



BARBARA LAWLOR
CONDO PRO

A true community

Condominiums are often described as vertical communities, and it's true. In fact, this lifestyle is a step up from low-rise communities in the sense that you are closer to your neighbours and encounter them more often in the hallways and amenity spaces.

There's a certain comfort in familiarity, and with people getting to know each other, they are more likely to notice if anything unusual is taking place. By using the amenities in the condo, residents meet new people and develop friendships that add to the sense of belonging they feel. Even stepping into the elevator and saying "Good morning" can start the process of getting to know someone. And when you travel, neighbours are incredibly handy in a condo for watering plants, feeding cats and the like.

It's hard to be lonely in a condominium — but remember that your suite always offers privacy when you want it. That's the beauty of this lifestyle, which is a guiding force for condo design. The amenity spaces contribute to neighbourliness by providing areas where people can gather for relaxation and enjoyment. These may include a fitness room, indoor and/

or outdoor pool, saunas, theatre room, media room, games room, rooftop patio, virtual golf, landscaped courtyard or any number of other common areas, which are uncommonly beautiful in today's buildings.

From the moment you enter the lobby, the building should speak to your sensibilities and feel like "home." Designers and decorators carry through that ambience, whether it's European, traditional, contemporary, modern or minimalist, into the decor for the amenity spaces. Whether you take the elevator to meet friends for a game of pool or to watch the Stanley Cup play-offs on the big screen or to hold a baby shower in the party room, it's enormously convenient.

Remember, too, that condominiums have rules and regulations that nurture community by promoting mutual consideration and respect among residents. For example, window treatments are often required to be in neutral tones so that your "community" has an attractive, cohesive look from the street. Rules about noise, pets and other lifestyle considerations are there to protect your enjoyment and your

It's hard to be lonely when living in a condo

investment - and everyone in the building is expected to follow these guidelines. It's an even playing field.

If an issue arises, another beauty of condominium living is having a concierge to help address the problem — usually much more quickly than something would be handled in a low-rise community. And speaking of concierge, many condos today also employ a Resident Services Director, who organizes social activities and groups to bring together like-minded people for fun and recreation. This may include day trips for shopping or to the casino, exercise classes, hobby groups and the like. It's a great way of nurturing the community feeling in the building and of encouraging people to use the amenities.

Taking the community aspect more literally, many urban condominiums are situated in master-planned communities, such as Humber Bay Shores in Etobicoke or the emerging Fort York Neighbourhood in downtown Toronto. These kinds of areas are packed with shops, services, parks, fabulous entertainment venues and other amenities that help to make everyday

life in a condominium enjoyable and practical. And of course, a condo beside the lake is the ultimate community setting for water lovers.

You will even find condominiums with restaurants and commercial retail venues in the podium, which really makes the building a community in the truest sense of the word.

I know people who have lived in low-rise communities for years and still don't know their neighbours. In a condominium, the common areas are natural gathering spots, so meeting people is easier. Remember, a home is more than the immediate walls that surround you; home is also determined by the people you enjoy in the neighbourhood. If you make the move to a condo, enjoy your new community and help others to do the same.

Barbara Lawlor is president of Baker Real Estate Inc. and an in-demand columnist and speaker. A member of the Baker team since 1993, she oversees the marketing and sales of condominium developments in the GTA and overseas.