

Beyond the Bricks: Business is blooming at Geranium

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It's a crisp spring morning and Boaz Feiner is hard at work in the spacious kitchen of his North York home, preparing an early lunch for a few guests.

As the conversation flows, Feiner, the convivial 35-year-old vice-president of housing for [Geranium Corp.](#), whips up a tasty spread: hearts of palm cucumber salad with an apple-mustard vinaigrette, tuna tartar sashimi and butternut squash ravioli.

He might be a developer by trade, but it's obvious where Feiner's true passion lies.

"I love food," he gushes. "My first dream is to own an NBA basketball team – I don't know if that's ever going to happen, though.

"But I've always said that one day I'd own a restaurant. It could be open two days a week and lose money, but I'd design it, choose the décor and the menu and have my food served there."

In the meantime, Feiner has his plate full with the pile of projects Geranium has planned, developments he hopes will vault his company into the upper ranks of GTA residential builders.

The company recently launched sales on the final phase of [Neighbourhoods of Cardinal Point](#), a 500-home community on the outskirts of Stouffville.

It is also developing a pair of sizable mixed-use projects in Simcoe County: [Big Bay Point Resort](#), a



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Boaz Feiner, vice president of Geranium Homes, prepares hearts of palm and cucumber salad with prepared mustard and apple vinaigrette.

new community on Lake Simcoe, and [Bond Head](#), a master-planned development near Bradford.

For Markham-based Geranium, a homebuilder that a decade ago started buying up sizable plots of land for future development, these master-planned projects represent the culmination of a long-term strategy.

"I think we are well positioned to become a big player in the marketplace, but in a different capacity than before," Feiner says. "We're out to become a major force."

After lunch, Feiner hops into his Range Rover and drives up to Stouffville to offer his guest a tour of the Cardinal Point project.

Located near Highway 48 and Main St., the master-planned community sits alongside acres of woodland ravine, set against a farmland backdrop.

Cardinal Point will ultimately include 500 homes, a mix of freehold townhomes and bungalows on fully-detached lots.

The fourth and final phase went on sale in March. "It's been received well," Feiner says.

This last phase will be the greenest yet, the first neighbourhood in Stouffville to meet Energy Star performance levels. The residences have also been engineered in accordance with the developer's own sustainable building standard, Geranium Green.

"I think what they're doing is very impressive," says Whitchurch-Stouffville councillor Susanne Hilton. "It's good for the community, certainly good for the environment and good for the homeowners. (Geranium) is hoping other builders will follow suit and I hope they will as well."

Feiner describes the architecture at Cardinal Point as "urban heritage," designed to offer the look and feel of a more established neighbourhood versus a suburb under construction.

To this end, certain community features were completed before residents moved into the first phase, including a park with playground and pond, tree-lined boulevards and sidewalks with street lighting.

Cardinal Point homes will have open-concept main floors with kitchens and breakfast areas adjoining a great room. The detached bungalows boast nine-foot ceilings and kitchens with a chef's island, which also overlook the great room (the advantage of having your home built by a foodie like Feiner.)

Larger floor plans give homeowners the option of having an upstairs loft or finished basement.

The homes' clay brick exteriors and Hardie board siding will be accented by peaked roofs, trimmed gables and, on the bungalows, a sheltered porch.

Geranium is no stranger to Stouffville. It previously developed land for a 1,000-unit community

there and partnered with SmartCentres to build Hoover Park Town Centre, a 570,000-square-foot shopping complex anchored by a Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire.

Geranium has big plans in Simcoe County, too.

Near Bradford, the firm is developing Bond Head, a community that by 2031 could include up to 30,000 new homes and 10 million square feet of commercial and industrial space. "This is a true master-planned community," says Feiner. "It will basically be a new town."

He notes that Geranium and its partners own the entire 3,200 acre property, so they won't have to co-ordinate with another builder on a neighbouring lot, avoiding headaches and complications.

In Innisfil, Geranium is beginning preliminary work on Big Bay Point Resort, a 1,600-unit community on Lake Simcoe with a 400-room hotel, 18-hole links-style golf course and a revamped marina with 1,000 boat slips. There will also be 80,000 square feet of commercial space.

The project will target vacation home buyers in the GTA and northern U.S. "There is a large number of people who want to come up here and have secondary houses that are closer to home," Feiner says. "The beauty of this is that you're only a one-hour drive from Toronto."

Geranium was founded in 1977 by Earl Rumm and Boaz's father Barry Feiner (both are still with the company).

The firm owes its flowery name to a combination of frugality and expediency on the part of Barry Feiner.

Boaz: "Basically, my dad asked them what do you have available? They said 'Geranium.' He said, okay, and there was nothing more to it.

"My dad was an immigrant from Israel, and money was tight and Earl was starting out, so it was cheaper to buy a shelf company than a new one."

The random name choice proved to be an effective one.

"For years, when sustainable housing wasn't the big issue, people wondered how we came up with our name," recalls the younger Feiner, who joined the family business in 1996. "Today, though, it really fits in with the marketplace. We were ahead of our time without knowing it."

For years Geranium focused primarily on building homes, doing work in centres across southern Ontario. By the early 1990s it was Canada's fourth largest lowrise homebuilder, according to the company.

As serviceable lots began to grow scarce, though, the firm changed tack and launched its own development arm, marking the creation of the Geranium Corp.

"That's where we swung our pendulum," Feiner says. "We went from being a homebuilder to being a developer/builder. By being both the developer and builder you try and control your own destiny because you control both parts of the equation."

Fast forward to the present day, and the large plots of land Geranium bought all those years ago are now nearing fruition. Indeed, projects such as Cardinal Point, Bond Head and Big Bay Point promise to fundamentally change the company's trajectory.

"We're finally starting to realize the results of our hard work over the last decade," Feiner says. "And now we're really in a wonderful position to do some damage."