

Business Profile

A year of laurels for master Toronto builder

By **RON CSILLAG**
Staff Reporter

TORONTO — Harold Green's name has been synonymous with construction for decades in Toronto. But Green has also demonstrated that he's something of a renaissance man in the building business.

He's been in the construction trade for 53 years, and has lent his name to dozens of single-family, highrise-condo, commercial and industrial projects.

But unlike some builders who have clashed with trade unions in their efforts to get projects built, Green has also worked the labor side of things, and his efforts have led to lasting peace among the trades, as well as more equitable working conditions.

He helped pioneer the building of pre-fabricated structures in Toronto, had a hand in the construction and selling of homes in Canada's first fully planned community, and built Toronto Jewry's central address — the Lipa Green Building — bearing his late father's name.

He's also devised a number of innovations in construction techniques, both in materials and labor, which have speeded the building process and made it more cost-efficient.

It's been a long time coming, but this has been, and will be, a year of laurels for the master Toronto builder.

In February, Green was inducted into the Greater Toronto Home Builders Association Hall of Fame in recognition of his contributions to the city's construction industry and its labor unions.

A few days later, he was honored by Mount Sinai Hospital for his involvement on its executive and his supervision of more than 30 hospital projects, including the Marvelle Koffler Breast Cancer Clinic.

Finally, on June 2, Green, his wife Miriam, and 18 other couples in the city's Jewish community, will be awarded the Canada-Israel Children's Centres' Peace Prize for their support of social and recreational complexes in Israel, which benefit more than 200,000 Israeli kids a year.

Green, a man of few words who still puts in a full day's work at age 71, takes it all in stride. Surrounded by photographs of his many projects, his three sons and nine grandchildren (soon to be 10) at his company's headquarters, the Yonge-Eglinton Centre, he reminisces about his humble origins.

He learned bricklaying while still a teenager, following in the footsteps of his Polish-born father, who came to Canada in 1910. Green and his brothers Al, a carpenter, and Sam, also a bricklayer, started out by building some of

Toronto's best-known Jewish bakeries, as well as factories in the city's garment district.

During World War II, Harold trained as a wireless air gunner for the Royal Canadian Air Force, and completed his course on May 8, 1945 — the very day the Allies declared victory in Europe. He never did see any action.

But three years later, his father, together with Toronto's Weinstock family, launched the Greenwin Construction Company, which provided plenty of action for the following 30 years.

Greenwin began modestly by building single-family homes and small plants. Harold started managing the company's construction division in 1952 — the same year he looked at the peaceful, rolling farm hills of Don Mills, and saw an opportunity.

The developer of the lands was having trouble getting homes built there. Many builders resisted the concept of the day, namely, that it was the developer who retained control over all aspects of the project, including the building of components of homes in off-site factories. The notion of subdivision control of almost every visible exterior component was new and strange to both purchasers and builders.

But Greenwin embraced it, and launched the now-standard method of mass producing pre-fabricating house components. For the first time, walls, windows, floors, roofs, trusses and stairs — all were manufactured at the plant and installed on site. The length of time it took to produce a home was reduced dramatically, and what Green calls Canada's first "master-planned" community was born.

He never looked back. Green estimates he built between 300 and 400 homes a year for the following 10 years in Don Mills.

The year 1961 was a watershed. "We did our first highrise that year," Green recalls, "at Eglinton

and Winnett. It was 3½ storeys. That was a highrise in those days." Another was put up on Sherbourne Avenue, and soon, Greenwin-built highrise apartments and condo suites were dotting the Yonge-Davisville area.

A technique borrowed from European construction methods later yielded three of the world's tallest prefabricated concrete structures in the world, each averaging 26 storeys, and all in Toronto.

It was during this period that Green first noticed something was amiss in highrise con-

struction.

Greenwin, through negotiations with the powerful trade unions, devised a new tack: a multi-trained tradesman called a formworker, who could perform all tasks, one after the other, with no stoppages.

In addition, Greenwin also experimented with a new system of highrise construction called the "flying form," which allowed large chunks of a structure to be assembled and then hoisted onto the floor above.

The efficiency of the new systems represented a 30 percent improvement in overall building costs and timing.

But not all had been calm on the labor front. "Traditionally, every April 30, there would be a strike," Green says. "You could count on it." Having assisted his father in helping to re-settle and train many post-war refugees, Green saw the need to deal fairly with construction workers. So in 1967, he founded and served as first president of the Metro Toronto Apartment Builders Association, which formed a link between the city's construction laborers and the high-rise builders.

The association forged the industry's first collective agreement between workers, employers and the union, and set up medical, dental, and legal aid plans, as well as pensions, for construction workers. Green himself spearheaded the committee that established a grievance mechanism, which is still in use today.

He also founded a fund to help rehabilitate injured construction workers, or to re-train them.

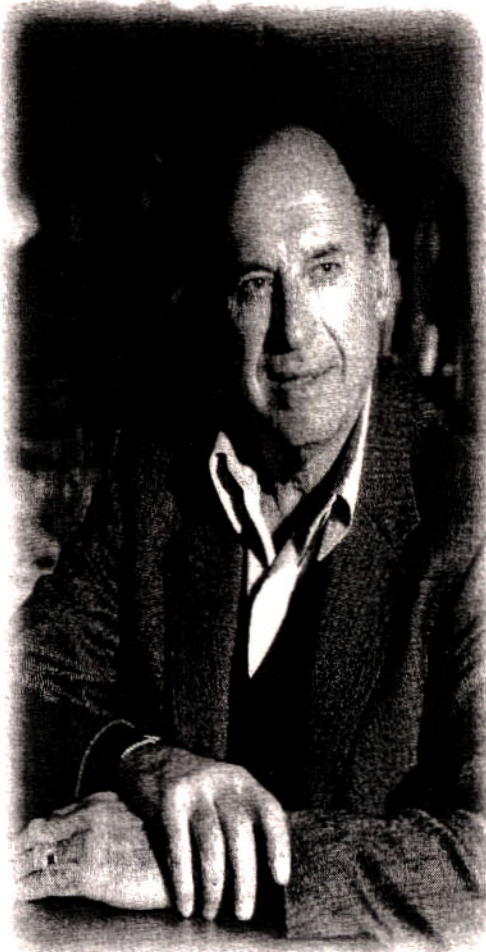
A peace pact with the unions was finally sealed in 1969. "And it's been quiet ever since," Green notes with just a hint of pride.

Green wrapped up the construction side of Greenwin in 1978. Today, he, his brother Al and Albert Latner are the principals behind Greenwin Properties, which owns or manages more than 45,000 rental apartments and townhomes, and oversees a portfolio of more than three million square feet of office space.

Twenty years ago, Green created Verdicroc Construction, which is building, or has built, over 2,000 condominium units. Some are luxurious (Highland Green in Aurora), but over half of them are government non-profit housing, including the Moshav Noam project at Bathurst and Lawrence. Verdicroc has also built over one million square feet of industrial, retail and health care projects.

Today, his sons are all in the business. Eric, 44, handles construction; Cary, 41, runs development; and Kevin, 39, looks after marketing and sales.

Green is taciturn when it comes to his achievements. "It's a tough business," he allows, "but I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."



Harold Green

struction methods. Large structures at the time were built using the "craft" system, meaning a building was put up by one specialized tradesman working after another, each completing only his craft. Carpenters would start and finish; to be followed by steel workers, then concrete pourers, and so on. The system was slow and la-