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“We have had to start doing things we’ve never done before, and some of them are here to stay forever. Hand sanitizer dispensers in lobbies, and gloves for our concierges.

—FOREST HILL GROUP
CEO ROBERT KLOPOT



KEEPING RESIDENTS SAFE AT HOME

Property managers, boards and staff make sweeping changes

ADAM BISBY

When the Forest Hill Group made an unusually large order of surgical masks, rubber gloves, disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer in early February, the inventory was expected to last for months.

Little did they know. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing hundreds of its residents to self-isolate, and compelling everyone to

practise physical distancing, the Toronto-based condo management firm is going through four to five litres of sanitizer a day across its 90-plus GTA properties, says president and CEO Robert Klopot. “We just got hazmat suits for getting to quarantined people in emergency situations.”

And that’s just the beginning. With at least 1.5 million people living in condos across the GTA, according to Statistics Canada, the group efforts of residents, boards, property

managers and staff to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are almost as sizable as the challenges they face.

PULLING TOGETHER

The most pushback the Forest Hill Group has experienced from residents was early on, when it made the decision to close all its amenity spaces, Klopot says, adding that the grumbling disappeared when most GTA condos followed suit. Now, “people are really lending each other a hand. We’ve seen

a lot of instances where the community has helped elderly people with groceries and with other little acts of kindness.”

Outside his home in Corktown’s Canary Park development, resident Steven Doyle says he is happy to help out. “My neighbour is older and can’t get out to walk her dog,” the middle-aged dentist explains, leash and dog-waste bag in hand. “If I’m being honest, it’s nice to have something to do right now.”

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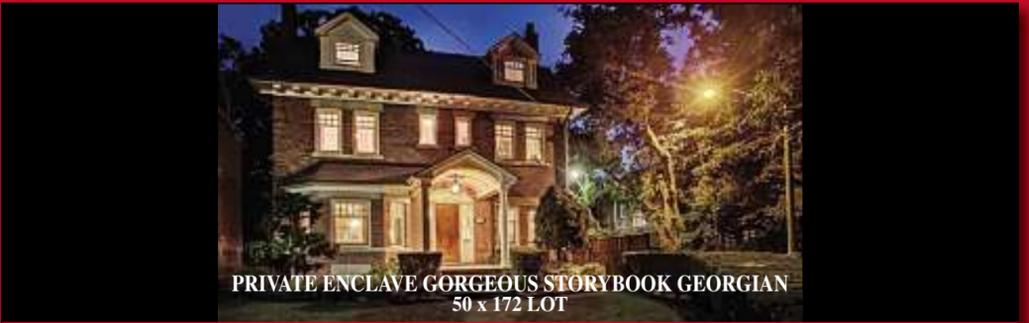
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POST HOMES

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CELEBRITY HOMES

9-1-1 STAR HEWITT BUYS US\$6M HOUSE IN L.A. COMMUNITY

Jennifer Love Hewitt has a new place to call home and it's family-friendly, to boot. The actress and her husband Brian Hallisay have bought a US\$6-million house in the casually chic seaside community of Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles. The couple will share the 6,300-square-foot property with children Autumn, 6, and Atticus, 4. The boxy white clapboard home, which Variety calls a "Cape



Cod-inspired Hamptons-style residence," has six bedrooms and 6.5 bathrooms. The ground floor boasts floor-to-ceiling glass windows and doors, and French doors open to a terrace on the second floor that overlooks the grassy backyard and pool. Hewitt stars on the Fox/Global television series 9-1-1 as Maddie Kendall, and Hallisay plays her ex-husband Doug Kendall. *Postmedia News*

Returning snowbirds present a particular challenge

SAFETY

Continued from PH1

DEALING WITH PUSHBACK

Condos being their own little microcosms of the city, not everyone in every building is on board with physical distancing and self-isolation. "The majority of residents are pulling together and trying to get through this," says Nancy Houle, a founding partner at Davidson Houle Allen LLP who specializes in condo law. "But we do have some outliers, and that's where legal intervention is required. We've had to write strong letters to individuals who have refused to self-isolate, explaining that what they are doing is putting the concierge, the cleaners, the superintendent and other residents at risk."

While the recently enacted Quarantine Act gives police authority to remove individuals from public streets, it does not enable condo management to confine residents to their units, Houle explains.

That's why communication is key. "Making sure that health and safety information is timely and getting out to our communities, as well as our staff, is our focus around the clock right now," Klopot says. "One of our biggest challenges is around all the snowbirds coming home. We've got to keep them informed about what to expect when they have to be quarantined for 14 days. We have to tell them not to touch elevator buttons if they're not wearing gloves. That we're going to knock three times

when leaving packages or groceries at their doors." New condo ownership presents another challenge. "You've been waiting years for your new home, and when you first arrive you're suddenly bombarded with all this information," Klopot says. "We're trying to soften that initial shock."

From posting notices on doors and elevators to sending emails and updating social media, there is no such thing as too much accurate COVID-19 information, says Audrey McGuire, the vice-president of operations for the Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario (ACMO). "The situation is changing very quickly and we update residents as soon as possible. If they aren't comfortable online, they receive a phone call."

EXPANDED ROLES FOR CONDO STAFF

Property managers wear many different hats at the best of times. Now, instead of dealing with five or 10 people on a given day, hundreds of residents are turning to them for help and support, McGuire says. "They're not medical experts. They're just doing the best they can to provide the information and assistance residents need."

Cleaning staff are in overdrive too. According to Klopot, a typical Forest Hill Group building has its lobby fully cleaned twice a day, with elevators and common areas wiped down every 15 minutes. Deliveries, which have become at least 40 per cent more numerous than before the pandemic, are met at the front doors by gloved condo staff and deliv-



SUPPLIED

At the Avenue and the Imperial Plaza condos on St. Clair Avenue West, property management ordered haz-mat suits so staff can safely reach quarantined individuals if needed. Communication is the key to keeping residents safe.

ered to units.

New steps being taken for staff safety

While some Forest Hill managers are working remotely, Klopot says their classification as essential workers means most of them are working behind closed doors in on-site offices.

One of their principal responsibilities at this time involves staff safety, he continues, pointing to steps such as taping or installing Plexiglas around concierge

areas to promote social distancing. The question is how long these measures will remain in place. "We have had to start doing things we've never done before, and some of them are here to stay forever. Hand sanitizer dispensers in lobbies, and gloves for our concierges. Before this, these protocols had benefits, but there was no downside to not practising them."

As it is, the new protocols, along with an uptick

in employee sick leave, have prompted an online hiring spree at Forest Hill.

BOARDS STEPPING UP

Some condo boards are rallying volunteers to deliver groceries and other necessities to fellow residents who are vulnerable to COVID-19 or in quarantine, Houle says. Some are also attempting to prevent the spread of the virus by providing Q-tips so residents don't have to touch

elevator buttons.

At the Toy Factory Lofts in Liberty Village, the board has gone so far as to offer residents the option of deferring their April maintenance fees.

"I've seen goodness in just about everyone I've dealt with," ACMO's McGuire says. "People in the condo community are being really kind and trying to help each other. There really is strength in adversity."

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