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Street Smarts: The magic of Mimico

All of the conveniences, none of the crowds: Toronto's best-kept secret is revealed



Weekends are sweet at Birds and Beans coffee shop in Mimico. Tyler Anderson/National Post

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Special to National Post

Toronto has a love affair with the condo, with 28,466 new-build units purchased in 2011. Thousands more are planned. Suite size, price, amenities and architecture are important, but more and more, a building's neighbourhood is being considered the ultimate draw. The fourth part of a lengthy series examining the GTA's new condo 'hoods.

It's nearly noon on a crisp Sunday in February and, as usual, Mimico's Birds & Beans café is busy. Three baristas scurry behind the counter, grinding bird-friendly beans and preparing freshly brewed coffee in soup-sized mugs. In the

back room, joggers fresh off a waterfront run compare stats while sipping lattes. In the front room, a young couple entices their children with the shop's home-baked milk chocolate chunk cookies.

As the doors continually open and close, owners David Pritchard and Madeleine Pengelley mingle with the customers. The couple has lived in the area for 20 years and chucked their information technology careers seven years ago to operate the café full-time. They greet almost everybody by name, including a boisterous group of regulars at a table near the front door who are talking up their South Etobicoke neighbourhood of Mimico. Several are new to the area, one has been there for decades while another has returned to his familial roots. But one thing they have in common is their delight in living on the water's edge.

"We moved out this way because we were starting a family and wanted a bigger house," says former Leslieville resident Kyra Trainor, a 40-year-old marketer, mom and sailor who frequents the Lakeshore Yacht Club. "We drove around one summer and fell in love with it. ...There's nothing better than waking up on a Sunday morning and having ducks on your lawn."

Her tablemates concur. Ivan Chavlin lived in Bloor West Village for 27 years before recently moving to Mimico. He discovered the area by accident while on a long walk along the Martin Goodman Trail. Now he's addicted to the waterfront and can't imagine living where he can't see it.

Musician Graham Howes nods, explaining his wife is from Halifax, so they felt "the pull of the water" when they settled in Mimico 35 years ago. He's so eager to spread the passion to newcomers that he has nominated himself as his street's unofficial welcoming committee.

Then Kyle Gojic pipes up, regaling the group with her latest adventure. The 35-year-old mother of three is training for a half-marathon. That morning she and her fellow runners were so keen on seeing the progress of the soon-to-be-finished waterfront trail that they hopped over a fence and ran along the uncompleted path, just for fun.

"Once you are familiar with [the water], it's so difficult to go anywhere else," Mr. Chavlin says. "I mean, uptown is fine, but the moment you abandon the water you say to yourself, 'There's something missing.' Anywhere I go beyond this point I feel confined."

The waterfront, it seems, is what makes South Etobicoke sing. Back in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of Toronto's wealthiest families built their summer homes in Mimico and trekked out every weekend to escape the big city. When Grand Trunk Railway opened the Mimico Yard, the area evolved to a

year-round community with houses built to accommodate the influx of workers.

Mimico became an independent village in 1911 and an official Ontario town in 1917, with the adjacent neighbourhoods of New Toronto, Long Branch and Alderwood expanding at a similar pace. In 1967, amidst much resident angst, Mimico was forced to amalgamate with Etobicoke.

Thirty years later, it became part of the City of Toronto.

Today, Mimico is a key component of Waterfront Toronto's extensive revitalization of Toronto's lakefront. The 1.1-km, \$18.6-million Mimico Waterfront Park is being outfitted with boardwalks, sheltered areas, sand dunes and cobble beaches as well as enhancements to terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Phase One opened in July 2008 and stretches from Norris Crescent Parkette east to Superior Avenue near Birds & Beans. Phase Two, scheduled for completion later this year, will extend to Humber Bay Park West and connect to the Martin Goodman Trail. Toronto and Region Conservation is an integral partner for Waterfront Toronto on the project.

Another exciting addition is a \$2-million Ice Trail in Colonel Sam Smith Park. The 250-metre artificial rink, which opened in late 2010, forms a large figure-eight that winds along the park's shoreline. It's especially busy on weekends when kids and adults come out to play. *Chatelaine* magazine recently billed the Ice Trail as one of the best winter destinations in Canada, while Ms. Pengelley describes it as "a Christmas card."

Mark Grimes has spent his whole life in the area and now serves as city councillor. He's proud of his hometown and is thrilled the word is spreading, albeit slowly. Toronto Life recently dubbed Mimico Toronto's top "next neighbourhood" when it comes to great real estate finds. Given that South Etobicoke is a quick ride to the airport or downtown, has two Go Transit stations, golf courses, three yacht clubs and three large parks, he's not surprised by the new condo construction along the old motel strip but sometimes wonders why things haven't moved quicker. He likens it to a giant jigsaw puzzle.

Our waterfront, the Humber Bay Shores, the police college, the MasterCard Centre, the skating trail, the skateboard parks, the expansion of Humber College — these are all key pieces that we're putting in place and they're coming in a little bit faster now," he says. "We're heading in the right direction and people are agreeing with what we're doing."

Mr. Pritchard, too, has noticed "an enthusiasm that wasn't there before." New businesses have opened up in the last few years, he says, and development along the waterfront has intensified. The Lakeshore Village newspaper,

delivered five times a year, touts local news and events to keep residents in the know. First-time buyers are moving in, he says, lured by the affordable housing prices and village atmosphere. The square beside the café plays host to concerts, tree lighting and other celebrations. Homey restaurants such as Kalamata, FBI Pizza, Café du Lac, Everest Indian Cuisine and Around the Corner (an organic breakfast place owned by the New Toronto butcher) are popular hangouts.

People support Lakeshore Arts, a not-for-profit that hosts community programming, film festivals, art shows and photography workshops for teens. Many residents give back by volunteering or fundraising as a group, with Ms. Trainor part of the Mimico Mums who raised more than \$100,000 for the Weekend to End Breast Cancer.

“[Mimico] is not really on the way to anywhere, so people go there and live there and everybody knows each other,” Mr. Pritchard says. “It’s very much a small-town feel. We’ve seen kids get born and grow up and now they’re looking over the counter. People will come in and talk to whoever is sitting beside them. A lot know each other or have met in the store and continued the relationship outside.”

And then there are those such as Eric Code who have simply come home. Though he grew up in Mississauga and called downtown Toronto home for years, the 38-year-old hails from Mimico stock. His great grandfather, architect JCB Horwood, designed the Wesley Mimico United Church and owned one of the original beachfront estates. Eighty years on, Mr. Code has moved back into the family home.

“It’s great that between here and that set of lights there’s everything you need,” says Mr. Code, glancing down the street from his Birds & Beans perch. “There are groceries, there’s a pharmacy, there’s hardware, there’s a vet, there’s a post office. And not only is there convenience, but I know the people. And they know me.”

Street Smarts: South Etobicoke’s waterfront gets swanky

In the mid-1980s, Camrost-Felcorp CEO David Feldman acquired a fast food outlet on Lake Shore Blvd. W. in Etobicoke and developed the site into 820

condominium homes he dubbed Marina Del Rey. The waterfront project was recognized as the best-planned urban community in Ontario. The project gave Mr. Feldman the confidence to tackle the nearby infamous motel strip, where his Mystic Pointe master-planned community eventually sprang to life. California Condos is its latest addition.

Today, South Etobicoke's waterfront is welcoming dozens of new condo projects, and Mr. Feldman can't help but wax nostalgic. He thinks the area is "one of Toronto's best-kept secrets ... I am privileged in seeing the 50-acre area transformed into a leading edge public accessible waterfront neighbourhood," he gushes.

Here's a sample of what's being built:

California Condos

30 storeys, 368 units Builder Camrost-Felcorp Location 165 Legion Rd. Suite Availability 74% sold. 580 to 975 sq. ft. from \$286,900 to \$449,900 Hot Tickets Matches Mystic Pointe community's active lifestyle with resort-like amenities including volleyball, lap pool and spa treatment rooms Status Under Construction Occupancy June 2012 Contact 416-251-8888; camrost.com

Eleven Superior

Nine storeys, 132 condos and townhomes Builder Davies Smith Developments Location Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Superior Avenue Suite Availability 70% sold. Condos from 559 to 977 sq. ft., townhomes from 889 to 1,047 sq. ft., pricing from low \$200,000s to mid-\$400,000s Hot Tickets Indoor rooftop with fitness centre; lounge with private dining area Status Actively Selling Occupancy Spring 2013 Contact 416-259-8882; elevensuperior.com

Eau du Soleil

Touted as one of Canada's tallest iconic waterfront condominium communities Builder Empire Communities Location Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Park Lawn Rd. Suite Availability From about 500 to 1,000 sq. ft. and from \$200,000s to more than \$1-million Status Registration Occupancy n/a Contact eaudusoleilcondos.com

The Hive

Five storeys, 20 lofts Builder Symmetry Developments Location The Queensway and Lady Bank Rd. Suite Availability 75% sold. 545 to 680 sq. ft. and from \$255,000 to \$318,000 Hot Tickets Small scaled, zinc-clad building with striking modern design Status Actively selling Occupancy Fall 2013 Contact 416-695-0125; thehivelofts.com

iLoft

30 storeys, 257 suites Builder Camrost-Felcorp Location 155 Legion Rd. Suite Availability 95% sold. Only nine suites left remaining including two-storey and single storey lofts from 640 to 1,125 sq. ft. and \$309,900 to \$473,900 Hot Tickets Part of master planned Mystic Pointe community Status Occupying Contact 416-251-8888; iloft.ca

IQ Condominium Residences

Two towers, 303 units Builder The Remington Group Location The Queensway and Zorra St. Suite Availability More than 90% sold. 485 to 900 sq. ft. starting from the \$190,000s Hot Tickets Sixth-floor terrace with dining, outdoor fireplace; master plan has seven towers Status Under Construction Occupancy February 2014 Contact 416-253-5838; iqcondos.com

Jade Waterfront Condominiums

38 storeys, 370 units Builder Phantom Developments Location Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Marine Parade Dr. Suite Availability 465 to 1,450 sq. ft and starting from \$225,000 Hot Tickets Penthouses have 10-ft. ceilings heights and large balconies; potting studio and outdoor community planting area Status Registration Occupancy Fall 2015 Contact 416-251-0707; jadewaterfrontcondos.com

Lago at the Waterfront

49 storeys, 451 units Builder Monarch Location Park Lawn Rd. and Lake Shore Blvd. Suite Availability More than 50% sold. 420 to 1,401 sq. ft. and \$199,990 to more than \$850,000 Hot Tickets Intriguing tower façade Status Pre-sales Occupancy December 2016 Contact 416-495-3544; monarchgroup.net

NXT Condos

Phase 1 is 29 storeys with 425 units and Phase 2 is 35 storeys with 525 units
Builder Cresford Developments Location Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Windermere
Ave. Suite Availability Phase 1 has 10 suites left from 773 to 1,144 sq. ft. and
\$395,900 to \$600,000; Phase 2 from 463 to 1,135 sq. ft. and \$239,900 to
\$600,000, 85% sold Hot Tickets Indoor and outdoor pools, tennis court, guest
suites, cinema Status Phase 1 Complete, Phase 2 under construction
Occupancy Phase 1 Move in Now, Phase 2 November 2012 Contact
416-977-5300; nxtcondos.com

Ocean Club

One tower with 352 units plus one boutique building with 111 units Builder
Graywood Developments and Beaverhall Homes Location Park Lawn Rd. and
Marine Parade Dr. Suite Availability 97% sold. From \$249,900 for 440 sq. ft. in
the tower and from \$299,900 for 590 sq. ft. in the boutique Hot Tickets
Nautical-inspired architecture; two-level restaurant with patio Status Under
construction Occupancy November 2014 Contact 416-255-4663;
oceanclubcondos.com

South Beach

Condos + Lofts

Two 27-storey towers with 313 units Builder Amexon Development Location
Park Lawn Rd. and Lake Shore Blvd. W. Suite Availability 95% sold. Hot Tickets
40,000-sq.-ft. amenity space includes outdoor reflecting pool, tubs, squash
courts; pet daycare Status Phase 1 occupying, Phase 2 Under Construction
Occupancy Phase 2 December 2012 Contact 416-252-3000;
southbeachtoronto.com

Watermark

Seven storeys, 72 units Builder Queenscorp Group Location Lake Shore Blvd.
W. and Long Branch Ave. Suite Availability 50% sold. 649 to 1,225 sq. ft. and
starting from \$297,900 Hot Tickets Romanesque-style architecture inspired by
Long Branch's history; Status Pre-construction Occupancy December 2013
Contact 416-354-2221; queenscorp.com

Westlake

A three-tower, 1,302-unit development on the waterfront Builder Onni
Location Lake Shore and Park Lawn Suite Availability Westlake 1, 95% sold;
Westlake 2, 85% sold; Westlake 3, 70% sold. 549 to 1,484 sq ft and \$244,900 to
\$921,900; Hot Tickets 30,000-sq.-ft. urban village Status Under
construction Occupancy Varies. Contact sales office. Contact 416-260-2600;
onni.com

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