

World's largest Ronald McDonald House to host 81 families

\$33 million Toronto project attracted co-operation and support from trades and community



HEATHER SEFTEL-KIRK
– The GTA Construction Report Special Feature

Ronald McDonald House Toronto, the largest residence of its kind in the world, welcomed its first families recently and is ramping up to meet its 81 family capacity. The \$33 million project, designed to be a house within a garden, within a city, has been designed as a sanctuary and place of healing for children and families.

The project has been funded with a \$8.7 federal capital grant, \$9 million from Ontario and the balance through fundraising. The new home will serve three times as many families as the previous residence.

Ron Rivet, project manager and principal with True North Project Management Inc. said the project had an exceptional level of co-operation and support.

“Normally in my job I would be reporting to a corporation but for this project I worked with a volunteer building committee comprised of executives from different firms,” he said. “Where site meetings can often be tense, here the general contractor and many of the subs had been involved early and donated time and money towards the project so everyone had a vested interest. It was clear every person involved understood the end goal and knew why they were there and it made a huge difference in the very nature of the project.”

Montgomery Sisam Architects principle Bob Davies says he appreciates Ronald McDonald House Toronto’s staff and Board of Di-



Ronald McDonald House

Continued from page B1

rector's exceptional vision. "They care so well for these children and families," he said. "They know exactly what they want them to have and what they need."

Davies and his team began the design process by talking with staff and families about what worked and what didn't work in existing houses. They toured the Manhattan House, then the largest in the world, and from that came the concept of a home within a garden within the city. "The basic formula for these houses is a 'home away from home' but we wanted to take it a step further," he said. "Knowing many of these families may come from somewhere far away from the 'big city of Toronto,' we wanted to provide them with a refuge or sanctuary within the city; a place where they could leave the hospital behind, and leave the city behind."

Jane Marco, executive director for Ronald McDonald House Toronto says the final design conveys all the qualities they wanted the house to express. "Although all the Ronald McDonald Houses share a common vision, each one manifests in a different way depending on the community. This is exactly what we wanted for Toronto; a sheltered home in a garden within the city."

Davies says the site for the house is exceptional and provided ample opportunity to achieve the design goals. One side of the block faces McCaul, which is only a block

from University Ave. and the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). The other side of the block faces Henry, a residential street of old Victorian homes. The house is nestled right in the middle of the block and cushioned by two significant gardens.

"On Henry this house repairs the fabric of the street," he said. "This piece of land has been owned by several groups over the years and saw homes torn down, a parking structure put up, that structure levelled and a parking lot put in, and now it contains a home again."

Arriving at the house, Davies says visitors and guests enter through a garden gate, designed by an artist and set inside a stone wall. Past the fountain, intended to symbolically wash away the city, up the steps and across the porch, you finally find peace.

"The whole experience is intended to be like a coming home and leaving everything else behind," he said. "You enter the house into a living room, the heart of any home, with windows on two sides looking into the gardens, a stone fireplace on one end and a large aquarium on the other. We know environment can affect healing so we wanted this to be a respite and a place for peace and healing."

The four-storey building contains abundant windows and light. "You can look from one side of the building, through the garden and see people in other parts of the building," Davies says. "Sharing that space and going through the same sorts of things gives people a sense of support and community that is so important."

One significantly different element in



True North Project Management is proud of its involvement on this outstanding project.

*Congratulations to
Ronald McDonald House Toronto
on their new home and the much
needed service they provide.*



**TRUE NORTH
PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

True North Project Management Inc
783 Lambe Court, Mississauga, Ontario L5W 1Z1
T 416-573-9895 F 905-696-8420

www.truenorthgroup.ca



this house from others, according to Davies, is in the kitchen space design. "Many of the houses have residential style kitchens on each floor and families are assigned a kitchen. The problem was, if a family went to prepare a meal and that space was already crowded they would often leave, not knowing where else to go. The kitchen here is designed as a long diner style set up with many islands running down the middle. Families are still assigned cupboards and fridge space but now, if one island is being used, they just move easily down to the next. We hope it will make the space freer and more accessible."

The upper floors are primarily residential and contain the large, hotel-style suites families will call their own for the duration of their stay. Davies says the rooms all fea-

ture windows and are set off a single loaded corridor with more windows and furniture scattered throughout the halls. "This is a place adults can gather after children have been put to bed for relaxation or social time and again, windows orient and connect them to the world outside. Each room has chalkboard panels beside the door so kids can decorate and claim their home space."

The house also features a fitness centre, reflection room, library, business centre and a playhouse in the exterior courtyard, and a private, one-room school. "The school is for both patients and their siblings and allows them to continue their learning and a routine of normalcy."

Working with the most critically ill chil-

Ronald McDonald House

Continued from page B2

dren through their relationship with Sick-Kids, Marco says families often arrive not knowing how long they'll be staying. "We can say the average stay is 40 days but within that there may be some here for a week, and some here for six months or longer."

Whether there for a short or an extended stay, Marco says Ronald McDonald House Toronto gives families a chance for normalcy. "It's hard to articulate the impact of what we offer but it's really about giving families a chance to stay together as a unit and to have relatively normal things going on while they are making these heavy decisions and going through treatment."

Part of the normalcy is providing families with a manual of information to orient them to the city; offering expressive art programs and play programs; and discussion groups for parents around topics like maintaining discipline.

On track for LEED Gold, the house is designed to be a healthy and energy efficient facility with low VOC materials used throughout, maximum access to daylight and natural ventilation. Other initiatives include storm water collection through a cistern, solar panels for hot water heating and the sourcing of recycled and local materials. Considering the fragile state of many of the children while undergoing treatment, special attention has been given to all aspects of indoor air quality.



Novascape Contractors Ltd. had responsibility for the house's landscaping. Part-owner Joe Genova said he enjoyed participating in the challenging project. "There were a lot of components to the landscaping with the water feature, a BBQ area, the fencing and gardens," he said. "It was a great chance to showcase what we can do and a pleasure to use our skills on such a worthwhile project. Every aspect of this project was wonderful to see and we are so pleased to have been able to contribute."

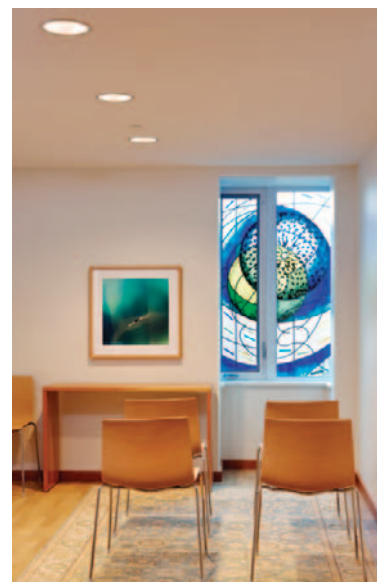
The house has started welcoming families, but it will take some time until it is at



full capacity with 28 staff and 24-hour service. "We need to make sure everyone is prepared to offer the level of service and commitment we want to provide our families," Marco said.

She says the most extraordinary thing about this house has been the depth of commitment, dedication and goodwill she has felt throughout the process. "Our volunteer building committee has been guiding this project for years – from finding the site to selecting the architect and construction partners and all they have done ensured extraordinary results."

Davies is proud of his company's in-



volvement in the project; a sentiment reflected by many who have worked on the house. "This seems like a rare and fantastic commission. What the charity does; the success stories for recovery you find within the walls of this house; it is a rich and rewarding experience for us all."

Rivet says it has been a wonderful experience working on this project. "It was an honor working with the dedicated staff and volunteers here. I believe such a project is rewarding personally for all who contributed to bringing this creative and exceptional house in on time and under budget."

When it comes to doing landscape work, Novascape Contractors Ltd. prides itself on providing clients with the full package.

Versatility has allowed Novascape to carve out a niche for itself doing work on high-rise condominium, subdivisions and industrial commercial sites since Joe Genova and his partner Saverio Griffo founded the company thirteen years ago.

Probably the best sign of Novascape's industry excellence is the fact that the majority of their customers are repeat clients.

Continuing to please clients one by one and grow at a steady rate by developing new relationships with industry experts is Novascape's goal for the near future, always focusing on the versatility and dedication that has been the key to their success.

**We are proud to be part of the
Ronald McDonald House project.
Congratulations to the whole team on their success.**



17-6175 Highway #7 Unit #17, Woodbridge, ON L4H 0P6
Tel: 905-850-6648 Fax: (905) 851-1217

www.novascape.ca

*Congratulations to the
whole team working on the
Ronald McDonald House*

*We are proud to be part
of this great project!*



We make it our responsibility, to provide our clients with the best painting services available in Canada all while maintaining our impeccable reputation. Conveying flawless customer services, the most advanced products and most cost effective techniques to our clients we are able to expand our expertise and excel into new markets in the years ahead.

Cervini Painting And Decorating Ltd.
6 - 21 Kenview Blvd., Brampton, Ontario, L6T 5G7
Phone: (905) 789-8293 Fax: (905) 789-8091

www.cervinipainting.com