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COVER STORY



Building neighbourhoods that bloom

Neighbourhoods in Bloom was initially rolled out at Cardinal Point in Stouffville, Ont. Geranium was looking for a way to jumpstart the landscaping process and partnered with Sheridan Nurseries for its first-ever homeowner gardening party.

New program helps buyers appreciate early the value that landscaping brings to their community and home

DIANNE DANIEL
Special to QMI Agency

A community that plants together reaps the benefit together. That's the idea behind an innovative concept from developer and builder Geranium Homes called Neighbourhoods in Bloom.

"Our intent is to help buyers appreciate early on the value that landscaping brings both to their community and to their home," says Susan Webb Smith, Director of Marketing, Geranium Homes.

Neighbourhoods in Bloom was initially rolled out at Cardinal Point, a master-planned community in downtown Stouffville, Ontario. Geranium was looking for a way to jumpstart the landscaping process and partnered with Sheridan Nurseries for its first-ever homeowner gardening party. The first 50 or

so homebuyers in Phase One were invited for a morning of planting and we're provided with "Geranium Dollars" to spend on a wide selection of shrubs, annuals, perennials and bulbs.



As part of the event, Sheridan staff was on hand to share expertise about grouping plants together, where to place them and how to maintain them. Geranium site workers were also actively involved, providing topsoil, mulch, wheelbarrows and manpower to help homeowners cut and prepare their beds. "We made it an absolutely great occasion for all of the neighbours to get together and plant together," says Webb Smith, adding that a neighbour barbecue followed in the afternoon. "It was a huge success."

The event was so well-received Geranium has decided to roll it out in other communities moving forward. Each year or whenever a critical mass of homebuyers has moved in, the company will spearhead a Neighbourhoods in Bloom event, tailored to the specific circumstances of the neighbour-



hood involved. For example, in lieu of a planting event at Forest Trail Estates in Ballantrae homeowners are offered a very good price on a package that includes sod and a coverage sprinkler system as a way to support the greening of the large acre-sized lots.

"This is part of our investment in you as a buyer, but it's also part of your investment in your own home," says Webb Smith. "It's something we do to really encourage the landscape of the whole community to come together."

Another way develop-

ers and builders are working together to enhance the landscapes — and street-scapes — of new subdivisions is by paying more attention to the storm water pond, a necessary feature in most new developments to help manage drainage and prevent flooding. "Years ago they would dig it, put a chain link fence around it and go way," notes Webb Smith. "Nowadays ... they've turned them into an integral part of the community to be enjoyed by the residents."

Webb Smith credits compa-

nies like Tribute Communities and Monarch Homes for pioneering the trend, one that Geranium fully embraces. The park at Cardinal Point, for example, is naturally landscaped with drought resistant plants native to the area and features seating areas, walkways and a children's playground.

"Cardinal Point has been leading the charge, but eventually these things will occur throughout the life of any community we build," she says. "It really creates a lot of buzz in the community."