

"COMMUNITY"

is a team effort



by Hugh Heron

As a builder of new home communities, I like to think that the people who move into our homes will enjoy safe lives. Of course, no one can control that, even in a gated community. But at the risk of sounding like a broken record, Canadians in general are secure in the knowledge that when the unexpected happens in life, they can count on professionals to help. I'm speaking of our Police and Fire Services, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel.

At The Heron Group and Heathwood Homes, we're great supporters of the people who work in these public services. They enhance the "community" aspect of the neighbourhoods we build. Although no society is perfect, ours is comfortable partially because of the work these dedicated individuals and teams do on a daily basis. Considering how difficult and risky their jobs can be, they obviously care about making a difference. And they do. Toronto is considered one of the safest cities of its size in North America, which hasn't happened by chance.

During the past few years, Heathwood and Heron have made special efforts to help people feel more secure across the Greater Toronto Area and to show support for our police officers, EMS workers and firefighters. We've done it through The Mikey Network.

In 2002, we saw firsthand how tragedy can strike when you least expect it. Our partner and friend, Mike Salem, experienced sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) on a golf course and died. We founded The Mikey Network in his name to promote heart-healthy living and to place public-access defibrillators called MIKEYs in public places. Since 2003, we've placed nearly \$1 million worth of MIKEYs – and we couldn't do it without the help of our community partners such as EMS. As part of the Toronto EMS Cardiac Safe City program, they provide the training for the onsite staff to use the defibrillators,

which is a critical component to the success of the Mikey initiative. In 2006, The Mikey Network donated two mountain bicycles and a rescue cart, each equipped with a MIKEY, to Toronto EMS to be used in life-saving efforts in crowded public places where full-size vehicles can't easily get through.

The police and firefighters are also partners who are often on the scene when the MIKEYs are in use, and who help us achieve our goals. Recently, we took our gratefulness and respect for these departments even further by supplying 56 MIKEYs to be placed in Police Service facilities, courthouses and collision centres across the GTA, and by donating six MIKEYs to Toronto Fire Services for placement in "training facilities" around the city. We saw this as an opportunity to help protect the police officers and firefighters who are so dedicated to protecting us. Now they may have a second chance at life should they experience SCA.

It's about caring for each other as human beings and doing what we can to help. Most builders give back to the greater community in some way. But it's also up to the public to work on making their neighbourhoods safe. Each and every one of us can take steps to make our homes safer and to pay attention to what's going on around us. We're all part of the team.



Hugh Heron is principal and partner in the Heron Group of Companies, president of Heathwood Homes and a member of the board of directors of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well as a past president of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.