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LUMINATO

'Icebreakers' seek common ground

Consultant on sustainability issues sees need for proper land use and density in design

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BILL TAYLOR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Mark Twain was probably just being cute when he said, "Buy land. They're not making it any more."

Jordy Gold sees nothing cute about it. Not that he wants to *buy* land. He just wants the land that we have to be used properly.

Gold believes in density, not wide-open residential spaces; urban highrises rather than suburban split-levels.

He strolls through the soaring Allen Lampert Galleria at Brookfield Place, at Bay and Wellington Sts., and likes what he sees. That's not just because it's one of the city's loveliest public spaces.

"It's so much easier to heat a place like this than a bunch of houses," he says.

Gold, 30, was born and partly raised in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He's a consultant on sustainability issues and writes extensively on the subject, too.

He has a degree from Queen's in politics and development studies and a master's degree from Sweden in environmental management and policy. In 2006, he was on Elizabeth May's team when the leader of the national Green party ran unsuccessfully for election.

He's also heavily involved in OpenCity Projects, "creative problem solvers and city builders using strategic design to make places, products and communications more meaningful. ... Combining viewpoints and partners, we create people-centred designs."

Working with the Ontario College of Art and Design and the Luminato festival, OpenCity has put together an exhibit called "Icebreakers – Creating Common Ground by Design." Launched last Wednesday, it runs in 11 places around the city through next Saturday. There's also an information centre in Brookfield Place.

OCAD students examined "how we define and interact with our neighbours" and have set up such things as a playground area in Bayview Village Shopping Centre.

One of the questions Icebreakers asks is, "When was the last time you spoke to the person living across the street?"

Gold anticipates the time when this becomes particularly apposite.

He may not be the green Messiah but he sees dark days coming. And, amiable as he is, when he talks about what he thinks it'll take to ward them off, he exhibits the proselytizing zeal of a hellfire-and-damnation evangelist.

That doesn't, he insists, make him a prophet of doom.

"If you were a pessimist, you might as well just give up right now," he says. "All I want is for people to act like adults."

Every new subdivision around the GTA means that much less farmland to grow the crops we'll need to sustain us, Gold says. "Locally grown" often is little more than a faddish label that goes hand-in-glove with a higher price tag.

But as oil supplies begin to dwindle – experts around the globe believe "peak oil" could be little more than a decade away – our personal worlds will also inevitably shrink, he says.

With oil prices hitting a projected \$200 or even \$300 a barrel, he believes: We won't be able to afford food that has to be brought great distances. Locally grown will become not a fad but a necessity.

Buying gasoline for the daily commute from outlying communities could cripple our budgets, he thinks.

We'll seek, Gold predicts, to live near our work, our friends, our interests. Our communities will spread upward, not outward. We'll live in vertical villages.

Condo towers, however much some people hate them, are the way of the future and we'll need creative new ways to get to know the neighbours who live, not just beside us but above and below us.

The sooner we face up to this new reality and start dealing with it, the better for all of us, he says.

It has to be done now, he warns. "If we wait for it to happen, that's too late. Among other things, it'll have become too expensive to do what needs to be done.

"We need more streetcar tracks, more subways, more buses. The time to make those investments is not when oil is two or three times more expensive. It's now."

One long-term project Gold is working on with a "green architect" is a proposal for a "huge resident and commercial development with closed loops to develop energy and deal with waste; extract the good stuff. It would go around in a circle.

"There's no way to know right now if we'll pull it off. But I'd like to see this model used across the board. We're certainly not doing enough of that in the city."

Land use is one of his hobby horses. Gold deplors the fact that "for a fast buck, we're continually chewing up perfectly good land around Toronto and turning it into subdivisions instead of producing food. It drives me mad.

"When oil goes to \$200 a barrel and beyond, growing food becomes far more expensive. It'll be too late to say, 'I wish we hadn't built that last suburb and paved the land.'

"We'll have to live in a denser form with less infrastructure and closer-knit communities. Strong communities with strong local economies."

Gold lives downtown in a 50-year-old highrise and rides a bicycle all year long.

In his spare time, he's a member of a Brazilian drumming group. But the beat that he marches to is his own and it may be the rest of the city that is out of step.

For more information, go to [opencityprojects.com](#).

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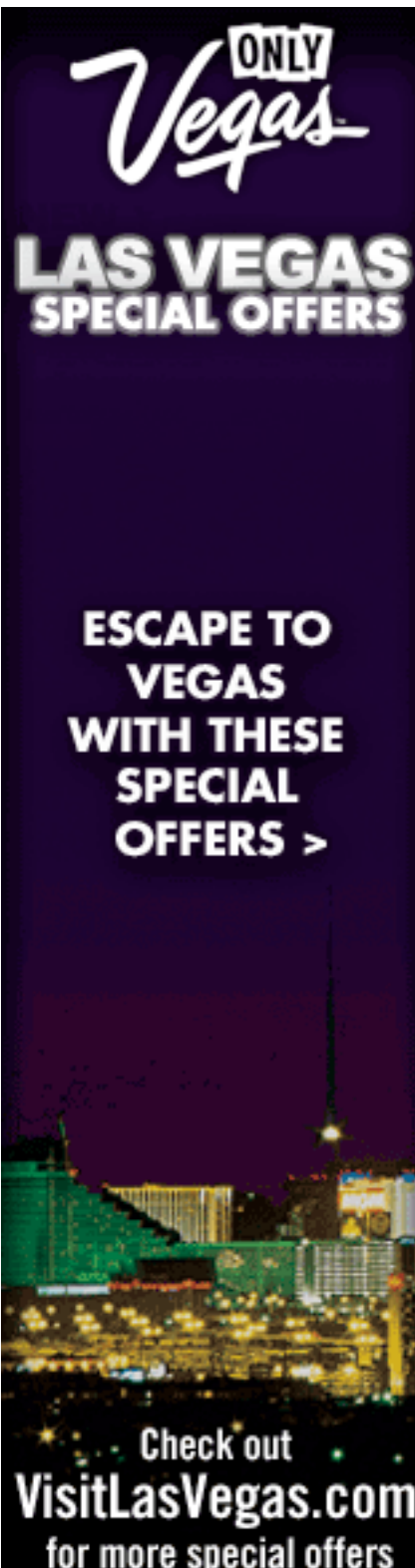
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