

Affordable housing for a world class city

By Annette Verschuren

Growing up in the Maritimes, I never quite understood the debate about Toronto's standing as a world class city.

The city is committed to sustainability, has effective public transit and incredible cultural and ethnic diversity. It's the heart of Canadian business, a world-renowned entertainment centre and one of North America's safest large cities.

Just this year, *The Economist* ranked Toronto the fourth most livable city in the world – trailing only Vancouver, British Columbia; Vienna, Austria and Melbourne, Australia. Pretty good company.

So, what's not to like about Toronto? Nothing – unless you're a Torontonians in need, looking for an affordable place to live.

Toronto's affordable housing deficit

Across Toronto, in 2009, an incredible 71,000 families were on the city's waiting list for subsidized housing. That's a seven per cent increase compared to 2008.

More than 30 per cent of Toronto's children five years-old and younger live below the low income cut-off level, which means their families spend a greater percentage of income on basics, such as food, clothing and shelter, than does the average family of similar size.

An amazing 100,000 Toronto families pay more than 50 per cent of pre-tax income in rent.

In many ways, Toronto's affordable housing deficit is a function of the city's success. Increasing demand for housing drives the market up, making housing unaffordable for lower-income Canadians.

Building affordable housing for communities in need

As a world class city, we can, we must, do more for the least fortunate among us. This work starts at home, by providing Torontonians with a safe, decent and affordable place to live.

A number of public, private and non-governmental organizations are hard at work doing just that. But we must move faster.

At The Home Depot, we've chosen to partner with Habitat for Humanity Canada and its affiliates, including the one in Toronto. Since 1996, The Home Depot Canada has provided tens of thousands of skilled, volunteer labour hours, and more than \$20-million in cash and in-kind donations to Habitat for Humanity's projects across Canada.

As Torontonians, we can all help provide affordable housing by getting involved and contributing to organizations like Habitat for Humanity. Research has proven that affordable housing improves the health of children and adults, helps children achieve better grades, keeps family units stronger and improves an individual's job prospects – all things that will make this city even better.

Annette Verschuren is president, The Home Depot Canada

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