

# Embracing Community



## Historic Donalda is a true family club By Jeremy Finkelstein



Photos courtesy of The Donalda Club. Rendering by Baker Turner Inc. Landscape Architecture.

This April, the Donalda Club will be holding a very special Open House in appreciation of its members and its community. Guests are invited to socialize, tour the Club, meet the Program Directors, and join in a family skate on the Club's curling rink. If you would like to attend, please contact Brian Krinberg at 416.447.5575.



With residential expansion redefining the boundaries of Greater Toronto for the past sixty years, it's difficult to imagine a time when residents regarded its popular Don Mills community as farmland. Yet this is precisely what existed before an investment group led by famed businessman E.P. Taylor purchased 600 acres along the Don Valley. Operating out of the old Donalda Farmhouse and fueled by Taylor's unwavering vision, the company soon increased its land holdings and began building a community with schools, housing and churches and, in so doing, reinvented the York Mills landscape from Bayview to the Don Valley.

Certainly, Taylor's legacy is secure within the annals of city-lore, however, even visionaries are afforded the occasional misstep. When his development company disbanded, the question was posed as to what to do with their operating centre, the historic Donalda Farmhouse. It was Taylor who envisioned the grand old home as a Gentleman's Club, from which members would be able to conduct business. Fortunately, 'Founding Executive' member, James A. Daly, understood from the outset that a healthy

community is one that is ultimately rooted in traditional family values. He believed that Don Mills would be best served by a Family Club, committed to bringing local families together and enhancing the community experience through recreational golf, tennis, curling, swimming and social programs. Today, fifty years later, the Donalda Club remains an iconic symbol for both community and family, and is a preferred destination for families from Don Mills and beyond.

Though steeped in tradition, the Donalda Club's directors have long understood that to best serve its members, a club must reflect the times. Over the past decade, they have introduced a renovation to the golf course, a modern tennis bubble for year-round play, international regulation squash courts, new dining and lounge areas, a new patio overlooking the golf course, and a new pro shop. "Modern facilities are very important for the membership, and you can never stop reinvesting in the club. We're a non-profit organization, when we have money left over, we put it back into the facilities," relates General Manager Charles Powell.

With that in mind, this May, the Donalda is preparing to unveil a brand new Olympic-sized saltwater pool area, complete with a diving area, children's splash zone and toddler pool. Members can also expect a full schedule of lessons available for all skill levels, aqua fit programs, and the finest ambient landscaping, in keeping with a first class resort. "We fully expect it to be the focal point of many families' summer days at the club," exclaims Powell.

Increased use of the pool facilities as a hub for physical activity is no coincidence. In keeping with the Club's vision to provide members with a fully integrated fitness program, an active swimming area is just part of the big picture. Two years ago, Donalda members were introduced to Jennifer Kennedy; the fitness fanatic who was hired to ensure a more holistic approach to fitness was integrated into the many activities, such as golf and tennis. Today, a traditional regiment of weights and cardio in the Club's modern fitness studio has been coupled with new age exercise like yoga and pilates, and members now have access to naturopathic doctors, dieticians and chiropractors. To ensure full member participation, Powell puts the onus on his staff, "Donalda has a very high standard and it expects its professionals to create

a high degree of enthusiasm and participation in their sport. Fortunately, because of our exclusive nature, there's never difficulty getting a lesson for any of our programs."

Of course, members understand that the Club was initially created out of the desire to promote and nurture the spirit of community. For fifty years, this sense of stewardship and goodwill has remained integral in the Club, and through annual events like the North York Masters Golf Tournament and the Daniel Nestor Tennis Tournament, Donalda Club members have helped raise millions of dollars for the North York General Hospital Foundation.

As the Donalda Club prepares for its fiftieth anniversary, its role in the community may be more important than ever. With explosive development having stretched our city's northern borders, and a society that has become increasingly insular and impersonal, many argue that Toronto is at risk of losing the communal spirit that has made it one of the great places in the world to live. Perhaps, it's time to step back, revisit our heritage, and re-embrace the traditional values of family and community upon which the Donalda Club was originally founded.