

NEWHOMES

Feeling the love



MARTIN SLOFSTRA
EDITOR'S
NOTE

A nice little side story to the main event on my recent visit to the Island of Bryan (see full story, centre spread this section) was provided by a Kingston, Ont. couple Michelle and Kurt Streicher.

Nice enough that the couple spent seven glorious days at Caerula Mar Club on South Andros Island, Bahamas a.k.a. HGTV's *Island of Bryan*, but they did it with a twist.

Imagine if you will that Michelle had booked this resort months in advance — planning it as a big surprise — not telling her husband exactly where and keeping the location secret from family and friends, until well, the Season 2 premiere this past Sunday night.

Very cleverly, and for nine days leading up to the show's premiere, Michelle would post clues on her Facebook page, photos taken of her trip around the resort, but in such a way not to reveal the exact location, at least not until the Sunday premiere, when word finally broke out.



For this Kingston, Ont. couple, visit to Island of Bryan was a big treat

And, "what initially began as a mystery holiday for Kurt turned into an amazing experience full of surprises for the two of us," she says.

"After several months in the dark, Kurt 'kinda' guessed where we were going two hours before our flight out of Fort Lauderdale. However, we were both surprised when Sarah and Bryan walked into the airplane

lounge to check-in for the same 9-seater flight to South Andros," says Streicher.

When the couple got to the property, a media contingent from HGTV, ET Canada, Global (and myself) had also arrived to profile the resort and interview the Baeumlars, then discovering that the week had been blocked off to regular guests.

"Thankfully they honoured our booking," and "we felt as though we snuck in to an exclusive party and witnessed some very cool behind the scenes action."

Michelle says Bryan, Sarah and top chef Sebastian took the time to interact with them several times and Sarah loved that she kept the holiday location a surprise for so long.

"We saw firsthand just how kind hearted, down to earth and generous they are and how much they are loved by the residents of South Andros. They've created amazing opportunities for an island with a low population but very high unemployment."

Once all the media and Sarah and Bryan left on Thursday, the couple had the entire resort to themselves. A special viewing of Episode 1 was arranged so they could see it a few hours before everyone else.

Needless to say, this was unlike any holiday they had ever had. Says Streicher, who by the way happens to be a travel agent: "Looking for a holiday away from the crowds? This is the place."



Looking for a location away from the crowds? This is the place to stay, says Michelle Streicher, a Kingston, Ont.-based travel agent.

It's time to align housing supply, population growth and transit



RICHARD LYALL
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Municipalities have a lot of work to do if they are going to tackle Ontario's housing crisis. I'd suggest starting by linking housing supply, population growth and transit.

One of the few people I know who really gets this concept is Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Steve Clark.

He has spearheaded some of the province's ongoing shrewd moves to increase supply and cut red tape, which RESCON applauds. Clark is a very forward thinker who extolled the virtues of linking a mix of housing around future transit stations in transit-oriented communities at a recent industry conference.

While individual municipalities control the approvals process, zoning and site planning, the GTA is one big entity and the engine of growth for Ontario.

So here's my big ask of the minister: considering that housing and transit were the hottest issues of the election his government won, why not appoint a housing/transit czar who can link housing supply (including the missing middle), population growth and transit?

For its efforts to boot supply, I commend the City of Toronto. It launched HousingTO 2020-2030, a progressive 10-year plan in December to tackle the city's housing crisis. The plan includes building 40,000 affordable rental homes, helping seniors and the homeless, and recognizing that housing is a right.

These are all important. But let's focus on housing supply for a second — 4,000 rentals per year is just a drop in the bucket compared with how many people scour the city for a rental home, or for those rentals to impact housing prices.

Meanwhile, it's going to take 10 years to build each of those 40,000 rentals from permit applications to ribbon cuttings.

Simply put, the City of Toronto and the GTA as a whole are not producing enough housing units to

accommodate about 115,000 people that come here every year. We need more supply in rentals and new housing to stabilize the market.

A tip of the hat to respected housing analyst Ben Myers, who recently crunched these numbers from Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation and BuzzBuzzHome on new housing:

- Housing completions for the Toronto census metropolitan area (CMA) have been above the 20-year average (32,000) at a five-year average of 37,000 units, but square footage has shrunk.

- In the Toronto CMA, the 41 million sq. ft. of housing space built in 2019 was the lowest amount of housing supply delivered since 1996. The 20-year average is 59 million sq. ft.

- Last year, builders/developers built 73,000 bedrooms — that's down from 148,000 in 2002.

We also need to think more about transit. There is a huge disconnect between residential and transit planning — we need to bring both sides to the table at City Hall more often so that we can plan to build more complete communities.

Millennials, seniors and the disabled need to have access to transit so they can live out their everyday lives. There are consequences to leaving transit out of the housing supply equation, as well as not getting enough housing supply to the market.

The missing middle — mid-rise condos, stacked townhomes, row homes — is still missing and must be part of the intensification solution if government and industry work together to ensure these homes are prioritized and built.

They will give more people badly needed, diverse housing options in downtown and urban areas near transit (or future transit) stations, and they can be built with wood to lessen the carbon footprint. From there, people can commute to their jobs around the GTA. Let's get someone to connect the dots so that we can build transit-oriented communities more efficiently and effectively.

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