



BREATHING NEW LIFE:

Local Developers Looking Forward, Into the Past

Local developers & builders Ben Polley, Roy Jason Ashdown, Peregrine Wood & Tom Dowd on top of the city (The Gummer Building).

by Susan Ratcliffe & Chris Tiessen

Guelph has embraced 'building green.' The new City Hall, sporting a living roof, living wall, emphasis on natural lighting, and much more, was built to meet the **LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)** Silver Standard. **Guelph Hydro's** Southgate Road facility, also **LEED**-certified, features a ground-source geothermal heating and cooling system, high-efficiency plumbing and lighting, drought-resistant and native species landscaping, and a 100-kilowatt solar facility on its roof. And local builder **Reid's Heritage Homes** has received numerous accolades for its innovative green building solutions.

All things in which we should take pride.

And yet, there remains a paradox to 'building green.' As renowned architect and green preservationist Carl Elefante has noted, bluntly: 'We cannot build our way to sustainability.' More to the point, Elefante observes: 'Seeking salvation through green building fails to account for the overwhelming vastness of the existing building stock.'

Elefante's surprising conclusion: *the greenest building is one that is already built.*

And four local developers are brilliantly putting Elefante's conclusions into practice.

There's Ben Polley of **Evolve Builders Group**, who single-handedly saved an 1878 stucco cottage at 60 Manitoba Street (*the one-time home of former mayor and first President of the Canadian Co-op Association, Samuel Carter*) from demolition. He then transformed it into his home office and – with straw bale addition, living roof, etc. – a model for environmental sustainability. Driven by his passion for restoration and preservation, Ben observes that 'the wealth of material, effort and energy we inherited from past craftspeople provides a visible, public record of the community's social, economic and cultural heritage.' He adds that restorations also 'gift the community with architectural art.' Indeed.

There's Jason Ashdown of **Skyline Group** who, in 2009, took a massive risk with his **Skyline** partners to restore the burnt-out shell of downtown's Gummer, Victoria and Stewart Buildings (c1850-75) into 77,000 square feet of fabulous office, commercial and residential space that has given new life to our downtown – and, it would seem, to Guelph itself.

There's Tom Dowd of **Stoneleigh Properties** who, in 2005, saw vast potential in the historic – and decrepit – 140-year-old Alma Block on Wyndham Street. A decade later, and it's the site of the popular **Bikram Yoga** and **Hush Salon**, with several gorgeous exposed-stone apartments upstairs.

And there's Peregrine Wood and Kirk Roberts of **Tyrcathlen Partners**, who transformed into amazing shared work spaces the historical **Granary Building** at 111 Farquhar (which now houses the **Guelph Chamber of Commerce**, **MedCanAccess**, **Innovation Guelph** and more) and the former **Guelph Civic Museum Building** at Waterloo and Dublin (now **Boarding House Arts**, home to **Musagetes** and an assortment of artists and arts organizations). As Peregrine and Kirk have eloquently remarked: 'Our projects aim to develop a character for a building and to make them a focal point – whether it is one of supporting the visual arts or creating a centre for innovation and business development.'

So look around and *be proud* – of Guelph's rich architectural legacy, become fabulously new.