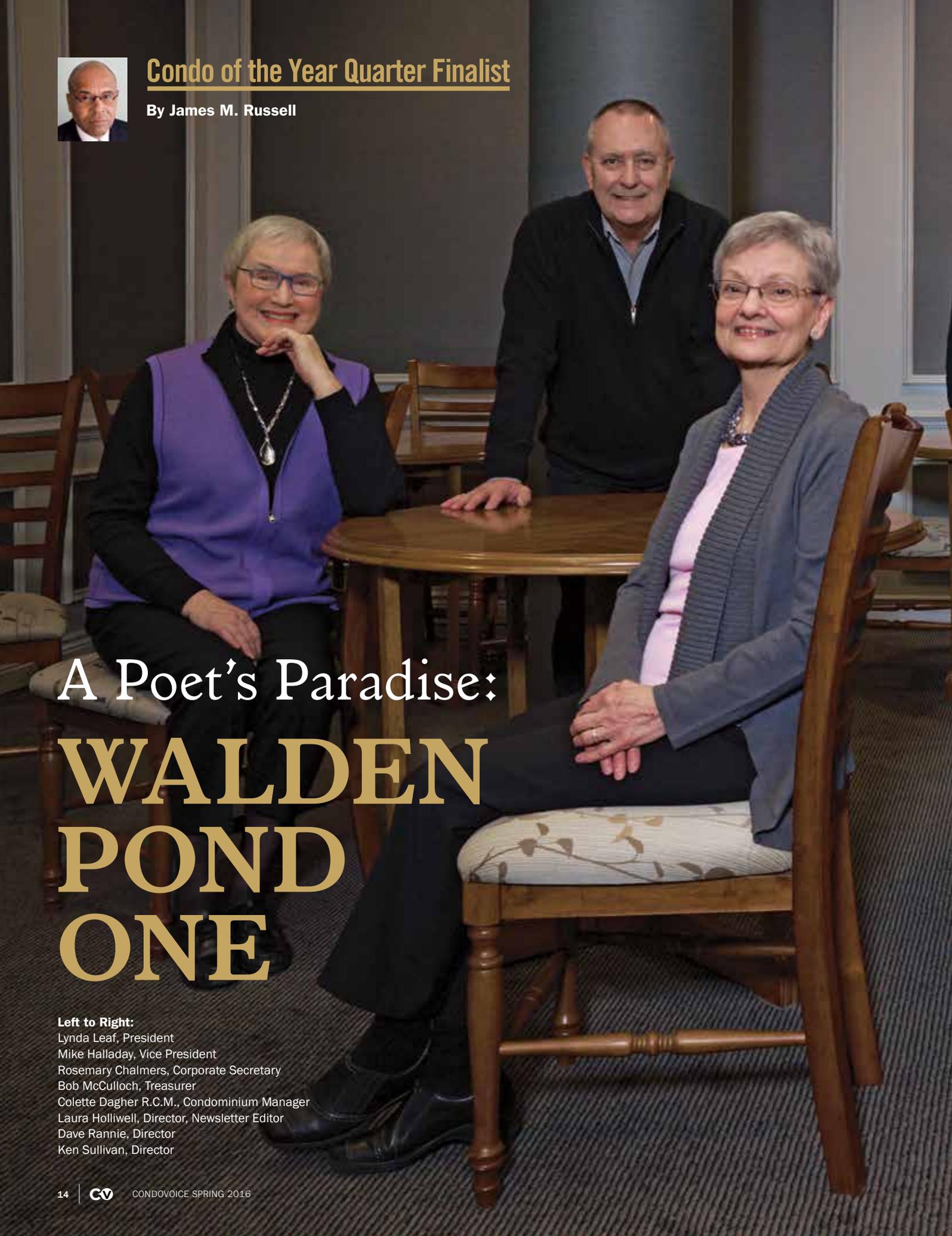




## Condo of the Year Quarter Finalist

By James M. Russell



# A Poet's Paradise: WALDEN POND ONE

**Left to Right:**

Lynda Leaf, President

Mike Halladay, Vice President

Rosemary Chalmers, Corporate Secretary

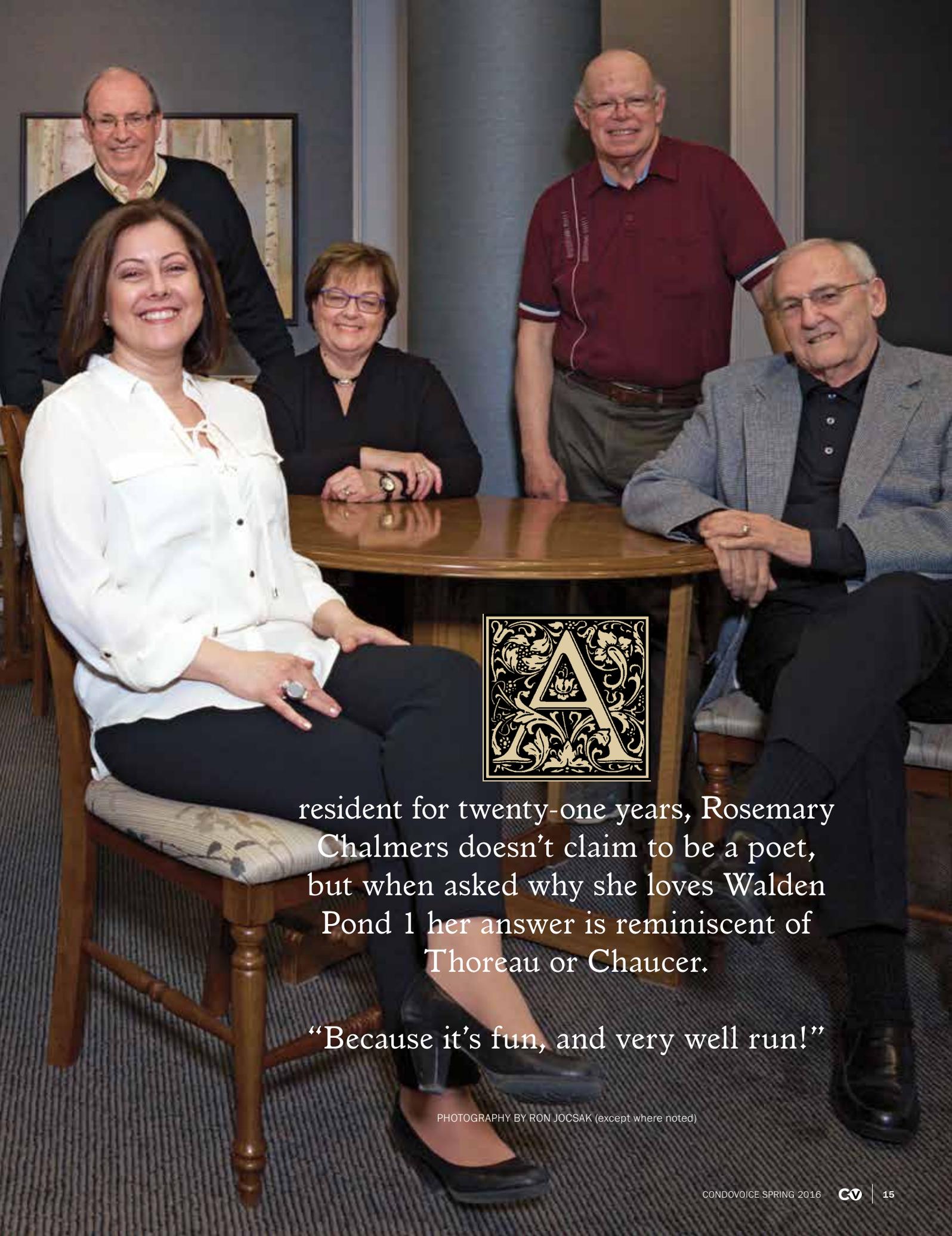
Bob McCulloch, Treasurer

Colette Dagher R.C.M., Condominium Manager

Laura Holliwel, Director, Newsletter Editor

Dave Rannie, Director

Ken Sullivan, Director



resident for twenty-one years, Rosemary Chalmers doesn't claim to be a poet, but when asked why she loves Walden Pond 1 her answer is reminiscent of Thoreau or Chaucer.

“Because it’s fun, and very well run!”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RON JOCSAK (except where noted)



TWO MID-PAGE PHOTOGRAPHS SUPPLIED BY CONDO MANAGEMENT

And Rosemary is correct. A visitor to Walden Pond 1 can't help but notice the pristine lobby and smiles on the faces of residents congregating in the building's spacious entrance as they come and go from their shopping junkets, or take a moment to chat with a neighbour after picking up their mail.

Walden Pond 1 was named after Thoreau's seminal work, not, as many people assume, after the nearby Waldon Pond, which sits near the epicenter of the historic, but not legal, 'town' of Unionville.

"Illegal?" you exclaim. Well, yes. Although Unionville, named in part after Ira White's Union Mills, was once a 'legal' police village back in the late 1700's, all such villages were abolished in 1970. So today, the official designation of "Unionville" only 'exists' in people's minds.

Walden Pond 1 is a ten storey, 142-unit building, located at 55 Austin Drive that sits on a massive plot of land, which it shares



**THEIR**  
**impressive flower**  
**beds, lawns and**  
**landscaping, earned**  
**Walden Pond 1**  
**the Town of**  
**Markham's**  
**prestigious Suzie**  
**Award.**

with Walden Pond II, its sister building.

Surrounding the ten storey Walden Pond 1 is a rainbow-like landscape of red begonia, purple fountain grass, red vodka, lime potato vine, yellow marigolds, blue ageratum, orange impatiens, lavender geraniums and many, many other blooms. Their impressive flower beds, lawns and landscaping, earned Walden Pond 1 the Town of Markham's prestigious Suzie Award.

To the east is Markville Mall, a sprawling complex with over a hundred and fifty stores and restaurants. While to the west is Austin Drive Park a 5.58 hectare (13.8 acres) green space that contains a portion of the Rouge River, a forest regeneration area, two kilometers of pathways, and woods – a picnicking, walking, running, and bird-watching paradise. The pond's name comes from the Old English words wealh and denu which mean 'foreigner' and 'valley', names given to a 'Stranger from a Valley'. The moniker is appropriate since the pond's



**THE Board's President guesses that more than half of the residents are over fifty, and that retirees make up a good portion of that group**



**Left to Right:**  
Corrine Wong, Beryl Filer, and group leader, Tessie Strader participate in Qi Gong for Seniors

aqueous volume comes, in part, from the 'strange' waters flowing off the mall's parking lot and overflow from the Rouge River, a tributary that courses through many 'valleys' on its journey to mighty Lake Ontario.

Sandwiched between the shopper's paradise and nature's Elysium, Walden Pond 1 has long been a desirable building. Board Treasurer, Robert McCulloch vividly remembers the day, more than five years ago, when his wife Betty said to him, "Boy, if one of those condos becomes available we have to move fast." And they did exactly that. When Robert passed by Walden Pond 1 one day and noticed furniture being moved out of the building, he immediately composed a short note and slipped it under the owner's door. "We eventually got a call, visited the unit and decided immediately to buy it." Neither he nor Betty regrets their rushed decision. "We love living in such an active and very together community. And, of course, there's the proximity to everything," adds Robert.

David Rannie, one of the Board's seven Directors, had a very specific list of requirements when he and his wife began shopping for an alternative to their multi-level house. "We needed something on one level for my

wife. Something in a good community. And preferably in a mature building.” They already had friends who lived in Walden Pond 1, so the transition to condominium living was smooth, “My wife and I are very, very happy here.”

As the law mandated, Walden Pond 1 had to drop its ‘adult only’ designation years ago, but Lynda Leaf, the Board’s President, guesses that more than half of the residents are over fifty, and that retirees make up a good portion of that group.

Walden Pond 1’s Social Committee, made up of Bill and Lola Guiler, Mike and Gail Halladay, Joyce Sherman, and Ken and Donna Sullivan, justly deserve the credit for the impressive number of activities, which include:

- An annual “Meet Your Neighbour” Sunday afternoon cocktail party
- Christmas “Sit Down” Turkey and Ham Dinner and caroling
- Valentines Day and St. Patrick’s Day events
- July 1st annual ‘Bring Your Own’ Luncheon
- Summer Barbeque

- Bi-Weekly tea at 3:00 during the winter
- A Summertime Picnic on their patio
- Monday evening Bridge Nights
- Tuesday morning Aqua Fit and Tuesday evening’s Euchre
- Wednesday afternoon Qi Gong and Wednesday Tile Rummy
- Thursday morning Yoga and Thursday evening’s Euchre
- Thursday night billiards
- And Movie Night every other Friday

Walden Pond 1 also has a large and masterfully organized library, thanks to the Board’s Corporate Secretary and former librarian Rosemary Chalmers.

‘Smoking’ and ‘furnishings’ are not popular subjects at board meetings. The Board of Walden Pond 1 however, does not shy away from challenges so when the Board noticed an increase in complaints from non-smoking residents about cigarette smoke drifting into their units, the Board drafted a non-smoking rule that, in July 2015, designated Walden Pond 1 – common elements and individual units – as completely non-smoking. There is a ‘grandfather’

exception that allows the smokers already in the building to continue smoking in their units, but new residents may not smoke. The Board’s move to protect the residents from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke has received wide approval from the residents, as well as real estate agents who are increasingly taking on clients looking for smoke-free buildings.

Because the Board recognized the need to better define the corporation’s responsibilities, in 2014, the Board took on the challenge of drafting a Standard Unit By-Law to establish what constituted ‘basic furnishings.’ Many condominium owners had upgraded their furnishings in their units, so it was necessary to define which improvements, such as flooring and kitchen cabinet facings, the corporation was responsible to insure. “Our new Standard Unit By-Law took months of work,” says Michael Halladay, the Board’s Vice-President. “But it is something that every condominium Board needs,” adds Laura Holliwell, who not only serves as one of the Board’s Directors but she is also the creative force behind Walden Pond 1’s award-winning



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Rosemary Chalmers, Librarian

quarterly newsletter.

The nine-page newsletter, delivered to each suite in March, June, September and December, is just one of the communication tools the Board uses to stay in contact with residents. “Our newsletter serves to educate, entertain and inform residents about their condominium,” says Laura. In addition to a regular ‘Message from the President’, the newsletter contains comprehensive information about Board decisions and their related costs, community happenings, and reminders about recycling processes.

Walden Pond 1’s Board also makes effective use of the conventional and digital notice boards installed in their mailroom and on each parking level, door-to-door handouts and a dedicated TV channel piped into each suite.

Fireside Chats, an open discussion forum for residents, are held four evenings a year and attended by Lynda and, at least, one other Board member. Some of the topics of discussion include new legislation, building related updates from the past three months and financial matters. Typically, as many



**ALDEN**  
**Pond 1 also has a large and masterly organized library, thanks to the Board’s Corporate Secretary and former librarian Rosemary Chalmers**

as forty residents turn out for the Fireside Chats – more than some Boards can hope for at their AGMs. And speaking of AGMs, the Board sets aside time both before and after their AGM for residents and Board members to socialize in a relaxed atmosphere.

The Board’s success in maintaining effective communication is not restricted to Walden Pond 1’s property line. “We have a great relationship with Don Hamilton, our local Councillor,” says Lynda. Not only does Mr. Hamilton attend many of Walden Pond 1’s social functions but he is their liaison with City Hall, recently helping the Board convince the City of Markham to lengthen the ‘signal duration’ at a nearby intersection to allow residents with mobility challenges time to complete their journey from one side of the four-lane boulevard to the other.

Typically, any condominium approaching its thirtieth birthday would find their building suffering from age-related failures but not Walden Pond 1, “Our current, and previous Boards have been quite forward looking” says Lynda, who points out that the only major repair looming in the distance is a roof renovation.



David Williamson, Superintendent, a.k.a. "Super Dave," standing next to the "Chiller," in the air-conditioning unit room.

Walden Pond 1's current Board is made up of Lynda Leaf, President; Robert McCulloch, Treasurer; Rosemary Chalmers, Corporate Secretary and Social Coordinator; Michael Halladay, Vice-President; Laura Holliwel, Director and Newsletter Editor; Ken Sullivan, Director and David Rannie, Director. Now a seven-member condominium Board for a 142 unit condominium building could seem unwieldy to some, but this Board works with focus, commitment, energy, efficiency and foresight. To help prepare for the unimaginable, the Board not only conducts yearly fire drills, but the Board members, as well as staff and interested residents, attend a yearly fire safety presentation by the Markham Fire and Emergency Services. There is also an annual Health and Safety session for all staff.

"The Board is fun to work with," says Colette Dagher, Walden Pond 1's Property Manager. "They are very enthusiastic and never refuse a repair or upgrade." Collette, who has nine years of property management experience, comes from a human resources background and has a superintendent, a cleaner and the 24/7 gate house staff under her supervision.



**THE**  
Boards of Walden  
Pond 1 have  
replaced a chiller,  
boilers, upgraded  
their water booster  
pumps and installed  
LED sensor  
lighting in the  
parking garage,  
along with CO<sup>2</sup>  
detectors.

"She (Collette) works incredibly hard, is very conscious of our money, and a great bargainer," says Lynda. "And Collette is very personable," adds Ken Sullivan.

Over the past ten years, the Boards of Walden Pond 1 have replaced a chiller, boilers, upgraded their water booster pumps and installed LED sensor lighting in the parking garage, along with CO<sub>2</sub> detectors. The Board topped up York Region's \$75 rebate to \$100 for residents who participated in the Region's Low Flow Toilet Program. The Board also negotiated a bulk rate for any resident who wanted to upgrade their taps and toilet hoses. Looking to the future, the Board is considering installing solar panels on the roof.

In their wisdom, the residents of Walden Pond 1 invested not only in a brick and plaster castle, but in a well-run and friendly community guided by gentleness and good, and as Mr. Thoreau once said:

"Goodness is the only investment that never fails." **CV**