

# BUILDING BLOCKS IN



**BACK IN THE** 1970s, discussion around the importance of formally educating those interested in careers in the building and development industries began. It was from these talks that Ryerson University and The University of Waterloo developed intensive industry-supported programs through their individual schools of planning. Today, BILD sponsors these courses that have been educating generations of planners and developers for over 30 years.

Dr. Steven Webber M.C.I.P., R.P.P., the instructor at Ryerson's third and fourth year elective course entitled "Private Development Seminar" is no stranger to issues in the building and development field. He is a member of many key organizations and focuses on a diverse range of issues including land use policy, growth management strategies, innovative solutions to affordable housing and the application of financial feasibility analysis in planning decisions.

Webber has experience working on planning and urban redevelopment in Toronto and Los Angeles and is the founder/principal of Urbanformation, a planning consulting firm. Webber is currently conducting research, in conjunction with the Ryerson University Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, on municipal planning and power centre development in the Greater Toronto Area.

# EDUCATION

■ *By Lucie Gryś*

This is Webber's first year teaching the course and his predecessor, David Amborski M.C.I.P., R.P.P., now the Director of the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Ryerson, taught the course from its inception over 30 years ago. It was Amborski's foresight that helped bring the program to Ryerson with the assistance of Peter Farlinger, then president of the Urban Development Institute.

The Ryerson curriculum is intensive. Amborski states the aim of the elective course "is to open a window in development for those who want to work in and negotiate in the industry." Both Webber and Amborski stress that it is crucial that students graduating from the school understand the sector from every angle and numerous speakers from the field are invited to relay relevant information and practical experiences to help enhance the curriculum.

The curriculum features a strong grounding in the planning process as applied in cities and regions and includes problem solving and analytical skills. The speakers shed light on anything and everything from finance to land acquisition to development approval and marketing. Moreover, every field

## **Education is key to the next generation of planners.**

of interest is covered from low-rise to condominium development to big box and commercial.

Many of the courses involve teamwork and students benefit from developing skills that relate to the working world. In addition, students learn about other disciplines that are closely linked to planning such as architecture, landscape architecture, politics, economics, sociology, community development, geography, civil engineering and business.

One of the highlights is learning how planning is done in other cities and regions through two field trips built into the program, as well as opportunities for study abroad at six universities in Europe and Australia. Planning experience is also gained through relevant field placements.

Ryerson alumnus and BILD's own Director of Municipal Government Relations Paula Tenuta recalls the very hands-on approach to the program.

Tenuta's experience with the intense four-year program covered everything from land acquisition to zoning and she says her time spent at Ryerson "was an amazing opportunity to work with others in tight deadline scenarios." She believes that the guest lecturers that were brought in helped her learn about life in the real world of planning and development and her experience in her work placement allowed her the chance to network with others in her field. Now, almost a decade after graduating, Tenuta and her fellow classmates all keep in touch and offer one another support in various fields.

The scenario is much the same at the University of Waterloo, where Leith Moore changes hats from being the Vice President of Development at the Sorbara Development Group to being an adjunct professor every Thursday afternoon. A graduate of the program almost 30 years ago, Moore is passionate about the industry. Ironically, Moore's boss, Mr. Edward Sorbara, was a lecturer in the course and now the wheel has turned full circle.

Moore brings an enormous wealth of knowledge and connections to the program both as an individual and through his involvement for the past 26 years with Sorbara, which is active throughout the GTA in industrial development and construction, condominium development and construction and, through Orchard Ridge Homes, low-rise residential development and construction.

Moore is also a member of the BILD Executive Committee and Board and also serves as a board member of Evergreen, a national non-profit environmental charity.

In this year's class at the University of Waterloo, students are knee-deep in learning about land development and planning. Of the 60 students Moore instructs, 50 are undergraduates and 10 are working on their Masters.

The core of the course allows students to select a site and act as project managers, do due diligence, work within a politicized approach, gain the necessary approvals, learn how to market their endeavors and determine how long it would take to build and service the project. Once the assumptions are determined, the students must then take those assumptions and translate them into a proforma. Real life issues such as cost, revenue, profit margins and cash flow issues are all addressed.

Moore states that the course “is very much like real life. The students take the theories they learn and apply them hands-on by attaching time and money to a project.” When the students enrol in the course, it is really their first time seeing the real life impact of their projects.

An important element to the program is the co-operative education placement that the University of Waterloo offers. From Moore’s point of view, “it is an important touch point that students must realize they are working within a political environment.”

Through co-op placements in the private and public sectors, students get to see issues firsthand from a developer’s perspective and Moore is pleased that “it gives them a very holistic view of all of the levels and comprehensive steps projects undergo.”

Moore, a veteran of the development industry and a strong believer in giving co-op students the opportunity to educate themselves about the intrinsic experience of a developer, encourages other developers to hire co-op students. “We need to give as much exposure as possible to the development process and narrow the sense of ‘us versus them.’”

The program at Waterloo creates a true community of planners and students learn how all elements are interconnected. As with the Ryerson program, guest speakers from across the industry spectrum are invited and students are immersed in all facets of the industry. Architects, engineers, municipal planners, builders, lawyers and others take the students on a learning odyssey through real scenarios. Field trips, like those that Ryerson students partake in, open the eyes of the emerging planners when they see what other cities and locales are doing.

Catherine Pan, a fourth-year student at the School of Planning and former co-op student at the Sorbara Development Group, believes that 80 per cent of what she has learned was gained during her work placements. Her future is bright as she has experienced, first hand, life in the outside world.

During her placements, Pan had the opportunity to shadow project managers and get an overall view of the development process. She gained experience in land acquisition, research, due diligence process, participated in public meetings and was a part of discussions with consultants and engineers. She believes that having a foot in the door is a great help and she is currently lining up interviews for a job in her field once she graduates. “I have one term left and I feel ready for the world,” she says.

Meghan Radford is the tutorial assistant for the course. She advises students on their term assignment as well as handling all aspects of the final exam. She has been practicing as a planning consultant for the past year and she encourages her students to discuss the development industry with her during her office hours.

“I have always told students that this course is probably one of the most practical they will experience in their undergraduate career,” Radford says, and she encourages them to take the assignment as seriously as possible. The

## MAKING THEIR MARK

Both Ryerson University and the University of Waterloo boast an extensive list of alumni who have forged careers in the fields of urban planning and development. This list below is a sample of graduates from the Ryerson School of Urban and Regional Planning who are making their mark in the industry. There are many others that are not listed from Ryerson and Waterloo but this offers a quick view of who is doing what and where.



Mark Tutton



Laurie Gordon



Patrick O'Hanlon

Mark Tutton, Northam Realty Advisors (BILD Executive Member)

Laurie Gordon, Berkshire Homes (BILD Executive Member)

Patrick O'Hanlon, Angus Glen (BILD Past President)

Gary Gregoris, Mattamy Homes

Paula Tenuta, BILD

Rodger Miller, Runnymede Developments

Lino Pellicano, Monarch Construction

Kaymar Mortazavi, Tas Design Build

Bruno Nazzicone, Senator Homes

Jessica Annis, BILD

Julie Laudadio, Metrus Development

Laura Cilio, RealNet Canada

Michael Smith, Tridel Group

Leona Savoie, Tridel Group

Steve Daniels, Tridel Group

Michael Goldberg, Goldberg Group

Jude Tersigni, Menkes Development Corporation

Lucy Tantalo, Brookfield Homes

Elliot Muzzo, Marel Group

Bob Blazeovski, Minto Communities

Christian Fisker, Spectrum Senior Housing Development

Michael Collins-Williams, Ontario Home Builders' Association

Daniel Belli, Trinistar

Tatiana DiGiacinto, Rockport Group

Giles Bisnaire, Rockport Group

student feedback she hears about the course shows that students do appreciate the knowledge that the speakers bring to the program.

“Overall, the course has received excellent feedback from the students – enrollment has been maintained from last year if it has not increased; the students are more engaged, and they seem to really enjoy the course,” she notes.

In the future, Radford hopes that BILD can take a more active role and in addition to sponsoring the course, become an effective partner in the School of Planning to enhance the educational experience between the professional and academic aspects of the discipline.

Moore and Webber agree that education is key to the next generation of planners. Offering them a wide range of opportunities in the field of planning and development is paramount. BILD sponsors programs to bridge the gap between industry professionals and to foster a greater sense of understanding and community.

The courses offered at the University of Waterloo and Ryerson University demonstrate that an academic understanding of planning and development is best learned through hands-on experiences that put the next generation into the field with a grounded knowledge about how the industry is linked.

The future of planning and development is complex and the next step is to expand the role of education to publish critiques and best practices about the industry. Moore believes that the industry has been too focused on policy rather than product. “The next evolution is to disseminate information for all to access and share our collective knowledge to improve the standards of development and building projects,” Moore remarks.

The knowledge gained through the courses at Ryerson and Waterloo enable students to be leaders in their industry. The courses also increase the public’s understanding of building and development as an industry that is continuously evolving to meet the needs of communities and businesses. 