

A History of Lagoon City



The 1600 acres which today make up Lagoon City Resort were previously unusable swampland.

Roughly 400 years ago the surrounding area was occupied by the Indians of the Huron nation whose capital, Cahiague, was located a few miles north of Lagoon City near what is currently the town of Warminster. At that time, the population of the Huron people exceeded 20,000 and was believed to be the largest concentration of Indians in all of North America.

In order to get to the rich fishing areas of Lake Simcoe, the people of the Huron villages east of the Lagoon City site traversed along the top of a ridge which cut through the low property. For many years this path was known to the local farmers and people of Mara Township as Old Indian Trail. Today, part of Old Indian Trail is used for hiking and cross-country skiing by the resort's residents and the other part forms one of Lagoon City's oldest streets which lies on a section of the original trail.



The first white man to set foot on what is today Lagoon City, was Samuel de Champlain. In September of

1615, Champlain led an army of 500 Huron warriors to battle the Iroquois.

The war party left Cahiague and canoed south through the narrows where Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching meet. Travelling south along the north-east shore of Lake Simcoe they arrived at the Lagoon City area and portaged

directly east, about 40 kilometers to what is today Sturgeon Lake. Champlain and his party then travelled through the Kawarthas to Lake Ontario.

Through the centuries the Lagoon City site remained unfarmable, unuseable, and for the most part unpenetrable to the local settlers. The small amount of cottage development which took place on the shoreline north and south of the site during the early 1900's proved only to exacerbate the problem as the natural drainage routes to the lake were cut off by the cottage roads. 5000 feet of shore and thousands of acres of flooded lowlands remained undeveloped and useless.

In 1962, Andrew Zsolt, a young civil engineer who ran a small development company, came upon the Lagoon City site. Given its sandy shoreline, Zsolt saw potential in developing the area into a resort town



with a protected harbour, similar to those he had enjoyed in Hungary as a student. That year he optioned to buy two shoreline properties from the owners, August Geisberger and Abraham Katz. Zsolt was convinced that Ontario needed a major, pre-planned resort town in the European tradition. He envisaged a stimulating community with a choice of accommodations, elegant restaurants, attractive beaches, superb water sports, colourful dinner theatres, night-clubs, and activities for a variety of tastes. He foresaw a resort-town that could accommodate these various features, and that would ultimately become a popular destination resort on an international scale. Zsolt conceived and designed a resort town concept for the site in 1962. In 1963 he formed Lagoon City Developments Limited (which was subsequently merged with Zsolt's Inducon Development Corporation). The company purchased these properties with 5,000 feet of shoreline and about 1,000 acres of land, which was eventually expanded to 1600 acres.

He submitted his first draft plan to the Ontario Department of Municipal Affairs in 1963 for the 1,000 acre community to be known as "Lagoon City". The Lagoon City town concept was revolutionary for several reasons:

- Rather than proposing a strip beach-front development, all of the 5,000 feet of sandy Lake Simcoe shoreline were reserved as a private community beach park for the use of all the residents and guests of Lagoon City.
- The plan called for the excavation of over 12 miles of waterways through the swamp which provided the needed fill for the project.
- The waterways provided lake access and protected dockage at the backyard of every home. Although the plan raised many objections and concerns initially, the concept of using wasteland rather than prime agricultural land for development and making private community beach park available for the whole community, instead of a chosen few, became Ontario government guidelines for resort development several years later.

In 1963, prior to formal approvals, 50 acres of brush were cleared and about 3,000 feet of navigable inland waterways were dug, including the first harbour. The original "Lake Avenue" was extended to make up a leg of Lagoon City's first road, Poplar Crescent. It crossed the Harbour Lagoon at Mara Township's 5th Concession, where the first building was erected. This motel style building, completed on Labour Day of 1963, contained 12 small residential units which were used initially as summer rental units and later sold as condominiums.



The following summer, in 1964, a second building was erected on the south side of the harbour, the Lagoon City Marina, (today the site of the Harbour Inn). Five mahogany sailboats

were purchased and the Lagoon City Yacht Club was formed. Work continued... digging lagoons, building roads, cleaning up the shoreline and the sandy beach.

In 1965, the Ontario Municipal Board ruled in favour of the project and its waterways. Phase I was approved for registration in four sub-phases over the following 7 years. This released for



development 186 single family lots, and 6 multiple-residential lots for 110 dwelling units. Thus began the long and painstaking construction of the sewer and water services throughout Phase I and ultimately through the whole resort project. Efforts reached a milestone in the summer of 1971 with the completion of the water filtration and sewage disposal plants, both built and operated for Lagoon City by the developer, Inducon Development Corporation. With the construction of Laguna Parkway, the Poplar Crescent causeway-extension over the Harbour Lagoon was removed, linking miles of waterways and homesites directly with Lake Simcoe and the Trent-Severn System.

The original harbour entrance built in 1963 was taken over by the Federal Department of Works in 1973. At that time, the Federal Government upgraded the harbour entrance by building-up and extending the berms past the sandbars, and digging out the entrance way between the berms.



The expenditures by the Federal Government of about \$270,000.00 were matched by Inducon on improvements inland to accommodate the boating public. Subsequently, over 8 miles of navigable waterways and numerous bridges were completed in Lagoon City.

In the seventies, with Phase I sold out and the newly opened harbour entrance in place, the project began to hit its stride. Ontario's new Condominium Act allowed for the registration and sale of the original "motel" units, which became the building block for the Harbour Village project. This complex became the first resort condominium project in Ontario. Completed in three phases during the summers of 1973, 1974, and 1976, Harbour Village has over 100 condominium units. Also in 1974, Phase II of Lagoon City was approved by the Ontario Municipal Board, bringing the total number of single family dwelling lots to over 450, and adding 12 more condominium project sites.

In 1977, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment purchased the Lagoon



City water filtration plant and existing piping from Inducon in order to extend the water mains to service the adjacent village of Brechin. The program involved a substantial enlargement of the Lagoon City waterworks to meet the future demands of the surrounding region. For phase II, Lagoon City's sewage treatment plant was also upgraded, expanded, and relocated in 1978 to handle the increased demand.



The Harbour Inn and Resort Club, completed in the summer of 1979, proved to be Lagoon City's most important single project up until that time. This was Canada's first, and Ontario's most successful, timeshare ownership resort. In 1981, 18 years

after the initial application, the second Official Plan for the region was approved by the Province and Lagoon City received official status as an Urban Resort Town-site, the only one in Ontario, (Whistler, B.C. being the only other in Canada), with a projected permanent population of 10,000 people. The approval helped to open the door for the Township of Mara Council to exercise a more positive supporting role towards the development of Lagoon City Resort.

Responding to the continued demand for waterfront condominiums, in 1982 the first condominium project of Phase II, Pinetree Villas, was built on Laguna Parkway by Inducon, followed by Canada's first segmented ownership project, Chateau Genevieve. Besides the unique concept, the project's design and layout were also new for Lagoon City.



As Lagoon City's Community Association and the Yacht Club grew, it became apparent that a large permanent facility would be required to house these two very active groups.

Simultaneously, Inducon's sales and administrative staff were outgrowing their facilities. This prompted the creation of the Lagoon City Resort Centre in 1984. This multi-purpose complex located at the resort's busiest intersection, Poplar Crescent and Laguna Parkway, became the permanent home for the Community



Association, the Yacht Club, and the resort's sales group. Three years later, in the summer of 1987, the Laguna Shores Mews was built directly across the street from the Resort Centre. This shopping mall offered goods and services at the hub of the resort, which previously were only available in Brechin or Orillia.

On November 4, 1986, "The Township of Mara Act" received Royal Assent in the Ontario Legislature. This Act created the "Lagoon City Parks and Waterways Commission" which, with the Township were given the power to acquire the private beach parks, waterways and footbridges in trust and to manage, maintain and regulate these properties including shorewalls. The Act also gave the Commission and the Township the taxing power to apportion the cost of maintenance among the properties benefiting from it. This Act created a unique precedent for Canada and for the resort development industry. It also insured the perpetual ownership and maintenance of the waterways, shorewalls and private community beach parks, and secured the property values in this unique setting for years to come.

Lagoon City's waterways, beaches and numerous facilities had always attracted many outside boaters, and the resort's harbour became the most popular transient port on Lake Simcoe. During the eighties, the interest in boating, especially power boating, surged. These two phenomena set the stage for Lagoon City's most significant and consequential development - the creation of a world class, luxury marine centre. Upon its completion in 1987, the Lagoon City Marine Centre was quickly recognized throughout the boating industry as Ontario's finest and most elegant full-service marina and became the focal point of the entire resort.



If during the seventies the project hit its stride, then the latter half of the eighties brought on a full gallop! Since 1987, Inducon could barely keep up with the demand for waterfront resort

condominiums and properties. All remaining lots from Phase II were quickly sold. In 1987, the first phase of the Laguna Shores Condominiums was introduced and

completely sold before breaking ground. This started a new trend in Lagoon City of pre-selling condominium projects before construction commenced. In 1988, all five phases of Laguna Shores had been sold. That year Lagoon City's most exclusive project, Marine Cove Villas, part of Lagoon City's Marine Village, was introduced and sold out.

In the Fall of 1988, the designs of four entirely new resort condominium projects were unveiled at Lagoon City. Woodland Shores Condominiums, Leeward Cove Villas, Chateau Simone, and Marina Quay represented an unprecedented offering of resort homes. After 25 years of building, the project was still only about one third complete with over 1000 acres of lakefront property remaining and Lagoon City Resort was well on its way to becoming Canada's world class waterfront resort town.



Source Unknown