

CONDO OF THE YEAR – 2nd Quarter Finalist

Condo DSCC #190



Liberty@Discovery Place

BY: JAMES M. RUSSELL

It was a typical Wednesday morning for Christine: Respond to emails, give instructions to staff, wrestle with her ever-present, and seemingly never shrinking, to-do list when the phone rang.

“We were thrilled when we got the news,” said Liberty’s Property Manager Christine LePage about the morning CCI’s Rebecca Harvey called with the news that her condominium (DSCC #190) had snagged the coveted Quarter Finalist spot in CCI’s Condo of the Year competition.

Liberty is part of Discovery Place, a collection of three condominiums located a block east of Pickering Town Centre.

“It used to be just a grassy field, and before that, farmland,” says Christine.

Designed and built for residents who want a stress-free lifestyle, the Liberty is situated

Congratulations are extended to Liberty@Discovery Place who been selected as the 2nd quarter finalist of CCI Toronto’s annual Condo of the Year Award!

The 2012-2013 annual grand prize winner will be selected from amongst the quarter finalists in the late summer of 2013 and will be announced at the CCI Toronto Annual General Meeting in the fall of 2013. Further details on this contest may be found on the CCI-T website at www.cci-toronto.org.

within walking distance of the Pickering Recreation Centre, the Pickering Library, City Hall and the sprawling Pickering Town Centre.

“It’s a pleasant location in the heart of the city,” says Christine.

Built by Tridel, the 11 storey, 220-unit condo tower contains an innovative mix of studios, one- and two-bedroom suites, and penthouses. Noted for its innovative design from Day One, Liberty has gone on to receive other accolades, including the Gardens in Bloom award in 2012, a commendation given by the City of Pickering. And most recently, Liberty was featured in the local newspaper, the Pickering News Advertiser.

Although ‘location, location, location’ is one of the big factors that draws residents to the Liberty, volunteerism is what makes Liberty ‘tick’ and at the heart of that volunteerism is their vibrant and ever-busy Social Committee which organizes and runs:

- An Annual Party in late December
- A summer BBQ
- Scrabble/Card Nights
- Coffee Morning
- Euchre Night
- Bingo Night
- Bowling Night
- Movie Night
- Casino trips
- Pot Luck Dinners
- and the always well-attended Line Dancing Night

Most events are free to residents, although a few carry a small charge, just to cover costs.

Liberty’s residents also enjoy the usual building amenities such as: pool, gym, laundry room, library, billiards and table tennis room, and a multi-function room, but unlike most condominiums, the residents of Liberty share some of their facilities—like the multi-function room—with their neighbours in the Millennium, which is immediately



The Board
L-R: Hardev Bains, William Tissert, Christine LePage, Michele Kerkos, Charles Morgan and Aki Namba.

north of Liberty. It is a collaboration that, over the years, has helped build a sense of community and cooperation.

THE BOARD

Can you think of another condominium where one of the Board members styles and cuts the residents’ hair?

Board member William Tissert, who has lived at Liberty since residents began moving in September 2005, and joined the Board six months ago, is a profession

hair stylist who not only donates his time to the all-volunteer Board but he also brings his hair styling expertise to home-bound residents and provides rides to any resident who prefers to have their hair coiffed in the comfort of his salon.

Sitting at the conference table in Christine’s office, the Board members reflect on their jobs. "I love being on the Board," says William, "It's a comfortable group and we enjoy sharing our common goals."



Multi-purpose room. (L-R: Christine & Michele)



Resident using the gym.

“And because the Board is a diverse group, we each bring different expertise to the table,” adds Director of the Board, Hardev Bains, who is not only one of the original residents but also served on the building’s Development Committee and helped organize the moving-in process when Liberty was finally ready to be occupied. “I used to live just next door and watched as Liberty was built.”

“Of course, it isn’t as if we (the Board) haven’t had challenges,” adds Board Member Chuck Morgan in a circum-spect tone.

Keeping the channels of communication open between the residents, staff and the Board has been and continues to be one of those challenges, but having the Property Manager’s office positioned in the lobby makes it easy for residents to speak to Christine or one of the office staff. Their eight-page monthly newsletter also helps to bridge the communication gap, as the newsletter is full of important information, scheduled events in the building and in the surrounding community, and even the “Chuckle of the Day.”

Another of the Board’s challenges has been the budget. “In these tough economic times, as a Board it is our responsibility to ensure that we tighten our belts in order not to impose hardships on our residents. To do this, we have to be smart and creative,” says Michele. Liberty’s Board not only put in place a comprehensive Budget System to help them manage their day-to-day expenses but they also developed a Budget Plan which allows them to track where the money is going and helps them save toward long-term goals. “Many of our residents are on fixed incomes so we have to keep a tight rein on the budget,” says Chuck.

Later in my interview it was revealed that yet another one of the Board’s challenges arose with the original management company, a problem that was remedied when the Board hired Newton-Trelawney more than four years ago.



Rick, the Liberty Superintendent

“But all condo boards have challenges. It’s just part of growth,” says William.

Christine smiled, and added, “I’ve been a property manager for more than twenty-five years and I can safely say that this is one of best boards — they’re wonderful.”

Part of the Board’s success comes from the fact that they have a single goal when discussing an issue. “We work hard to stay united,” adds Aki Namba, who is ninety-four and acts as a “Special Consultant” to the Board. William, in his early 30s, is the youngest member, and Chuck, President of the Board, Michele Kerkos, VP, Roxanne Brown, and Hardev fill in the middle years.

Liberty’s Quarter Finalist Award comes at a special time for Aki. Just recently he received his Bachelor of Commerce Degree from the University of British Columbia. Aki earned the degree seventy years ago during a particularly disgraceful period in Canada’s past when Canadians of Japanese origin were forced into prison camps. Aki was

attending UBC when he was imprisoned.

SOLAR AND OTHER GREEN SUCCESSES

Liberty is the only condo building in Durham that has installed solar panels. In 2005 when Liberty’s Board of Directors was under the leadership of Rudy de Vries, the Board, in conjunction with Tridel, paid over \$200,000 to install 76 panels on Liberty’s flat-top roof. At that time, the Ministry of Energy was offering a 25% rebate, making the installation a no-brainer.

The solar thermal system, which the Board projected would have a break-even period of 6.5 years, is composed of five main components: the solar collectors, the preheat tanks, connecting piping pumps, the heat exchanger, and the control system. The pumps, heat



Tri-Sorter



Main Recycle Room

‘Two years ago, Aki started The Liberty Emergency BUDDY System in the building to address the needs of the building’s elderly residents.’

exchanger, and control system are grouped into a single unit. The system has two hydraulic loops: one filled with a propylene glycol solution and another with portable water. Circuit pumps move the hot glycol liquid from the solar collectors to the mechanical room. Heat is then transferred from the glycol circuit to the portable water through a heat exchanger. The heat generated during the day is stored in the solar pre-heated tanks that are connected to the domestic hot water supply.

The system’s pumps are activated by the control system when a sufficient temperature differential is reached between the collectors and the water in the pre-heated tanks (usually 20F or 11C). Just as the Board had predicted, the solar panel system has provided Liberty with an economical way of offsetting the building’s use of natural gas and electricity. Especially since approximately 1/5 of residents’ water consumption typically goes to showering and washing.

However, with Ontario’s short summers and long winters, a conventional hot water boiler is still necessary. But the hot water boiler doesn’t have to work as hard because the solar thermal system pre-heats what would otherwise have been cold water before it goes to the boiler. During the winter months and during cloudy weather, the system is heavily dependent on natural gas but in the summer months, natural gas consumption is kept to a minimum. This represents a savings of approximately \$12,000 per year.

Liberty’s other green features include tri-sorters in every garbage room so that



Aki Namba with his degree from the University of British Columbia

residents can dispose of their wet and recyclable garbage in different chutes. Last year the feature resulted in Liberty diverting tons of trash from landfill to recycling.

For the physically challenged, the condominium has parked a wheelchair in the laundry room to make it easier for those residents who have mobility needs to do their washing and drying. Additionally, the Board and Management have upgraded the building by installing railings in the elevators and exercise room, and retrofitted all the garbage room doors with push-button activated automatic doors.

Liberty’s Board is currently looking into the idea of charging stations for hybrid, and all-electric cars and scooters.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

Of course, every great Board needs a great property manager and staff, which is why the Board decided to change companies and hired Newton-Trelawney four years ago. Christine, and her staff are just one of the pillars of success that makes Liberty such a great place to live. But when I asked Rick, Liberty’s Superintendent for the past two years, what makes he attributes to the condominium’s success, his answer is short and accompanied by a big smile: “it’s the tenants.”

COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY

Two years ago, Aki started The Liberty Emergency BUDDY System in the building to address the needs of the

building’s elderly residents. Its purpose is “to create and promote a greater sense of security and peace of mind regarding potential medical emergencies which may befall living alone as well as senior couples living in the Liberty Condominium.” Overseen by a Coordinating Committee, the BUDDY System pairs two resident volunteers with each participating resident. The Coordinating Committee’s BUDDY SYSTEM information sheet lays out not only the structure of the BUDDY SYSTEM but the limitations including, “Your BUDDY will not attempt to do anything for which he/she is not qualified.” But it is sentence three, under the heading “Purpose, Objectives and Limitations that first catches one’s eye as it exclaims, “You are not alone! You will have two BUDDIES!”

Liberty’s Board of Directors was instrumental in establishing the Durham Condo Presidents’ Alliance, an organization that represents about 3,000 residents. The Alliance meets monthly to discuss common local issues such as transit, security and, just recently, Ash trees and the blight that was threatening their health. In the past the Presidents’ Alliance meetings have included Pickering’s Mayor, the local MPP and MP, local transit officials, and representatives from the Durham Police.

THE FUTURE

According to the City of Pickering website, their population is expected to grow from the current level of approximately ninety-one thousand to more than one-hundred and thirty thousand in 2031. Yet despite the rapid urbanification going on around Liberty, its far-thinking Board and great staff will continue to ensure that Liberty continues to be a great place to live. “After all,” says Christine, “We have the best residents, which is in part why we have strong unity and a happy spirit”

And, I may add, a fair number of residents with expertly coiffured hair. ■