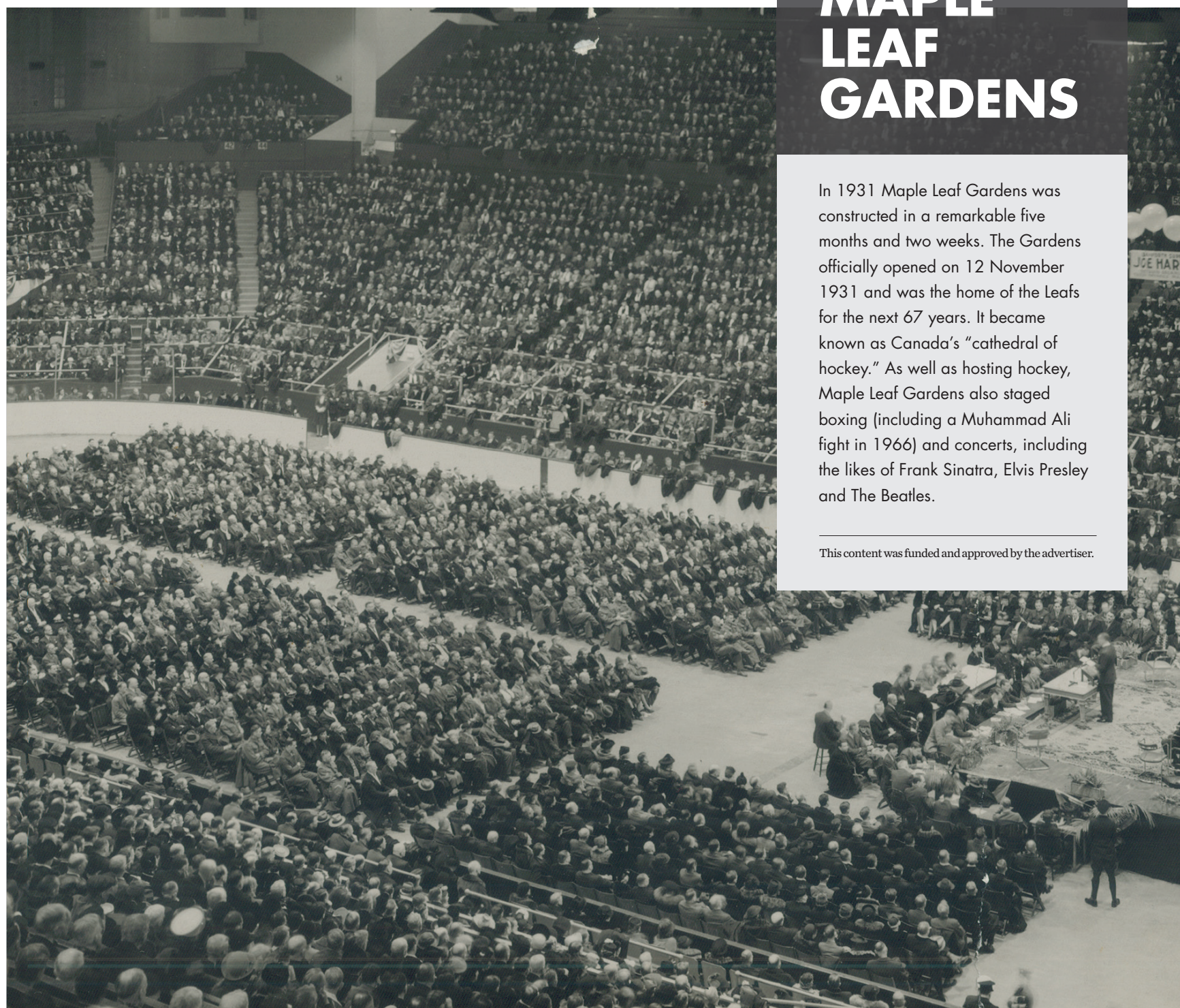
The opening of Eaton's College Street caused excitement in Toronto, 1930. Toronto Star Archives / Contributor

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MAPLE LEAF GARDENS

In 1931 Maple Leaf Gardens was constructed in a remarkable five months and two weeks. The Gardens officially opened on 12 November 1931 and was the home of the Leafs for the next 67 years. It became known as Canada's "cathedral of hockey." As well as hosting hockey, Maple Leaf Gardens also staged boxing (including a Muhammad Ali fight in 1966) and concerts, including the likes of Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and The Beatles.

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A Conservative Party rally at Maple Leaf Gardens, March 19, 1940. Toronto Star Archives / Contributor

THE BILD
CORNERSTONE

Canada Life Building
opens
1931

Ontario Railway and Municipal Board renamed
the Ontario Municipal Board
1932

THE HARDEST OF TIMES

Despair, relief and the birth of the welfare state

In the 1930s, when the Great Depression was wreaking havoc across Canada and around the world, even the most rabid free-marketeers were beginning to grasp that some form of social safety net was an absolute necessity. The economy was in tatters. Unemployment had hit 30 percent. Wages were down drastically and thousands found themselves destitute.

Still, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's final New Deal speech in 1935 left many Tories gasping in disbelief. Suddenly it seemed Mr. Laissez Faire himself had gone over to the dark side: "The old order has gone," he said in his radio address. "It will not return. In my mind, reform means government intervention. It means government control and regulation."

As Pierre Berton wrote in his book, *The Great Depression: 1929-1939*, "Here was the leading Conservative, the spokesman for the right, the self-made millionaire... opting for the principle of government intervention on a scale not known before. Bennett made that philosophy respectable. Bit by bit it came to be adopted, provincially and federally. Within a generation, the principles that R.B. Bennett enunciated in his famous series of broadcasts would be commonly held by all but the most moss-backed of Canadians."

Perhaps, but decades after Canada took these first steps toward welfare state status, we're still debating what role government should play in the lives of its citizens. For some, the term is one of contempt. For others, it is an expression of our better nature. In either case, as Berton argued, most Canadians are comfortable with the notion that government

has some role to play in regulating market forces and to a greater or lesser degree, redistributing wealth.

As the effects of the Great Depression deepened, all three levels of government were forced to engage. Charitable agencies and religious organizations were doing what they could to help, but were unable to keep up with demand. It was the same for Canadian municipalities. In Toronto, where nearly one-third of employable residents were jobless, the situation was dire. Though the city's diversified economy meant it was better off than many communities, in 1934, 120,000 Torontonians were dependent on relief to get by. Throughout the 1930s food lines were a common sight in Toronto, as were marches and demonstrations by men demanding work.

The city responded as best it could; in 1930 the Civic Employment Office and the Central Bureau for Unemployment Relief were created to help the jobless find work. In 1932, Toronto set up the Department of Welfare to administer relief efforts. Working with charities such as the Neighbourhood Workers Association and the Catholic Welfare Bureau, it distributed food and clothing vouchers to the needy. Caring for growing poverty cost the city millions, much of which had to be borrowed. In 1935, the worst year of the Depression, Toronto spent \$10 million on relief. By 1939, the total was more than \$60 million.

As it happened, Bennett's conversion came too late to stop Mackenzie King's Liberals from winning a landslide in the 1935 election. By then, Bennett had lost voters' confidence. Nearly 90 years later, he is



Jobless men marching to demand jobs in Toronto, circa 1930s. Toronto Star Archives / Contributor

remembered – if at all – by the phrase "Bennett Buggy," which referred to the phenomenon of stripped-down cars being turned into horse-drawn carts. Before he left office, however, Bennett legislated Dominion Unemployment Relief, which provided money to the provinces to assist the jobless. It also oversaw a program of relief camps for unemployed single men. Typically put in isolated locations far from towns and cities, these temporary habitations were breeding grounds for a generation of angry young men. When King took office he quickly closed the camps, but not before more than 170,000 men had passed through them.

Clearly, King had read the tea leaves and knew what he had to do. In 1937, the

Home Improvement Plan provided subsidized rents and renovation loans to 67,000 houses. The National Housing Act, 1938, was meant to aid construction of affordable accommodation, but was suspended when the war started the following year. Consequently, during the Depression young people stayed with their parents longer and the city's birthrate dropped.

Even for low-wage workers who did keep their jobs, the Depression had devastating results. In Toronto, Eaton's came under scrutiny of the Ontario Minimum Wage Act for a variety of infractions that left piecework seamstresses working for low pay.

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THE BILD
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Tridel (Jack DelZotto & Sons) founded
1934

Dominion Housing Act passed
1935

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From humble beginnings, Minto Communities has grown into one of the GTA's most trusted developers, known for innovation, commitment to quality homes, and sustainability.

The Minto Communities story is directly interwoven with the 100-year anniversary of BILD. It begins in the 1920s, when the Greenberg family immigrated to Canada. Driven by their entrepreneurial spirit, adaptability, and constant innovation, the Greenberg family believed they could make better places for everyone to live.

In 1955, brothers Gilbert, Irving, Lawrence and Louis launched their construction company Mercury Homes, which was later registered as Minto Construction Ltd. Over the years, the Greenberg brothers helped modernize the concept of new home construction in Canada and grew the business substantially, expanding into the development space as Minto Communities. Today, Minto Communities is active across the GTA, Ottawa, and Alberta, as well as in Florida and South Carolina. Altogether, Minto Communities has built over 85,000 homes using thoughtful design and planning to create complete communities where residents can flourish.

There have been many milestones throughout Minto Communities' history. In the 1960s, Minto Communities was one of the first builders in Ontario to pre-fabricate framing for their homes, enabling faster production with better quality. That same decade, in 1968, Minto Communities built the first-ever high-rise condominium in Canada, named Horizon House in Parkwood Hills, Ottawa. Their first project in Toronto, "Optima on the Park", a luxury condominium in Scarborough, broke ground in 1985. Next came the Minto Plaza twin tower complex at Bay and Elm Streets in 1988, followed by the ambitious Prince Arthur condo in Yorkville, a landmark known as an architectural icon.

Now, 30 years later, Minto Communities continues to contribute to the fabric of Toronto and the GTA through diverse projects like the mid-rise boutique condominium 123 Portland, which will enhance the vibrant King West pocket and The Saint, a 47-storey sleek tower at Church and Adelaide. Union Village, a master-planned low-rise community in Markham, created in partnership with Metropia, will provide 2,400 new homes in a variety of sizes and styles, transforming 412 acres into a complete and connected neighbourhood with incredible access to nature, parks, walking trails and opportunities for social connections. Remarkably, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, 123 Portland, Union Village and The Saint all broke ground in 2020.

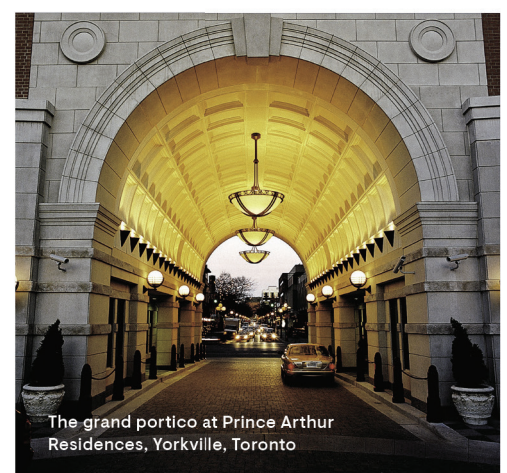
Sustainability has continued to grow in scope and focus since the Greenbergs' early adoption of recycling, with Minto Communities prioritizing green building practices, energy consumption, and resource management. In the late 1990s, Minto Communities created an Environmental Team to innovate new ways to minimize the impact of development and building operations. Since then, pursuing LEED® certification or ENERGY STAR® for high-rise and low-rise projects has become standard practice for the organization. Notably, Radiance at Minto Gardens was the first high-rise residential condominium to achieve LEED® certification, and organically, Minto Communities has won multiple awards from homebuilder associations in regional, provincial and national chapters to recognize sustainability efforts and energy consumption management, including winning the Green Builder of The Year eight times at various award ceremonies including the BILD awards, Ontario Home Builders' Association awards, and the Durham Region Homebuilders' Association awards.

Minto Communities is also enhancing the concept of wellness through every community, exploring new designations like WELL Certification, which measures the

overall wellness of a property, consistent incorporation of natural light and seamless connections to nature at every site, and holistic amenity programs that incorporate exciting new spaces like the meditation room with salt rock wall at downtown Toronto project The Saint. Continuing to manage energy consumption, Minto Communities is incorporating leading-edge technologies including its first geothermal energy system at North Oak, the newest phase of the Oakville master-planned community.

Over our more than 65-year history, Minto Communities has always been driven by the concept of "building better" fueled by our core values of innovation and sustainability. Through all our evolution and expansion, we continue to learn and improve, thanks in part to incredible industry partners like BILD.

From all of us at Minto Communities, congratulations to BILD on your 100-year anniversary! Together, we can continue to build quality communities and revitalize neighbourhoods, creating better spaces for people of all ages to live, work and play.



The grand portico at Prince Arthur Residences, Yorkville, Toronto

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GETTING ON TRACK

A streetcar named PCC gives a city its identity

The streetcar is to Toronto what the bright red double-decker bus is to London, or the yellow taxi to New York — not just a way to get around, but also a symbol, an icon, an integral part of the city's identity.

Long before the 1930s, streetcars were an established feature of life in Toronto. The earliest horse-drawn carriages appeared in the 1860s, followed 30 years later by electrified rolling stock. At the beginning of the decade, the Peter Witt streetcar was the vehicle of choice. It had been in service since 1921, the year the (then) Toronto Transportation Commission was formed, but was having difficulty keeping pace with the evolving city.

So when the first Presidents' Conference Committee (PCC) streetcars took to the tracks on St. Clair Ave on 23 September 1938, they changed the face of public transit in the city forever. Eventually, Toronto would purchase 745 PCCs, new and used, the largest such fleet in the world. Remarkably, they remained in service until 1995. The vaguely Art Deco vehicle, a masterpiece of industrial design, was not only a workhorse and model of durability, it made an aesthetic statement powerful enough to capture the city's imagination. It was the PCC that gave the TTC its nickname — the Red Rocket — while conveying an image of reliability, security and even warmth. Just as important, it provided the backdrop to the mantra of the TTC as "The Better Way."

In the '30s, the vehicle had one other quality that, inevitably, it lost over the decades — its modernity. By the time it was retired, the old PCC was nostalgia on wheels. In a city where the skyline seemed to change weekly, it provided a comforting connection to the past. At the same

time, it still did the job, moving people around the city effortlessly. It helped knit the city into a coherent whole and integrate relatively new neighbourhoods such as North Toronto and the Beaches, in the east end of the city, as well as the working-class enclaves further afield, such as New Toronto, Mimico and Long Branch.

When the PPC arrived in this city, nearly two decades before the Yonge Street subway opened, streetcars were the main form of public transit. Even during the worst years of the Depression, the TTC was busy. Its lowest ridership, in 1933, comprised 145 million trips, respectable perhaps but down significantly from the peak of 400 million in 1929. The drop in passengers and subsequently the fare box forced the Commission to lay off a quarter of its staff. Economic hardship made the PCC even more attractive to the TTC. Unlike its predecessor, which needed two operators, it required just one.

As subway lines were completed, streetcar routes were closed. In the '30s, streetcars ran along Yonge and Bloor, major arteries now served by the metro. But even today, the observant will notice that Bloor widens just east of Yonge, a remnant of the days when there was a large island in the middle of the street where passengers switched from subway to streetcar and vice-versa. Though subways moved more people, they didn't provide the fine-grained connectivity so critical to the health of downtown Toronto and the neighbourhoods that formed along major arteries like King, Queen and College. Ultimately, the Yonge and Sheppard subway line extensions would speed the development of North York's "downtown," but not until decades later.



Rolling out a TTC streetcar, circa 1930s. Toronto Star, Bob Olsen / Contributor

Any doubts about Toronto's commitment to streetcars were dispelled in 1966 when the TTC announced it planned to eliminate them by 1980. A citizen-led movement formed to fight the move. The argument was simple: in the long run the most efficient thing to do was to keep streetcar infrastructure. Metro Toronto chair William Allen's claim that "streetcars are as obsolete as the horse and buggy" turned out to be somewhat premature. The scheme was eventually dropped and in the 21st century, streetcars — now Light Rail Vehicles — are back in service around the world, including some highly unlikely US centres such as Phoenix, Atlanta and Detroit.

Even in the '30s, Toronto's unwavering commitment to the streetcar bucked the

trend. Already North American cities were ripping up tracks to make way for cars and trucks. As automobile usage grew, surface transit, specifically streetcars, seemed ever so slow and out-of-date.

As British activist/author George Monbiot argues: "When you drive society becomes an obstacle. Pedestrians, bicycles, traffic calming, speed limits, the law: all become a nuisance to be wished away."

Streetcars are different; they teach patience, consideration for others and self-awareness. Thus did Toronto's decision in the 1930s to stick with the streetcar help form a city that can still be proud of its liveability.

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| <p>THE BILD CORNERSTONE</p> | <p>Toronto Airport built in Malton 1937</p> | <p>National Housing Act passed 1938</p> |
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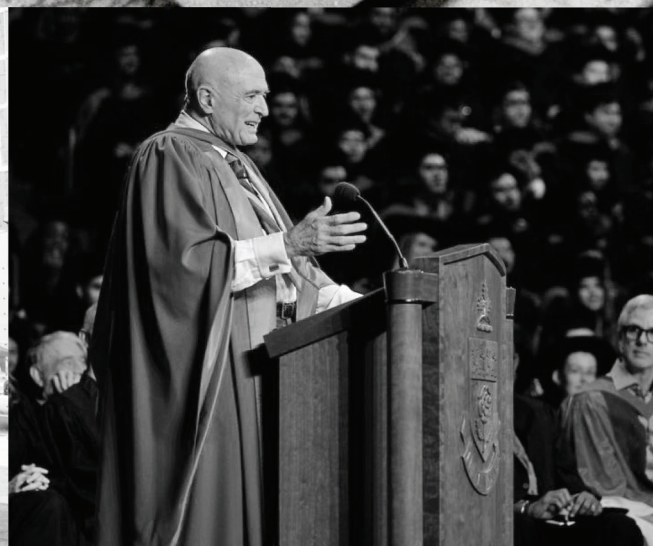
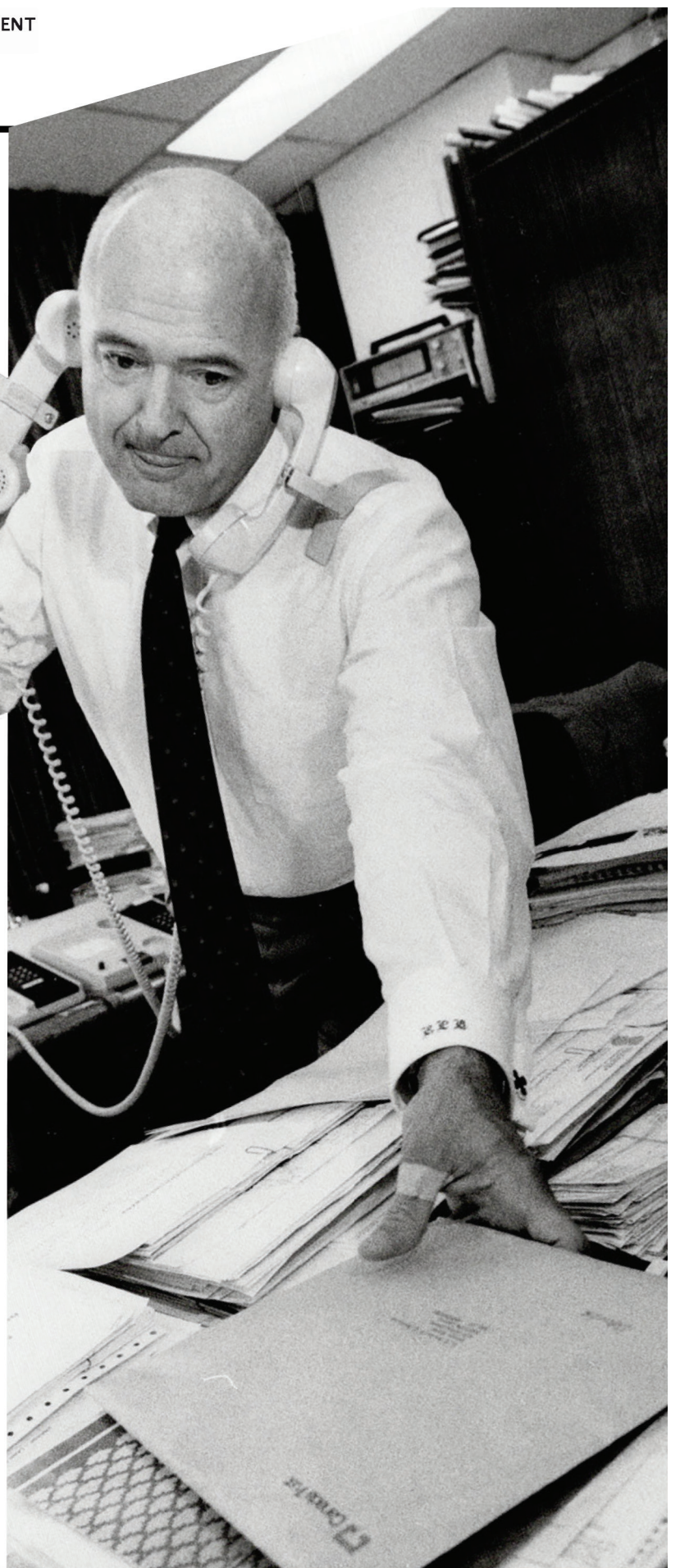
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FOUNDING FATHERS

THE MAN WHO BUILT TORONTO THE GTA

Meet the man responsible for pioneering most of the residential and commercial landscape of the Greater Toronto Area you see today. Rudolph P. Bratty, co-founder of The Remington Group and the son of Italian immigrants, took six low rise lots he purchased in North York with a couple of friends in the early 1950's and used those profits to build one of Canada's largest real estate empires. Widely known for his strategic land purchases and borderline clairvoyant forward-thinking, Rudy Bratty, with the help of his brother Jerry, has spent more than 65 years since building a diverse portfolio of low rise residential communities (ranging from traditional townhomes to sprawling custom estates), mid- and high-rise condominiums, and a vast array of industrial and commercial properties in municipalities across Southern Ontario. Today, The Remington Group manages more than three million square feet of commercial space, 80 percent of which resides in the rapidly growing City of Markham, and has built more than 30,000 luxury homes and condominiums.



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Under Mr. Bratty's visionary leadership, The Remington Group became one of the first developers to bring master-planned communities featuring mixed-use high-rise projects to traditionally suburban 905-area cities. Enter Downtown Markham, a 243-acre urban centre which was originally envisioned more than 30 years ago as separated districts of low rise housing, industrial parks, and big box plazas. This project has evolved into a compact mix of contemporary architecture and York Region's premier hub of commerce, education, art and culture. In the 1990s, who would have thought there would one day be overwhelming demand in this bucolic farm township for high end luxury retail, cosmopolitan condos, and an urban lifestyle? One man: Mr. Rudolph P. Bratty.

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