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Baby makes three for CTV newsmen and his fiancée. **K19**

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Full disclosure is best when sellers sign the paperwork. **K2**



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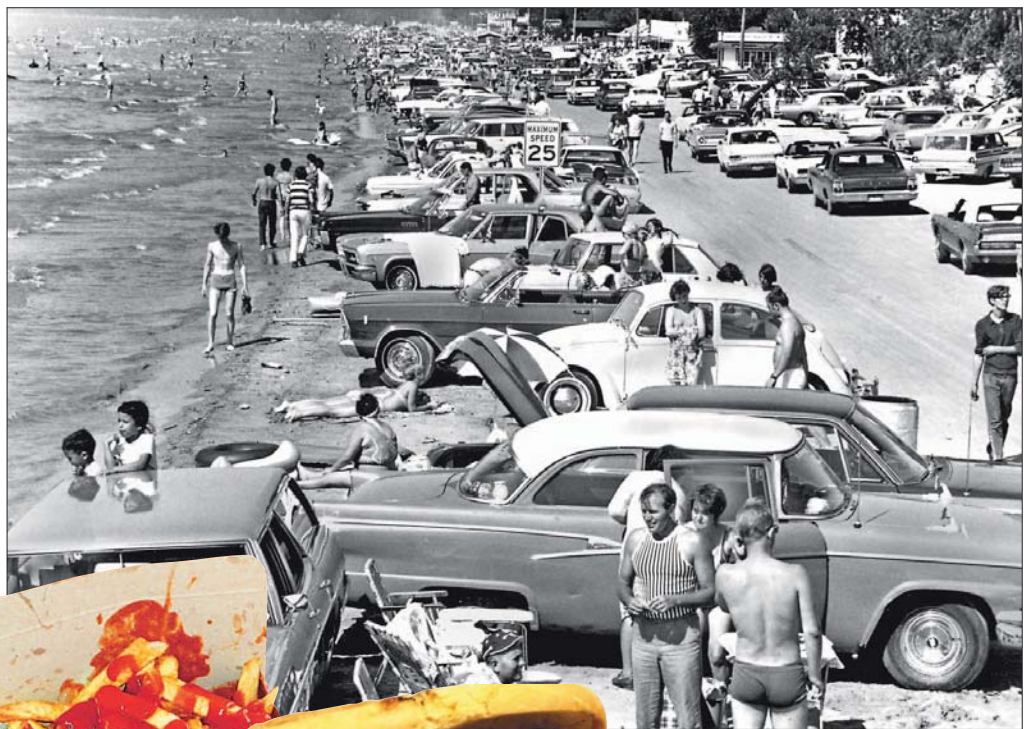
HOUSE HELP

This Sunday give Mom a gift to lighten her load. **K12**



Reinventing Wasaga

Spectacular facelift will include resort hotel, spa and new downtown area with 375 homes **K21**



FRANK TESKEY FILE PHOTO/TORONTO STAR
Wasaga Beach — the longest freshwater beach in the world — has always been a gathering point for youth who celebrate summer. Here, on a hot weekend in 1969, the cars were so thick on the hot sand it was tough for a sunbather to find a spot.

INSTANT DOWNTOWN

Wasaga's heart transplant

Linear resort town clears way for a pedestrian friendly core — with help from big-box store

ROBERTA AVERY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

WASAGA BEACH—For decades thousands of the winter weary have headed to this resort community on Georgian Bay for the annual rite of spring known as the Victoria Day weekend or, as some call it, "the May 2-4."

Year in, year out, there haven't been many surprises. But those arriving next weekend are going to notice that big changes are underway.

The town — on what's billed as the world's longest freshwater beach — is getting a facelift, a heart and some help from a seemingly unlikely source.

The Waterslide opposite Beach Area 1 is down and so is most of the old Miramar Hotel. Other parts of the facelift include expansion of the Bananas Beach Club and renovations to the Friendly Greek restaurant. Tired-looking cottage courts across the community are being demolished to make way for more upscale development and a \$100-million resort hotel and spa is slated for the west end of the community.

"In 10 years time, Wasaga Beach will be hardly recognizable," says Bonnie Smith, Wasaga Beach's economic development officer.

As for the new heart, Wasaga Beach was incorporated as a town in 1974 by the province, but the linear nature of the municipality has resulted in both residential and commercial development occurring in nodes with no town centre, says Ray Kelso, Wasaga Beach's director of planning and development.

That's all about to change, says Mark Crowe, vice-president and general manager for the developer of Stonebridge by the Bay. Hamont Investments Ltd.'s Stonebridge plans call for a pedestrian-oriented community with 375 homes, a commercial section with stores, restaurants, a hotel, municipal parks, ponds, a trail system and green spaces.

"Wasaga Beach didn't have an all-encompassing centre, so we're creating a focal point," Crowe says.

Although Stonebridge by the Bay has been in the planning stages for six or seven years, it's a good fit for the province's Places to Grow policy, Kelso says.

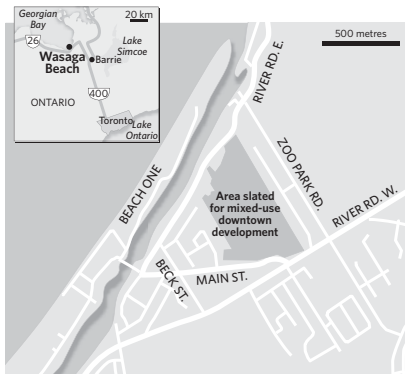
Last June, the province announced a plan (under its 2005 Places to Grow Act) for an area it designated the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which includes Simcoe County.

The plan calls for towns and cities to ensure that new development helps create communities that offer more choices in housing and a range of amenities such as shops, schools, entertainment and services that are closer to where people live.

In 1974, the population of this town was only around 4,000 people, but services including sewer and water, were brought in to accommodate peak sum-



Wasaga Beach planning manager Ray Kelso, left, goes over plans with developer Mark Crowe whose Stonebridge complex will mix housing and commercial properties.



mer weekends when as many as 150,000 people a day visit the beach, Kelso says.

With large capacity services in place, the town has been able to handle rapid growth and it now has a population that tops 16,000.

"We've also had a continuous municipal commitment to growth and it has really paid off," Kelso says.

But unlike a lot of the Wasaga Beach development that took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s — mostly subdivisions of single family bungalows with no commercial component — Stonebridge will include a mix of single family homes, high-density housing and a commercial centre.

"Stonebridge will consist of a

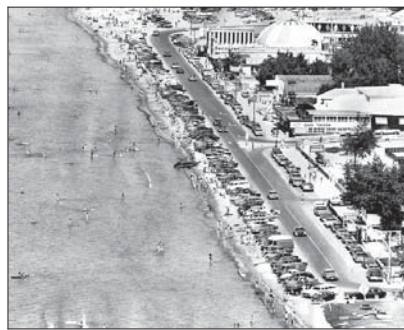
mix of diverse building types that cater to a range of lifestyle needs, including young families, professionals and retirees," Crowe says.

Roads are under construction and services have already been brought to the lot lines on two sides of the development.

Construction of the 75 homes in Phase I on the 34-hectare site at the east end of Wasaga Beach is scheduled to start this summer.

Homes in the first phase will be freehold single family homes — a mix of bungalows and two storeys. The first occupancy is scheduled for next spring. Townhomes and a 125-unit condominium are also slated for the site.

Prices for homes have not been



Georgian Bay town has long had a marvellous stretch of sand that attracts huge crowds in summer, but never a downtown.

finalized, but Crowe expects them to start around \$178,000 for the condominiums, with single family homes reaching the \$350,000 range.

"Stonebridge will draw and build upon the best of Wasaga Beach's historical architecture," Crowe says.

Mississauga-based Hamont is working to establish the "unique and quaint character of a beach resort" by incorporating wraparound porches, dormer and porthole style windows into home styles. The townhomes will have underground, two-car garages to improve curb appeal, Crowe says.

The vision for Stonebridge is a community friendly to the pedestrian-inclined Intrust Village at Blue Mountain, with

boutique-style stores, restaurants and cafes with patios open to the street. There are to be small plazas and tree-lined streets dotted with seating areas.

There will also be walkways with gazebos leading down to Beach Area 1, which is just a few hundred metres from the site.

Developers planning to create a commercial and residential mix, need "very deep pockets," says Brian Johnston, president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association.

"It's a conundrum," says Johnston. "It's hard to find retailers to rent your commercial component until you have built the residential section and it's hard to sell homes when the commercial section isn't fully devel-

oped," says Johnston, who calls such projects "pretty rare." It's much easier for developers to build highrise buildings close to existing and well-established commercial centres, than to start from scratch, he says.

Crowe agrees that it takes a lot of "heavy investment," to get a project such as Stonebridge off the ground, but says that Hamont, which has built commercial projects such as the indoor mall in Orangeville and a 250-home development in Oakville, is confident the company has the right mix.

And that's where the help from an unlikely source comes in. Urbanists who push for mixed uses usually see big-box retail as an enemy, but in Wasaga Beach, a 10,350-square-metre Wal-Mart (slated to open this summer) is being hailed as part of the plan.

Crowe says the mix of car-dependent retailing and a pedestrian-friendly centre full of boutiques means that the smaller merchants can draw on the Wal-Mart customer base and not just depend on the residents of the Stonebridge homes.

Smith adds that a recently opened Real Canadian Superstore, Canadian Tire and a large drugstore near the west end of the town and now Wal-Mart, indicate that retailers are firmly recognizing the community's potential.

Crowe says that Wal-Mart, or a similar anchor store, was a critical component to Stonebridge.

"Wal-Mart is an engine to the development. It will create a destination that will bring people to Stonebridge," Crowe says.



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