

Norman Reisman was an industry icon



Ontario's building and construction community lost an icon of the industry with the passing of Norman Reisman on Jan. 10.

The 72-year-old builder co-founded Toronto-based Great Gulf Group of Cos. with his brother Elly in 1975. The company builds homes, shopping malls and office towers throughout North America.

To colleagues in the business, Norman was known for constructing towers, condos and office buildings that transformed the urban landscape across the continent.

"Norman loved the industry and especially the people behind it, all the way to the jobsite trenches," says Tad Putyra, president and COO, low rise, at Great Gulf.

To friends and family, he will be remembered for his positive attitude, sense of humour, mischievous mindset, and sharp wit.

No occasion was too minor for celebration, no accomplishment too small

to keep the champagne corked.

"He was a very unique individual and a very big supporter of everything we did here at the Residential Construction Council of Ontario," says RESCON president Richard Lyall. "He was a big innovator and leader in our industry for the past 30-plus years. His contributions will never be forgotten."

Norman was born Oct. 24, 1948. He was the first of six children. He once considered a career as a professional skier in Austria, but after a run down the slopes decided to try his hand at another vocation.

He began his construction career as a builder doing summer jobs for his father and teamed up in the 1970s with his brother to build homes.

Their first venture was a modest single-family housing project in Waterloo. From that, Norman and his brother grew their company and expanded it across Canada and into the United States.

Their vision grew skyward as they

transformed the urban landscape with high-rise towers, condos and office buildings.

The brothers were committed to architectural distinction and their projects won many awards. Their company grew into a fully integrated group of residential, commercial and industrial developers and builders.

Norman had plenty of business stories but the ones he most loved to tell were of his family, which included his wife, Michelle, his adult children Gregory and Alessandra, and many nieces and nephews.

Norman's humour flowed and bubbled into the world, full magnum, according to his obit.

He loved life and – rather than tell people how to live – just lived and invited everybody else to join in.

"He would lead with a twinkle in his eye or a sly conspiratorial smile, and follow with sledgehammer-blunt corniness or with scalpel-sharp wit," the obit reads.

"There was always another joke, just around the corner, waiting to be told. And no one loved them more than Norman, who laughed till he cried with each retelling."

Even in the last months of his life, while battling cancer, Norman would talk to others about their future plans for travel or relocating to a warm island, quipping that he was just going a little further.

In addition to his immediate family, Norman is survived by his brother Elly and Dragana, Sam and Rose, Dolly and Mo, Hannah, Larry and Marielba. He was the son-in-law of Brenda and the late Barry Netkin, brother-in-law of Brad and Jen, and Lisa, and doting uncle to Elissa, Josh, Faryl, Natalie, David, Laura, Adam, Jesse, Gabe, Maya, Jordan, Jack and Isabel.

In lieu of flowers, the family is asking that donations be sent to Dr. Benjamin Goldstein, The Centre for Youth Bipolar Disorder at CAMH, or to The Temmy Latner Centre for Palliative Care.