

Coming Home

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Ever since suburban growth boomed along with all those babies born between 1946 and 1964, the term “bedroom community” implied a comfy, cosy place that people left in the morning to earn a living and then retreated back to after a gruelling day at the widget factory.

Durham Region in 2010 is still a comfy, cosy place but residents definitely don't retreat. After their journeys, be they weekday GO train trips to Toronto, Hawaiian holidays or dropping the kids off at school, four prominent Durhamites share their favourite spots to come home to.

“General Motors Centre is a great place,” declares Roger Lajoie. The veteran broadcaster is the voice of the Oshawa Generals on Rogers TV and proudly declares his bias up front. “There's no question the arena has attracted a lot of business. Like a lot of older downtowns, Oshawa needed some work but since the arena opened in November 2006 it's really improved.”

Some things are perfect as is. “Fazio's downtown – terrific Italian,” says Lajoie about one of his favourite fine dining spots. For every day fare he and his family – wife Rita, daughter Nicki and stepson Ryan opt for an Oshawa classic. “Teddy's is an institution, a good family style restaurant. It probably represents Oshawa better than any other place in town does to tell you the truth,” he says. “Like the city, it's not glamorous but offers good wholesome food, reasonably priced.”

Lajoie, who frequently hosts shows on Toronto sports radio station The Fan 590 is a proud promoter of eating locally. “There's a little place in Courtice called Barnaby's, a smaller version of Teddy's which we go to all the time. Durham is really underrated in terms of the value of its restaurants,” says the media vet.

One local who fully appreciates the region's quiet and contemplative corners is the multi-talented Neil Crone. Currently in the limelight thanks to his role as Fred Tupper on the hit television series Little Mosque on the Prairie, Crone seeks solitude close to his Sunderland home.

“One of my personal sanctuaries is the old Quaker Meeting House in Uxbridge,” reveals Crone. “They have a beautiful big lawn that's quite secluded. Up toward the meeting house there are these huge, stately, old growth maples,” he explains. “If I've had a busy or crazy day, on my way home I'll just sit down under the canopies of these things, leaning my back against the bark. It's really quite a beautiful feeling.”

Crone has found another local spot to recover from hectic days on set. “Just outside Sunderland there is a tiny little cemetery, the St. John cemetery. It backs onto farmers' fields and affords a beautiful view of the Uxbridge Valley,” says Crone. “I go there all the time because it's right on the way home.”

They have these little benches there in memory of people so I'll sit there under the pine trees and look over the valley. It's very restful there."

What trees are to Neil Crone, water is to Kevin Shea. "The shoreline in Durham Region is so under appreciated," he says. "It's not The Beach, it's not Sunnyside and it's not the Bluffs but it has some real charm to it."

The nameplate on Shea's weekday work desk reads "Manager, public relations, Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation" but hockey fans know him better as the Hockey Hall of Fame's editor of publications and on-line Features. As if that isn't enough, in his spare time Shea has penned eight books including the recently re-released Barilko: Without a Trace.

Shea and his fiancée, who works in child protective services, are often on the road and treasure their homecoming haunts now that they are empty nesters. "There's a beautiful marsh within walking distance of our home and just east of us there is Lynde Shores Conservation area," says Shea. "Sometimes it's nothing more than grabbing a coffee at Tim Horton's in Whitby, laughing together, catching up on our lives and Lynde Shores is beautiful place to do that."

Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's analogy of Canada being a mouse sleeping next to the elephantine United States works equally as well when dealing with Toronto and Durham Region. Our local history and heritage is often lost in the shadow cast by our jumbo neighbour to the west. Although Shea has only lived in Ajax for six years the history buff immediately delved into local lore. "I feel a real sense of kinship for where I live and want to know everything I can about these areas and their development. We have our own great history right here in Durham Region," he boasts.

Shea uses a guide book published by the Province of Ontario listing the sites of all the heritage plaques and markers to fuel his curiosity and says, "I've probably done all of the ones in Durham three or four times."

One of those plaques is located on the grounds of Intrepid Park in Whitby, where fellow Durham author Susanna Kearsley goes for inspiration and relaxation.

"It's a place that I really love, one of Durham Region's little hidden spots," Kearsley says of the site on Boundary Road. "It's a beautifully isolated spot, right down at the lake. It played such an important part during World War II."

Kearsley is an award-winning writer who won the 1993 Catherine Cookson Fiction Prize and has kept a steady stream of books in the marketplace. She is often away from home promoting her works and enjoys returning to Intrepid Park, which she featured in her book "Every Secret Thing."

"During the war most people had no clue it was the site of Camp X, of what really went on there," says Kearsley of the site where many secret agents were trained. "Those people made such a huge and unsung contribution to the war."

A keen historian, Kearsley makes a point of attending Remembrance Day services at the site when her hectic schedule allows for it. “Many people don’t even know there is a service. A lot of surviving agents and people who worked there come back for the event,” she says. “There’s a lot of atmosphere there even though the buildings are gone. It has a very reverent atmosphere, one I’m happy to see preserved,” she adds.

“Right now it’s a very wild and windswept place, great for closing your eyes and imagining what it would have been like full of people making a secret contribution to the war,” Kearsley reminisces.

Thanks to Remembrance Day services that will be held at Intrepid Park, the original Camp X site, Durham residents will not have to rely on their imaginations. Ordinary citizens can stand side by side with veterans, former agents and public officials to commemorate the significant work that was done so close to home, and to remember the local lives lost who never lived to see their Durham homecomings.