



Giving back to the community with heart

In 2003, the Heron Group and Heathwood Homes established the Mikey Network to honour the memory of former partner Mike Salem, who experienced sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) and died on a golf course in 2002. This non-profit charitable organization promotes heart-healthy living and places public-access defibrillators called Mikeys in high-risk public places. In Mike Salem's name, the network works with community partners to offer a second chance at life to people of all ages who experience SCA. To support this worthy cause, visit www.mikeynetwork.com.

New versus reno



HUGH HERON ON-SITE INSIGHT

I know someone who is renovating a large 35-year-old home. Recently she said to me, "We're spending so much money, we could have bought a brand new house!"

Certainly, people renovate homes without such a major financial outlay, but as it often happens, one thing led to another... and it's taken months of upheaval, mess and money to bring the entire house up to consistent modern standards.

Her comment about being able to buy a new home is interesting, and those who are considering major renovations may want to look at the big picture before making that decision.

Renovations can run into tens, and even hundreds of thousands of dollars and in the end, you still have

an older home. In the case of a family homestead, historical home, a dwelling you love or a house that's in the perfect location, renovation can be an exciting and worthwhile practice. But if you're not living in the home of your dreams, compare renovating to buying new, and do it fairly.

Remember, we don't build homes today like we used to — we build them better. When you purchase a new home, you benefit from state-of-the-art design and construction techniques.

Today's homes are built for the way modern families live, with open-concept spaces that bring people together. Our new homes are more comfortable, healthier, energy-efficient and greener than ever before.

When you buy new, a design consultant will guide you through the many choices of features and finishes to help you make your home reflect your personality. If you renovate and you are not someone who visualizes well, you may need to hire a design or decorator, which will add to the cost.

Location is a critical part of your home choice. Buying new means that you can also look at a different locale that might meet your lifestyle needs better. It may be closer to your workplace or kids' schools and shopping. Maybe it's near parks or in a community with walking trails and ponds. It might even be in the heart of the city, if that's what you've dreamed of. Do some research and figure out where transportation is going in your current area and the places where you may look for a new home.

Having said all that, renovating can result in a wonderful home; if you decide to take this path, do it right. Be careful and keep an open

mind to possibilities. If you redo a room or two, the other spaces in your home will pale by comparison, so be aware that one thing may lead to another.

It may be tempting to use the underground economy for your renovation, but you take a terrible risk. You may end up with a contractor who is not up to speed on Ontario Building Code, or who will take your cash and run. Even worse, that builder may not be covered by insurance or WSIB, so if any accidents happen on your property, you are responsible.

The best thing you can do is turn to the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) which counts many fine renovation firms in its member roster. BILD provides a free and fantastic Reno Guide that is packed with information to consider before you renovate.

The Guide lists five steps to take to a successful reno, the first of which is selecting a reputable, trust-

worthy renovator. BILD even presents Renovation & Custom Builder Awards every year. You can check www.bildgta.ca for information.

Ask around as well. Find out who the contractor has worked for in your area and ask these clients whether they were happy with the finished product and the service. It's the same advice I give new home buyers — do your homework.

Purchasing a new home or renovating an older one should be an exciting and happy experience. Whichever you choose, take steps to make sure you get the best results for your hard-earned money. And then enjoy!

— Hugh Heron is Principal and Partner in the Heron Group of Companies and President of Heathwood Homes, as well as a former Member of the Board of Directors of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and a Past President of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.