

# BUILDER



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# Ezio Tartaro

Gintar Contractors Ltd., Windsor, Ontario

BY JUDY PENZ SHELUK



*“Accessibility is much more than meeting industry standards.”*

This month we paid a visit to **EZIO TARTARO**, president of the Greater Windsor Homebuilders Association (GWHBA), and president of **Gintar Contractors Ltd.** Founded by Ezio's father, **GINO TARTARO**, in 1979, the Windsor-based company has expanded over time to become an established major player in the specialized field of barrier-free construction, developer and builder of active adult communities, and single-source contractor for specific commercial projects. Gintar prides itself on employing and hiring only the best tradespeople the industry has to offer, boasting an energetic and highly motivated team.

“Windsor-Essex is a very unique area, in which you have a large number of builders doing a small number of volumes,” said Ezio. “This creates a challenge for most builders as they fear the competition and play the price-war game. Our business model is quite different, and has proven to be successful: when you offer a unique and distinctive approach to the entire building process, while ensuring quality is second to none, inevitably the results will be quite different and your value will hold

its own.”

That sort of approach takes vision, commitment, and many long hours, something Ezio admits can take a personal toll. “Being away from my family is truly the worst part of the day, but I would have to say that I am my own worst enemy, despite having the best employees and trades, I still feel the need, to not just look over, but see for myself that the job task was done as if I were to do it myself. If I were to sum up my role within the company, I would have to say it is project manager, coordinator, estimator, salesperson, general labourer...” The list goes on, but bottom line is Ezio is one president who is not afraid of getting his hands dirty or working the day with the rest of the team. “What keeps me going is the sense of accomplishment, the satisfaction of a satisfied new client, being proud of our product and truly doing what I love the most, and that is building.”

## Giving Back

Not simply content to work long hours at Gintar, Ezio is also on his third term as president of the GWHBA. “I was nominated to the board of directors five years ago, and quickly moved up the ladder by simply being involved

and constantly looking to facilitate change within our industry. Home builders are a backbone to every community, and considering the challenges we face every day, I wanted to have my voice, along with the others I represent, heard at the highest levels.”

Has he considered serving on the provincial level? “Funny you ask, but when the beloved late **DAVID HORTON** was EO of the Ontario Home Builders’ Association (OHBA), he had pulled me aside one day to discuss this exact question,” said Ezio. “I would love the opportunity, and would always consider it, although I hope the opportunity comes later in my career. At this point in my life, I find myself constantly trying to balance an often excessive workload with the demands of a growing family.”

## Barrier-free Construction

Gintar has become known for its dedication to accessibility and barrier-free construction, something that started about 15 years ago. “My father had been approached by an insurance adjuster to construct a temporary ramp to a home,” said Ezio.

“The homeowner had been hurt in an accident and was being released from the hospital with no way to enter the house. After doing one of these projects, many more started to arise. Soon, as some injured clients became permanently impaired, the need for more extensive accessibility requirements became a necessity. As time continued on, the opportunity to change focus was apparent. Today we believe in building with flexibility in mind. When you have been extensively involved in renovating someone's home to meet the needs of accessibility, you understand how easy and cost effective some simple tips and design changes within your new home can help you in the future.”

In an ideal world, Ezio would like to see all Gintar's homes built with full accessibility, but admits that this kind of construction often scares people. “It reminds them of a potential future. However, we do cater our designs with accessibility in mind: our floor plans are open concept, hallways are wider, door openings are as wide as possible, front entrances are within 16”-8” off finished grade, stairs to basements are a minimum of 3-6” with an electrical receptacle at the bottom of the stairs; something that can easily accommodate an inexpensive stair glide in the future vs. the cost of an elevator.”

The company also designs completely accessible washrooms using roll-under sinks ▶ 18

16 ▶ and curb-less roll-in showers complete with trough drain and multi function accessible shower valves.

"Kitchens are another popular item on the list," said Ezio, "though these are usually customer specific. We have created completely user-friendly kitchens with multi-height accessible counters, specific accessible appliances and full extension drawers. The list is endless, and the results are invaluable. Accessibility is much more than meeting industry standards, it is about creating functional and aesthetically pleasing environments for everyone including those with special needs."

## Marketing Maintenance-free Communities

On the same latitude with northern California and southern Italy, the climate in the Windsor-Essex area is relatively mild, with a temperature climate that allows seven months of short sleeve weather, hot summers and moderate winters. Combine good weather with affordable housing prices (a property in Windsor-Essex is roughly 30-60 per cent less expensive than comparable areas in Ontario),

and maintenance-free, town home condominium projects, and you have the start of a marketing strategy.

"At first, marketing of The Fairways at Point West, a maintenance-free development was targeted at local home buyers, but as we gained momentum we decided to embark on a large



out-of-town campaign, targeted to the Greater Toronto Area, and soon enough our sales to out-of-towners exceeded our local buyers," said Ezio. "The project, now sold out, was started by another developer and was set on a championship private golf course and had home designs of the 1990s. During that era,

this design seemed to work with 2-storey and 3-level back-split units, but the needs of families, empty nesters and active retirees have changed. We embarked on this project by taking the remaining lots and drastically changing the original intent to revolve around our new vision of multi-functional, one floor open concept layouts with stylish architectural design, upgraded and distinctive finishes, abundant natural light, bedrooms that can double as dens or home offices, large spaces dedicated to recreation and entertaining, freedom from exterior maintenance, and quick access to golf, parks, trails and downtown amenities."

The success of The Fairways at Pointe West empowered Gintar to further this type of project with their newest venture, The Fairways at Seven Lakes, a community of luxury, maintenance-free semi-detached homes built within a championship golf course. "Windsor-Essex's growing region of active retirement luxury properties and the quality amenities of its nine communities truly offer a unique lifestyle experience for those looking to retire here," said Ezio. "It's a good place to live, work, and play." ■

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