

Brockville develops new opportunities built on solid heritage

St. Lawrence Community welcomes developers combining heritage, lifestyle and sustainable manufacturing

STAFF WRITER

– The OCR Construction Report Special Feature

Brockville, Ontario's oldest city, is proving how a municipality can reinvent itself to create attractive investment and development opportunities, while retaining respect for its traditions, heritage and well-established strengths.

You can see evidence of the resurgence on the waterfront of the St. Lawrence Seaway, where Fuller Construction is working on the foundations for the new \$18-million Maritime Discovery Centre, part of the \$60-million Tall Ships Landing, a luxury mixed-use condo development.

The Centre, to showcase the life and culture of the 1000 Islands and St. Lawrence River, is an example of a successful public-private partnership, with the City of Brockville and Fuller jointly developing the project, with significant multi-million dollar contributions from the federal/provincial infrastructure program.

While this attraction, scheduled to open in 2012, is the most highly visible and central project in Brockville, it is certainly not the only initiative for the manufacturing centre with a population of 24,000, about an hour from Ottawa.

Brockville's Director of Economic Development Dave Paul says the community is open for business with appealing incentives for developers, as it encourages new environmentally-sensitive manufacturing projects to supplement and support the community's traditional "Fortune 500" manufacturing base.

"We're looking to encourage solar energy and wind farm manufacturing," he said.

The community's major factories and plants have, to some extent, suffered with the recent recession and trend to globalization but Paul says most of the community's key employers are remaining in town and, notably, even when facilities close or reduce their size, employees and their families elect to stay in Brockville because of the community's quality of life.

"Some have chosen to stay here and commute to the Ottawa-area for work," Paul said. This isn't an unreasonable idea – the commuting time from Orleans to Kanata during rush hour would be no greater than the drive each day from Brockville to jobs in the greater Ottawa area.

Meanwhile, residents enjoy the "resort lifestyle" with key municipal amenities without the stress and traffic of the big city.

Of course, Paul and other local officials – and new businesses setting up in the community – would rather have people from Ottawa, Kingston and other areas to commute (or move) to Brockville, and they are laying out the welcome mat.

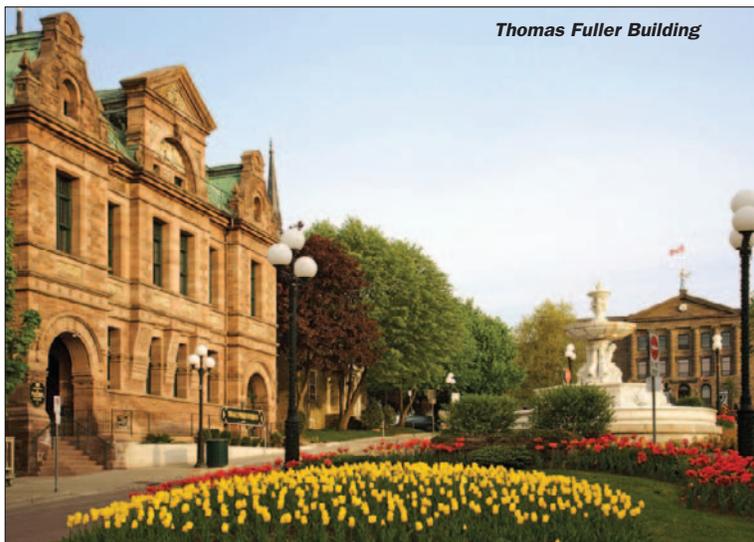
Sabby Duthie, director of operations for The Wedgewood retirement residence



Dave Paul in his office



Thomas Fuller Building



downtown, just a few metres from City Hall, is an example of the successful integration of new and old in this community, which has the slogan: "Homestyle Charm – World Class Business!"

After immigrating from the United Kingdom in the 1990s, the Duthies discovered Brockville's beauty, before building from scratch a successful retirement centre in Kanata. They then took a big step a few years ago, selling their existing business to move back to Brockville to develop the approximately \$20 million, 109-unit resort retirement complex.

The facility, opened in 2008 has already achieved 86-per cent occupancy, with a vibrant community life in a new building that melds well with Brockville's historical downtown district.

Sabby Duthie says she has enjoyed working with Brockville municipal officials, who have avoided the bureaucracy and delays you might find elsewhere.

Paul says Brockville is working to develop resources and services for new Canadian immigrants who traditionally migrate to the larger cities, by providing social networking and community resources. These policies are reasonable, because entrepreneurial immigrants can create hundreds of jobs and bring a fresh perspective to the community.

The Maritime Discovery Centre is another example of how to encourage development and business opportunities in the waterfront area, a former industrial site with great potential. The Fuller Group of Companies expressed interest in an initiative to combine a home for the family-owned Brigantine Fair Jeanne with a luxury condo and boutique hotel/retail project appealing to purchasers from Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. The Ottawa Citizen described the Tall Ships Landing's ideal clients as having "a passion for the water and deep enough pockets to pay prices that start at \$305,900 for a 995-sq. ft. condo looking over Brockville and rising to \$995,900 for a penthouse and 18,994 sq. ft. of living space and a huge view down the river."

The Tall Ships Landing project has had its share of snags. One Brockville resident opposed it and work needed to be delayed until an Ontario Municipal Board ruling; then the recession hit. But Maritime Discovery Centre executive director Bob Burchett says work is moving forward to create an interactive experience which will attract people with its diversity of "experiential learning" opportunities.

"We're planning to have animals including North American otters and a very large aquarium with fish from the St. Lawrence," Burchett says. "There'll be a dive tank where divers can do training, visible and open to the public, along with a multi-pur-



Bob Burchett



pose theatre with retractable seats and walls that can be used for a broader space.”

“The theatre and other space around it will allow room for gatherings of 250 for banquets and other functions . . . this will be a mini-convention centre,” he said.

+Dave Paul, meanwhile, says the city (especially following the recent municipal elections) is continuing to give the green light to development. Paul, himself, has taken the lead in his own field: He is the current president of the approximately 1,000-member Economic Developers Association of Canada, representing communities from coast-to-coast, north to south.

This of course means that Paul will respond

to economic development inquiries with respect for integrity and ethics, but he is certainly free to explain the advantages of building in Brockville.

“Brockville is very much focused on green and sustainability and are also part of the United Nations biosphere,” he said. “We want to walk the talk, living and thinking future sustainability.”

These elements are consistent with Brockville’s potential: Nearby at the Wedgwood, youthful owners and staff are creating a welcoming environment for seniors in an environmentally-responsible building that blends into the downtown heritage district, with City

Brockville’s construction and development incentives

Brockville has put out the welcome mat for builders and developers with incentives to reduce the risks, costs and minimize bureaucracy in developing new projects.

Fast approvals

“If a developer has all his plans done, we will give him a building permit within 14 business days,” Brockville’s economic development director Dave Paul says. This attitude helped Brockville win 70 jobs for screen printer Ketchum Manufacturing, which faced one development roadblock after another in the Ottawa area, before discovering the community’s rapid approval process.

No development charges

No building permit fees in the downtown area

Community Improvement Program – incremental tax grants for five years

“This means, if someone builds in the downtown area, the developer will only need to pay taxes on the pre-development land value for five years – representing a significant saving during the start-up stage,” says Paul.

Brownfields Program – property and school tax rebates

“If developers are working with old industrial land, they “don’t have to pay for the cost of remediation,” Paul said.

Altogether, the tax savings and incentives can save a developer more than \$100,000 in costs.

For more information

You can call the Brockville Economic Development Office at (613) 8772 ext 445, email info@brockville.com or visit the city’s website at <http://www.brockville.com>.



The Wedgwood, a recently-opened retirement community in downtown Brockville



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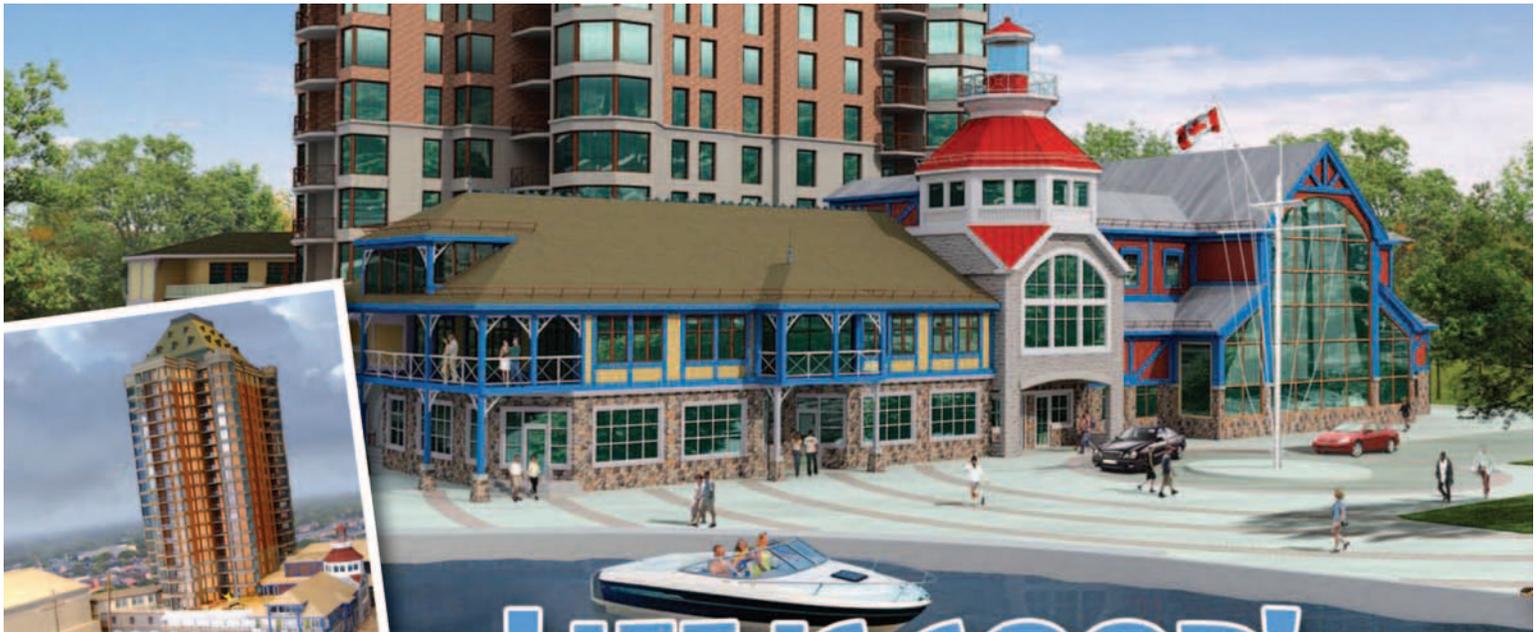
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Simon Fuller rediscovers Brockville heritage on Ebay

Tall Ships Landing project traces its roots to great-grandfather Thomas Fuller

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The story behind the Tall Ships Landing/ Maritime Discovery Centre development in Brockville goes back four generations and relates to the successful integration of the Fuller family's history in construction, along with some timely innovation and opportunity, including the surprising purchase of the downtown heritage building on eBay.

Simon Fuller of the Fuller Construction Group says his great grandfather, Thomas Fuller, designed this original federal building in Brockville in the 19th century when he served as Chief Architect of the Dominion of Canada. It's architectural style is similar to Fuller's design of the Langevin Block facing Parliament Hill (Fuller also designed the original Parliamentary Centre Block and Library).

The downtown building on Court House Avenue, which originally served as the Post Office and Customs House, changed hands in the 1960s and, after years of use as a Catholic cultural centre, evolved into a flea market in the 1990's – eventually the building fell into decay.

Then, in December 2003, Fuller discovered the 12,000 sq. ft. building for sale on the eBay online auction site.

"Apparently someone planning a hotel project purchased it, signed a contract, but the financing for the project failed when a terrorist bomb went off in Indonesia, so the owner put it up for sale with the hope of recovering some of his money," Fuller said.

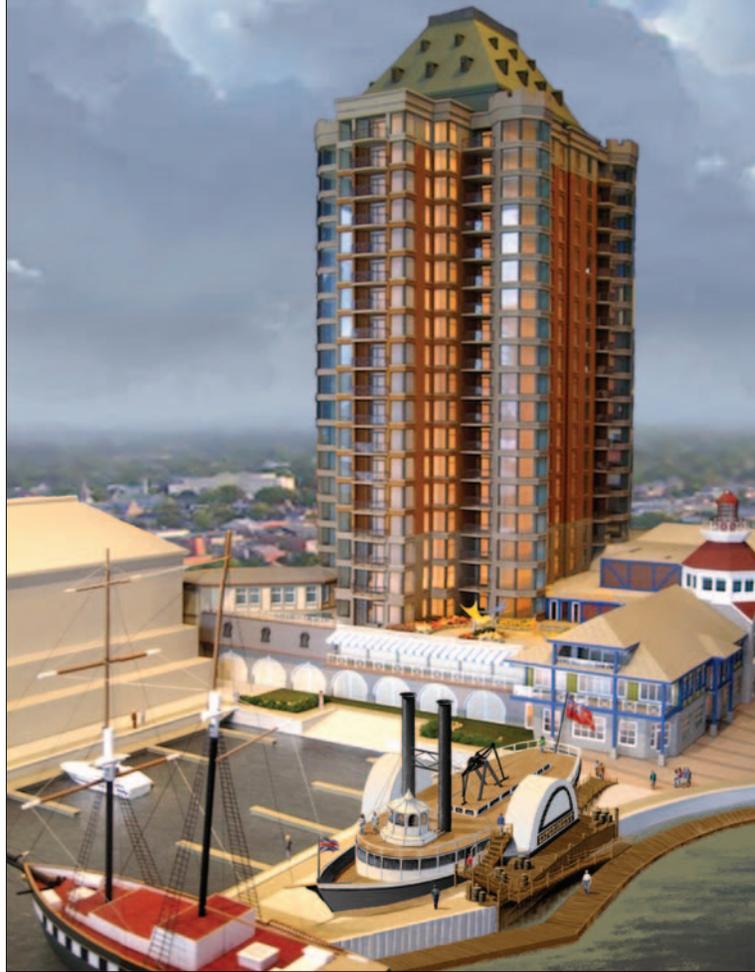
"He wanted \$350,000, and we bought it."

Fuller decided to restore the building to its original heritage character. He said while the ground floor had been redeveloped, the upper floors contained all of the original fixtures, even the original linoleum flooring from the 19th century.

"This proved to be a project of passion, not for the rate of return," he said. Ultimately the Fullers poured about \$3 million into the renovations (though the company secured a \$600,000 federal heritage grant. The City of Brockville, to encourage development in the core, waived development fees and any new taxes on the improved building for five years.)

The restoration included designing up-to-date mechanical and electrical systems in a manner that maintained the building's heritage character and appearance.

Current tenants include the federal government's Service Canada on the ground floor and the provincial Crown Attorney's offices on the upper floors, ironically restoring the building to its original public-service functions. The project took about 18 months to complete, and has received recognition -



the TOBY award for historical office building of the year from the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA).

However, Fuller discovered a much greater Brockville development when he concluded work on his eBay-purchased building.

"The City was overjoyed at the fact of having the great-grandson of the original architect doing this work, putting passion into the project, and revitalizing the downtown core with a true heritage building," he said.

Fuller was attracted to a 3 ½ acre vacant harbour front site, which he thought was ideally situated for development. Municipal officials told him the owner, from a prominent Brockville family, had declined to sell it to other developers for more than 20 years. Having observed the renovations of the Post Office, (now called the Thomas Fuller Building) from their office across the street, the landowners were impressed enough that they agreed to sell the land to the Fuller Group.

Fuller describes the site as "a centre ice location," befitting a landmark waterfront development, including condominiums,

restaurant, shops, boutique hotel, Maritime Discovery Centre and marina. Bytown Brigantine, the Fuller family's foundation for character development under sail, will be docking their tall ship "Fair Jeanne" at the site.

Fuller, meanwhile, requested a zoning change to allow his company to build the 20-storey Tall Ships Landing mixed-use condominium development in a city that had an eight-storey height restriction.

The original rules would have allowed for the same overall density, but with multiple eight storey buildings occupying most of the land. The higher "point block" development enabled Fuller to keep open space and public areas at grade. "We weren't asking to increase the density – we simply wanted to shape it differently," he said.

Brockville City Council liked the idea, gave approval in two unanimous votes, and changed the city's official plan in 33 days. But one resident objected, requiring the matter to go before the Ontario Municipal Board, which ultimately approved the project.

Meanwhile, plans for the Maritime Dis-



Gino Giannandrea, left, chairman of the Maritime Discovery Centre steering committee, with developer Simon Fuller by his side, prepares Wednesday to hit the switch to detonate dynamite to excavate for one of three elevator shafts for Tall Ships Landing, a 20-storey condominium project to be built on Brockville's waterfront. The Discovery centre will be included in the project.

covery Centre evolved from a smaller \$5 million project to a much more compelling (and attractive) \$18 million, 27,000 sq. ft. centre.

"The Maritime Discovery Centre is not a museum or a science centre," Fuller said. "It is designed to inspire curiosity such that visitors will have a different experience every time they come."

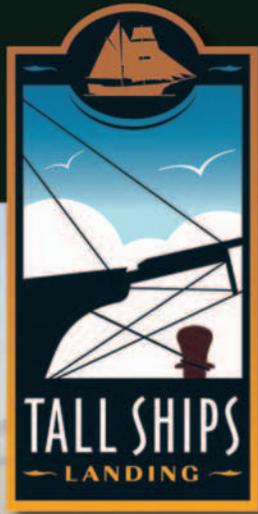
The facility includes an elevated "Captain's Walk," resembling a steam paddle-wheeler that used to "ply the river," providing pedestrian access and views of the harbour and waterfront.

The condos at the Tall Ships Landing project are selling well, says Fuller, ironically largely to individuals who have achieved success in the construction industry, especially from the Ottawa area.

They know Fuller's reputation and they can afford the quality of this extraordinary recreational lifestyle in the Thousand Islands which, in comparison to Ottawa or Toronto, is less expensive.

"Brockville is one of Canada's finest small cities," Fuller says. "With a beauty that rivals Muskoka and the Adirondacks none can compare to the views from this location in the Thousand Islands with the views, a constant parade of sea going ships and a vibrant waterfront."

This area is renowned for its incredible freshwater diving to shipwrecks below and the city owns several of the Thousand Islands, affording an incredible recreational playground and coastal living experience. With all of the hometown charm of a small city (less than 25,000 people), Brockville provides many of the cultural, retail and health care amenities you would expect to see in a much larger city, and still it is less than an hour away from Kingston and Ottawa.

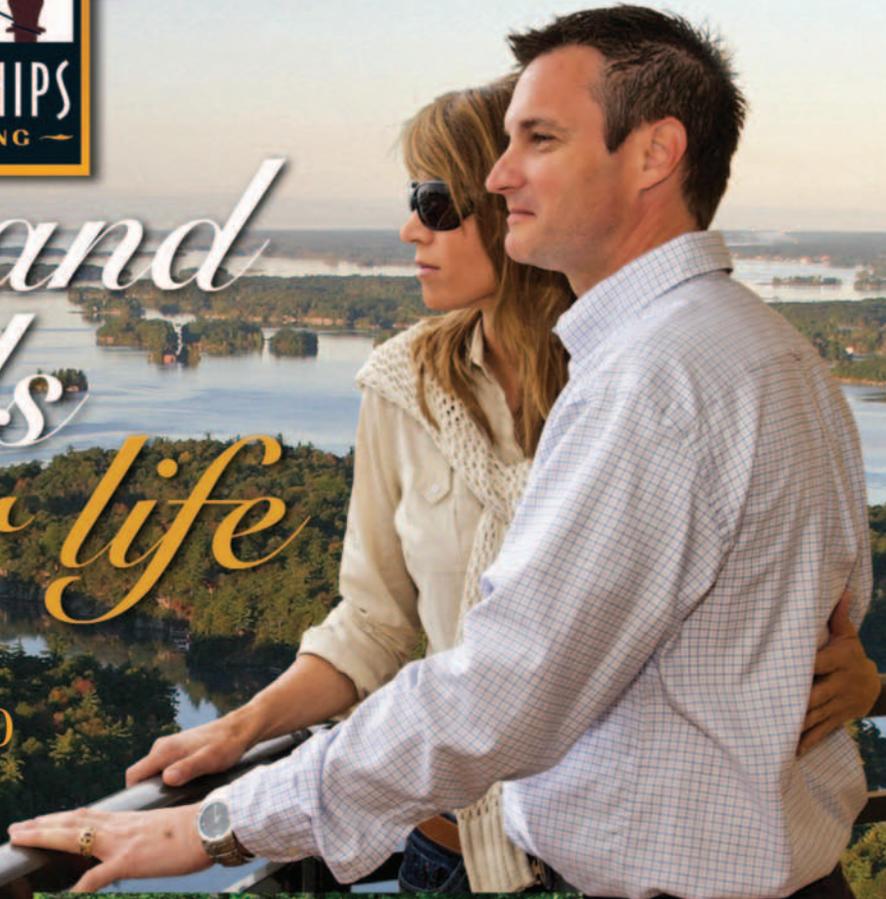


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