

The London Free Press

Sifton Properties turns 85 years old

Friday, February 29, 2008

It is rare for a family business to survive through three generations.

By JOE MATYAS, SUN MEDIA

It was party time at a London seniors' residence yesterday as Sifton Properties Ltd. began celebrating a milestone birthday.

The company turns 85 this year and is marking the achievement.

Yesterday, staff and residents of Longworth Retirement Village in London's Westmount area put up banners and donned party hats to celebrate with Richard Sifton and his sister, Sherene Davidson.

"Thanks for making us feel so welcome," said Richard, a third-generation president, during a short address at an upscale facility that represents part of the company's current direction.

Still one of London's most prominent homebuilders, Sifton has moved into retirement and long-term care property development.

Built at a cost of more than \$20 million, Longworth was opened in 2003.

It has two wings, one accommodating 160 residents in long-term care units and the other housing 127 seniors in retirement units.

Some of the residents are couples who live in separate wings but are able to see each other every day, said Mary Jane McArthur, manager of the retirement building.

"We have couples living together," she said, "but we're also able to accommodate a healthy partner and a frail partner who needs a lot of assistance."

Longworth has 220 employees in its long-care facility and 75 in its retirement building, said Randy Peltz, Sifton's regional manager of long-term care.

The company also operates seniors' residences on the complementary retirement/long term care model in Richmond Woods in north London, Lanark Heights in Kitchener and Erin Mills Heights in Mississauga, Peltz said, and more are planned.

Once a mall developer, Sifton sold off its shopping centres years ago and continued as a housing developer.

The company also owns One London Place in partnership with Great West Life.

The Sifton saga began in 1923 on Rosedale Avenue, a short street off Adelaide when Harry Sifton built three modest homes on lots that were \$300 apiece.

He built 500 houses, one at a time, before passing the torch to his son, Mowbray Sifton, who began assembling large tracts of land and developing entire subdivisions.



Alma Lostell helps celebrate the 85th anniversary of Sifton Properties with president Richard Sifton and his sister Sherene Davidson. (Sue Reeve, Sun Media)

The first was Braemar in 1949.

Others followed. The company has also built homes in other Ontario cities.

Sifton also broke new ground with Berkshire Village, a townhouse development that last year won an award as Ontario's best rental community for curb appeal -- 40 years after it was built.

Current developments in London are: Richmond Hill, Upland Hills and RiverBend, a gated, private residential community with a championship 18-hole golf course.

In 2004, Mowbray Sifton stepped down as chair of the board and was replaced by Glen Sifton. Richard then moved into his brother's former position as president.

It's unusual for Canadian family businesses to last for three generations, he said.

"Only 50 per cent survive to the second generation," he said, and only half to the third generation.

"We were given jobs at the bottom and told it was our responsibility to keep them," he said of himself and his siblings. "We had to work hard and work our way up."