

■ **WEBSITE:** It's an information gathering tool for both homebuyers and builders



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Cameron Properties president Ben Cameron says the London Home Builders' Association's interactive online map to members' developments is a handy resource for builders and homebuyers.

Interactive web map keeps market current

BY GEOFF DALE
Special to Sun Media

It's only been online for about six weeks, but the London Home Builders' Association's interactive website map to its members' developments is already getting rave reviews.

"Marketing in London to new homebuyers can be difficult," said Ben Cameron, president of medium-sized Cameron Properties.

"That's because up until now there hasn't been one specific area where home purchasers can go to get a complete picture of what's happening throughout the city.

"Now they have it: a simple, direct and highly effective spot to seek out the kind of pertinent information they need. It's just . . . a fantastic tool that gives buyers the essentials to go ahead with their plans and builders more promotion for their projects."

The idea began more than a year ago, with the association gathering information and developing the design in early spring. The site was officially launched in October.

Association executive officer Lois Langdon said the site — free to LHBA members and a first for any home builders' association — levels the playing field for large, medium and small builders, allowing everyone to participate, regardless of promotional budget.

And for potential new homebuyers, the interactive map is a straightforward research tool available anytime. To use the site:

- ▶ Visit www.lhba.on.ca/builders_map.
- ▶ Click on either a house icon directly on the map or one of the neighbourhood items listed in the column on the left side of the page.
- ▶ Read a brief neighbourhood description and what housing developments are in that section of the city.
- ▶ Click on the appropriate builder's icon for more details.

"A buyer gets to see exactly what's going on at any site anywhere in the city," says Jim Vanderhoeven, operations manager of the city's biggest single-family-home builder, CachetReid Heritage Homes.

"It works extremely well as an information-gathering tool, giving buyers

the necessary groundwork before actually venturing out to a specific site in the city. Once the buyer gets the basics, he or she goes to the builder for specifics like price range. Then it's up to the builder."

Pointing to the goal of getting every LHBA member on board, Langdon says response to the builders' map has been overwhelmingly positive, with more than 20 new housing developments featured.

"It is a work in progress," she adds. "We collect and post new information on a regular basis. Progress is a sign of movement and market vitality."

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*Ben Cameron, president,
Cameron Properties.*

Even during a downturn in the housing market, Cameron said, the map will still be effective for buyers and builders.

"In bad times, consumers will still have everything they need at their fingertips," he said.

"Buyers might miss out on the perfect site because the home was located on a cul-de-sac or off a side street and they didn't see a billboard or an ad.

"The map will ensure they don't miss anything. Even in a tough market, people still need information and this map should do exactly what it's intended to do."

Langdon says the map, including a new logo for the navigation bar, will be featured at the Lifestyle Home Show Jan. 23-25 at the Western Fair grounds to kick off the spring 2009 season. It will also be at the centre of a promotional campaign.

"It is a unique service so we are putting a lot of effect into creating awareness of its existence," she says.

The 66 builders in the 265-member association are responsible for 80 per cent of the residential building in London.

Geoff Dale is a Woodstock-based writer