

CONDO OF THE YEAR – 4th Quarter Finalist

Atrium II (MTCC #650)

By **JAMES M. RUSSELL**

“Location, location, location is what attracts people to Atrium II, but it is the wonderful sense of community that distinguishes it from every other condominium.”

CCI Toronto is thrilled to announce that Atrium II (MTCC #650) has been selected as the 4th quarter finalist of the annual Condo of the Year Award. Congratulations are extended to MTCC #650!

Further details on this contest may be found on the CCI-T website at www.ccitoronto.org. The 2011-2012 annual grand prize winner will be selected from amongst the quarter finalists in the late summer of 2012 and will be announced at the CCI Toronto Annual General Meeting on October 25th, 2012.



Says Board President Donna Grabowsky, one of the first residents, “This was a new experience for most of who lived in Atrium II back then (1985). High-rise condominiums were a fairly new concept, even in Toronto. But, right from the beginning we felt at home here. It was like small-town Manitoba. People you met in the halls, or in the elevator, smiled, said ‘hi’ and engaged in conversation.”

Atrium II was built in the sleepy north end of Toronto, in a vibrant area now called the City of North York, and before that, the Borough of North York, and in the late 1800s, Lansing. Back then the Dempsey Brothers Store, which sat on the northwest corner of Yonge and Sheppard, served as a milk depot for local farmers.

The building was designed by an architect who believed that condominiums should be large enough to actually live in. Consequently, Atrium II contains only two-bedroom residences, all of which range from 1,680 to 1,900 square feet - huge by today’s standards.

Atrium II’s original declaration, dated August 20, 1984, contained just seven bylaws. The total operating budget that year was \$759,025, an amount that increased just 2.1% in 1985 under the leadership of the first Chair, Ivan Wiseman.

Over the years Atrium II has seen more than its share of famous residents. People like:

- Lou Ronson, a world-renowned human rights crusader;
- Eleanor Caplan, M.P. and former Minister of Health;
- General Branwell Tillsley and General Maude Tillsley of the Salvation Army;
- Thomas Wells, who served in the Provincial Legislature from 1963 to 1985; and,
- A.J. Billes, co-founder of Canadian Tire.

Situated just a block north and a block east of North York’s busiest intersection, the twenty-four storey Atrium II

is a shining example of great design, attentive governance and active residents. So much so that in 2009, Atrium II won the John Filion Award for Excellence in recognition of the fact that, while many condominium boards



Atrium II’s lobby.

try to create the quality of life that Atrium II has enjoyed from Day One, not many are successful—especially with a resident population as diverse and multi-cultural as Atrium II’s.

The Social Committee, led by Board member David Phillips, organizes weekly activities including movie nights, opera night, Mah-Jong, bridge and poker nights, and an appropriately named Chit Chat Club. As well, the Social Committee organizes annual celebrations like Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, a summer BBQ, Halloween Handout, Warm Clothing Drive, North York Harvest Food Bank Drive, winter holiday gatherings, and in 2009, Atrium II’s 25th Anniversary party.

“Over 80 residents attended this year’s

Mother’s Day party,” says Board member Marsha Rosen. “Everyone had a fabulous time,” adds past President Mary Humphreys.

Every social event is organized and run by residents. Although each event represents not only a budget-line expense and involves weeks, sometimes months of planning, the residents and board view them as important opportunities for people to socialize, have fun, learn, and share their love of life with their Atrium II neighbours and friends. Helping to maintain avenues of communication is Atrium II’s professional-looking newsletter, COMMON ELEMENTS, which is published three times a year by the Communications Committee, headed by Denise Marshall.

Other resident-run committees are dedicated to Community Action, Property Standards, Finance, Building, Communication, Reserve Fund and Renovation. A Board member chairs each committee.



Donna Grabowski, Board President in the Atrium II’s beautiful Japanese garden.

Atrium II’s seven-member Board of Directors, one of the most active and visionary in Canada, has just completed overseeing a massive \$1.5 million renovation that included the pool, lobby, hobby room, library, and the installation of a much-needed guest suite. They also moved the fitness room, which now offers residents a

magnificent view of Atrium II's sheltered garden.

“During the renovation we also switched over to a Building Automation System which allows staff to monitor and manage major equipment from a



Jane loves her workouts on the elliptical machine.



Ali enjoys a swim in the Atrium II's pool.

central location,” says George Gera, Chair of the Building Committee.

Atrium II's popular fitness and aqua-fit classes—free to residents—encourage friendships among the more active residents, and the impressive exercise

room, pool and whirlpool have become great meeting places.

In keeping with the area's rich Jewish heritage, Atrium II has a Yiddish Club and every year residents organize Chanukah with candle lighting, songs and treats. But Atrium II is very much a multi-cultural community, so mere weeks after celebrating Chanukah the residents ring in the Chinese New Year with an always well-attended party.

Perhaps Atrium II's most amazing accomplishment is turning the Yonge Corridor Condominium Association (YCCA) into a force to be reckoned with.

The reformation of the YCCA began approximately six years ago when Atrium II's Board, residents and staff began to realize that rapid development in their area was not only contributing to traffic gridlock but that the rapid-fire surge in density was impacting the environment and infrastructure, and



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placing a huge strain on utilities such as electricity, water and sewage. So the residents and staff, led by Dr. Mel Katzman, Chair of Atrium II's Community Action Committee, successfully reformed and revitalized the already existing YCCA with the intention of making the voices of North York residents heard by the three levels of government. Today the YCCA boasts a membership of more than 30 condominiums and soon could be amalgamating with another association to boost the roster to over 40 member condominiums.

Over the past few years, the YCCA has: Helped to establish a feasibility study for an overpass from Yonge Street to the east-bound 401.

- Stopped, with the input and help of their municipal councillor, the installation of a large video sign at the nearby intersection of Yonge and Sheppard.
- Provided substantial input toward the planning and construction of the MINTO development at Sheppard and Kenneth, which is just north of Atrium II.
- Organized meetings with provincial ministers and heads of municipal departments so that members of the YCCA could communicate their concerns and make suggestions, many of which have already resulted in improvements to the area.
- Applied unwavering pressure on all levels of government in an effort to reform the OMB.
- Compiled a database of reliable service providers and contractors.

THE FUTURE:

As mentioned before, the Atrium II Board is currently working with City and provincial officials to try to come up with a solution to the daily gridlock caused by the overburdened south-bound onramp to the east-bound 401 as well as addressing the always-busy intersection of Yonge and Sheppard.

One of Atrium II's residents, a statistician by profession, is also conducting a study into why there is a large differ-

LOUIS RONSON'S HARD HAT STORY

This hardhat was donated to Atrium II by Louis Ronson, one of its first residents.

When Mr. Ronson first moved into his condo, the building was still being finished so he had to ride the construction worker's elevator and was therefore required to wear a hardhat.

Mr. Ronson, now in his late 90's, donated the hardhat just before he went off to live in a retirement residence (where he is loving it).

Atrium II's Senior Property Manager, Terry Ferster, had Mr. and Mrs. Ronson's names engraved onto a small plaque, which was then attached to a tape measure. A hard plastic case ensures that it that hardhat will remain pristine for decades in Atrium II's newly renovated library.



ence in their low maintenance cost per square foot compared with buildings of the same age, square footage, common area space and amenities, so other condominium boards can learn from the best how to manage utilities, security, and landscaping.

And speaking of landscaping, not only do the grounds of Atrium II harbour a beautiful Japanese garden replete with benches, stone-bottomed stream, Japanese Maple, stone pagoda and a wonderfully calm ambiance, but last year the grounds were nominated for the prestigious North York Great Front Gardens Contest, an annual event run by the North York Horticultural Society to recognize outstanding front gardens that contribute to the beautification of North York.

"It's not only a wonderful place to live

but to work also," says Atrium II's Senior Property Manager Terry Ferster.

With Atrium II's healthy reserve, forward-thinking Board and active residents, the future looks great for the building. That feeling of optimism and well-being is evident even to a visitor of 65 Spring Garden.

"I'm so glad we live here," Donna Sheine, wife of current Board member Bill Sheine, said to her husband as they stepped through the front door to go on one their frequent walks around the neighbourhood.

Congratulations to the Board, staff and residents of CCI's quarter-finalist Atrium II. You have set an admirable standard for excellence in governance and resident involvement. ■