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FRIDAY HARBOUR BUILT ON A BIG VISION

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Written by Tracy Hanes

Shauna Dudding has quite the fish tale about a catch made in the former Big Bay Marina harbour on Lake Simcoe. She and her team hauled in 9,000 fish representing 30-plus species – including a four-foot northern pike.



Shauna Dudding, chief engineer and vice president of development for Geranium Corp. Photo credit: Rick Vanderlinde

The fish were relocated to allow for the enlargement of the marina basin from 10 to 53 acres (34 acres of which are water) that serves as the centrepiece of Friday Harbour, the \$1.5-billion, 600-acre resort development under construction in the town of Innisfil, Ont., near Barrie.

Hundreds of guests, purchasers and potential buyers got a sneak peek at the new marina basin at a celebration last month. When completed, condo buyers in the 600-acre resort will be able to moor their boat at one of 1,000 slips, shop and eat in the Marina Village, hike on nature trails or swing a club on the 18-hole golf course. Up to 2,000 condos and hotel units will be built.



Over 4,000 people attended the Marina launch in September

The site is 10 minutes from Barrie and about an hour's drive from Toronto. Condo owners can also hop on the GO train from Toronto to the Barrie station and be picked up by the resort shuttle. Construction has started on the initial buildings, with first occupancy expected in 2016.

Dudding is chief engineer and vice president of development for the Geranium Corp., a partner in Friday Harbour with ConDrain Group, Optus Capital and Pemberton group. Ensuring the well-being of the site's flora and fauna, including the fish, has been among her many responsibilities.

“We went out in a boat with tentacles that sends out low-level current to temporarily stun the fish, starting with the smallest fish, then we increased the shock as we moved to larger species,” she said. Fish were gathered into buckets and tanks and released into Lake Simcoe on the other side of a temporary dam at the mouth of the harbour.

Then it was up to Jim De Gasperis, president of ConDrain, to carry out the excavation. “For 60 years, ConDrain has built infrastructure and this is the first marina,” he said. “The biggest challenge was the weather, as we kept working all last winter. We moved nine million cubic metres of dirt (or 170,000 truckloads) and have up to 100 pieces of equipment here at one time.”



Jim DeGasperis, president of ConDrain. Photo credit: Toronto Star's New In Homes

All that dirt was trucked to the site of the golf course, where it will be used to shape the course's features. The course is slated to be open in fall 2016.

Dudding, whose background is environmental civil engineering, says the water needed to refill the basin had virtually no effect on Lake Simcoe's levels. "It represented a drop of .4 millimetres. We needed 350,000 cubic metres to refill the harbour; 3.5 million cubic metres are lost to evaporation every day."

With the marina excavation completed and the harbour refilled, the fish are welcome to return to an underwater habitat four times its original size. Some other residents, including frogs and turtles, have moved into their new digs created on the site.



Approximately 30 fish habitats have been created in the Marina. Photo credit: Toronto Star's New In Homes

“We built a new amphibian habitat before we decommissioned the old one and it’s been so unbelievably successful,” Dudding says. “The water in the old habitat came from surface water (such as rain) and would dry up, so there wasn’t enough water for tadpoles to turn into frogs. Now, we’ve seen an increase of the species of frogs.”

Turtles got an improved, deeper pond and red-bellied snakes will spend the winter in a hibernaculum, a chamber constructed below frost level. Friday Harbour amphibians, reptiles and small mammals will be able to move safely between seasonal habitats through wildlife underpasses that will pass under four municipal roads.



The new Marina is entirely flooded and will be home to several fish, frogs and turtles.

Many of the development's green initiatives are unprecedented in Ontario. Friday Harbour completed the first phosphorous budget in the province and demonstrated that the amount of phosphorous coming off the site into the lake will be less after it's built than before. Phosphorous is a nutrient contained in common items such as detergents, fertilizer, manure and decaying plants.

With the Innisfil and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, Dudding led a cutting edge pilot project to test wastewater treatments to find one that would yield ultra-low phosphorous limits. Friday Harbour's sewage will be treated at the Alcona treatment plant in Innisfil, thus reducing phosphorus loading, and the resort is extending sewage service to allow 1,700 homes in the area to get off septic systems.

Endangered butternut trees on the property will be protected and a replanting program has been established. Friday Harbour also implemented a butternut-seed collection program to send seeds from the healthiest trees to the Forest Gene Conservation Authority for archiving.

The vision for Friday Harbour has been a decade and a half in the making, since Geranium Corp. President Earl Rumm, who owns a cottage in the area, stopped into the Big Bay Point Marina to get his boat fixed. He noticed a rough sketch of a townhouse development tacked up on the wall and realized the potential the site presented.



A master plan of Friday Harbour Resort

Now, with more than 450 condos sold and construction well underway, Geranium housing-division President Boaz Feiner says Friday Harbour is “on the radar of six million people within a 90-minute radius” of the site.