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DISCOVER REAL QUALITY AND A CAREFREE LIFESTYLE AT WILLIAM'S COURT LÉPINE LUXURY APARTMENTS

Carrie Bostrom has pretty much seen it all when it comes to Ottawa rental units.

DAVID KAUFMAN

Alternative Investor

For more than a decade, the 34-year-old dental assistant moved from one old apartment complex to another, paying ever-increasing rent for the same dingy spaces with their parquet floors, dated appliances and thin walls. It was time, she told herself, for a step up.

Two years ago, she took that step and moved into a fourth floor studio unit at William's Court – Lépine Luxury Apartments in Kanata Lakes, a striking new rental community built by Lépine. It was the perfect fit, she says, a stepping stone to whatever comes next.

"It's quite large, high ceilings, great lighting," she says. "A washer and dryer are included in the unit and there are so many amenities here — the fitness centre, the saltwater pool. It's very quiet. It's a renter's dream."

The other big plus is the sense of community in what will ultimately be a five-building "neighbourhood" complete with treed gardens, a pond, rooftop patios and a central reception area staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's fresh; it's clean; it's well-maintained. It's the kind of place, she says, that you leave feeling good and that you're happy and proud to come home to.

Currently, three of five buildings — 471 units — are complete. The fourth and final phase is scheduled to open within the next 10 months and is already booking reservations.

Partners Francesca Lépine-Willson and her brother Francis Lépine learned the business from their late father, Rene, who designed and built many prestigious addresses in Montreal. Those endeavors included the Olympic Village, which was built on time and on budget after the initial contractor's project unraveled just 17 months before the 1976 Games.

Always at the forefront of building innovation, the family saw a niche developing in the housing market somewhere between traditional rentals and condos. That niche would appeal to young up-and-comers and older empty-nesters alike.

"It was really a combination," says Francesca. "First of all looking at the demographics and at the future, we're seeing a whole wave of people who are going to want to get rid of the stairs, get rid of the lawn, get rid of the snow removal — where are those people going to go?"

There is also the younger demographic. They've been raised in a nice house, had experienced student "slumming" and are looking for something like what they were raised in. But they're not ready to buy, either for financial reasons or simply because their lives are still evolving.

"It's a fresh alternative to the condominium concept," says Francesca. "Condos may have been a wonderful concept that allowed people to get into

home ownership who might not have otherwise been able to. But it has its drawbacks for people going into retirement, people wanting to deal with their estate and free up their capital and who don't want the responsibility of ownership. However, in condominiums the responsibility is still there. It's maybe a little bit different ... but it's still there."

Enter Jim and Sandra Romanuk. They came to William's Court from quite a different perspective from Carrie, but their wants and needs intersect.

Originally from Montreal, the Romanuks were empty-nesters who over the course of 42 years together had followed the Alberta oil boom, then returned east to Ottawa when the bubble burst. They owned a home in Centrepoinde for years before moving into one of Lépine's new apartments in Kanata three months ago.

Sandra, 64, worked at a government job in Hull for 30 years. Now she and Jim, a handyman and elevator mechanic, just want to kick back and enjoy life. They don't want to pay condo fees or attend board meetings.

"I never thought I'd live in Kanata," she admits. "And the reason I live in Kanata is because of this building. They're doing something here that I don't see happening very much in Ottawa unless you're buying a condo."

Sandra was concerned about things as simple as having her own washer and dryer — she'd never been without them. She and Jim looked at rentals around the city, but most were 40 to 50 years old and had limited amenities.

"We just thought this was the ultimate in total freedom," she says. "You don't even have to deal with a condo board. You come down to the office if something's wrong and it's taken care of; you just continue on with your day. "It's like a condo, but without all the baggage."

Her sister used to run a seniors' residence and she would tell Sandra how her prospective clients would come, "todder around in their 80s and say, 'I'm not ready for this.'"

The next time she'd see them, they'd have fallen or had encountered some other age-related misfortune.

"So I've always kind of taken a page from her book and said: Go somewhere while you still can enjoy all the amenities and love all the stuff around you." And Sandra's doing just that.

Always a self-described pool rat, she swims daily and can be found socializing at the gazebo in the courtyard with its fire pit, or on one of the many rooftop patios, where there are barbecues and sweeping views in all directions.

The buildings are all interconnected by a secure, underground climate-controlled parking garage, as well as landscaped pathways above ground. From the decor and the saltwater aquarium to the massage chairs in the lobby, Sandra says Lépine has paid attention to detail.

"There's a sense of community; there's always somebody to talk to. It's like a resort. It's an easy lifestyle, serene. And I like the fact that there are people of all ages. I don't like to belong to a club where every member's like me."

Like the Romanuks, Colette Watts and her husband found themselves at loose ends after their two children grew up and moved out of their three-storey home. It took some time, but they finally settled on a place where they felt comfortable downsizing — William's Court.

They booked an apartment, sold their house of 23 years, put their belongings in storage and, despite Lépine's offer of interim apartment accommodations, they travelled until their suite in Building C was ready. Their dog came to William's Court with them.

"We'd been considering this for several years," says Colette, 67. "This was perfect for us. It was the best move we ever made."

Like the Romanuks, they signed a 10-year lease, giving themselves stability, predictability and peace of mind. Carrie, on the other hand, signed on for two years and just recently renewed for one — an arrangement more amenable to her age and circumstance.

In fact, flexible leasing was one of the principles guiding the Lépinés as they embarked on the project. Another was to build it more like a resort with quality as a primary focus.

Says Francesca Lépine-Willson: "It makes for a diverse community, but one that is basically like-minded."

Some facts and figures on William's Court – Lépine Luxury Apartments:

- There are more than 100 unique floor plans ranging from 700 to 1,800 square feet;
- rent from \$1,300 to \$4,500/month;
- naturally finished maple cabinets, granite counters, hardwood floors;
- large kitchen and living spaces similar to a single family home;
- all appliances are provided, including in-suite laundry;
- nine-foot ceilings throughout; ten-foot ceilings on the ground floor.
- resort lifestyle community with all-inclusive amenities, including a staffed fitness centre, a saltwater pool, rooftop terraces with barbecues and more;
- long-term leases available with guaranteed rates;
- guest-suite hosting for family.

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