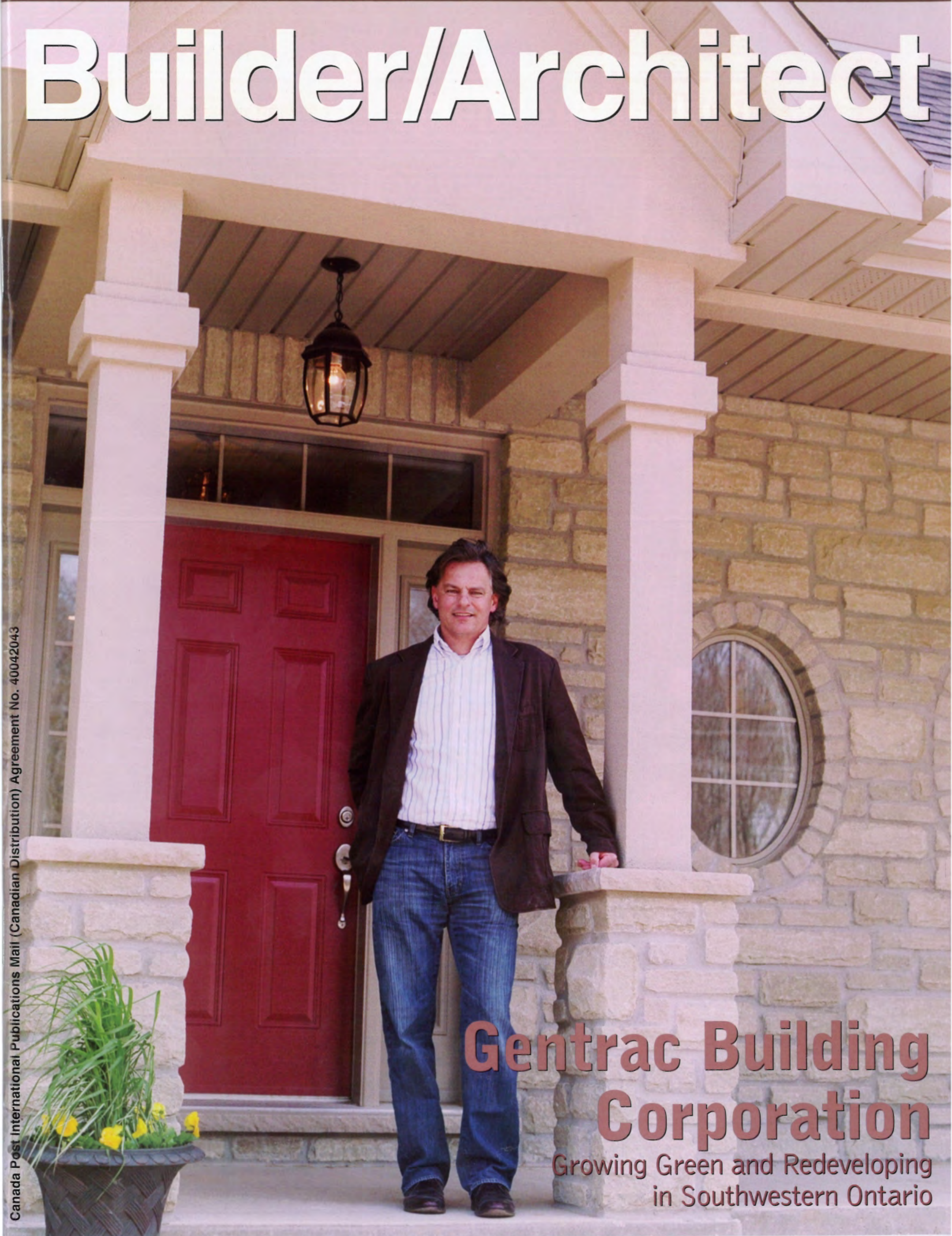


# Builder/Architect

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## Gentrac Building Corporation

Growing Green and Redeveloping  
in Southwestern Ontario





# Gentrac Building Corporation

## Growing Green and Redeveloping in Southwestern Ontario

By Michael McKay

After obtaining his engineering degree in 1981 at the University of Western Ontario and his business degree in 1983 at the University of British Columbia, John Gilvesy began his career as a project engineer for Gilvesy Construction, a family company specializing in the development, construction and management of both small and large residential and commercial projects in southwestern Ontario, including well-known Hickory Hills Adult Living Community in Tillsonburg and the award-winning Victoria Hall Restoration in Petrolia.

In 1993, John branched out to become a real estate broker for Coldwell Banker and activated Gentrac Building Corporation to provide site analysis, development, construction and management services within the development, construction and real estate industry. "The insight gained as a real estate broker has allowed us

to better appreciate the buyer process and understand homeowner preferences. It has also better equipped us to formulate marketing strategies and communicate with our sales staff."

Gentrac Building Corporation first began building single-family homes in 2002, responding to an observed short supply targeting the growing empty-nester market descending on southwestern Ontario, and to facilitate sales at its affiliated subdivision in Simcoe. Now, together with related companies including Permterra Development Corporation and Gilvesy Enterprises Inc., projects include subdivision and condominium development, upscale residential homes including custom builds to owner requirements, commercial construction and management of assets and leasing operations, the most prominent being at the flagship 14-storey waterfront building First Sarnia Place in Sarnia.

**The unveiling of Tillsonburg's first solar-powered, Energy Star-qualified home. From left to right: Ernie Hardeman, M.P.P. (Oxford); John Gilvesy, President of Gentrac Building Corporation; Dave MacKenzie, M.P. (Oxford); Chris Evans, Carmanah Technologies**







Gentrac Building Corporation also moved quickly into “green” building, being recognized by the Ontario Power Authority as “raising the bar for other home builders in Ontario,” building energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable houses. Gentrac Building Corporation is an Energy Star and R2000 qualified builder.

“We believe that in the long run, green building is the only sustainable direction for the environment,” says John. “We are also intrigued by the fact that solar energy can be converted to electricity. To promote the growth of solar PV, we felt it important for a working system to be on display. Gentrac built its first home utilizing photovoltaic panels on the roof of its model

at affiliated Wood Haven Subdivision in Tillsonburg.” Panels and mountings were selected to blend in with roofing and other materials, making them aesthetically viable and acceptable within larger residential developments.

“The buying public has shown great interest in our energy-efficient homes,” says John, “but I’m not convinced that they are prepared yet to pay for the solar upgrade.”

Undeterred, John is currently working on plans to have solar PV panels mounted on the south-facing side of the affiliated Wood Haven luxury townhouse condominium development in Tillsonburg. Subject to approval, 54 solar panels could convert solar energy into electricity, to be sold back to the local utility.





PHOTOS BY DANIEL DUTKA PHOTOGRAPHY





“This initiative is relatively new to the area and could potentially reduce condominium fees to the residents.

“Being recognized as a Tarion registered quality home builder has opened doors and allowed Gentrac to diversify into the custom-home building market. At first, the majority of the new custom homes were awarded to older, established home builders. Having models available allows prospective clients to compare our materials, details, finishes and value,” says John. “Being a professional engineer and licensed home builder permits us to design and build to exacting custom requirements. We are now one of the established builders, carving out our own market share.”



PHOTOS BY DANIEL DUTKA PHOTOGRAPHY





Gentrac Building Corporation and affiliated companies are also converting buildings, with recent redevelopment at First Sarnia Place, on the shores of the St. Clair River. “First Sarnia Place was originally a 14-storey family-built office tower and world

headquarters for Polysar Ltd.,” says John. In 2005, a major tenant gave notice that it was vacating the building. Market conditions, including projected soft demand for office space and lifestyle trends toward more condominium living, gave rise to a mixed-use building with 38 luxury waterfront residential condominium units on floors 6 through 12 of the tower. The remaining floors continue as office space and a fine-dining rooftop restaurant.

“The conversion truly created some exciting moments as construction continued above and below the business activities of existing commercial tenants. Demolition, replacing windows, creating balconies, moving materials in and out, maintaining dust, noise and temperature control and

preventing water penetration while still operating the building had its challenges,” says John. “We certainly do recognize the effort, patience and cooperation of all parties involved.”

John sees the First Sarnia Place project as an example of an







adaptive reuse playing a role toward revitalization of the downtown core. “Bringing people to live in the core will definitely help bring the downtown back.” More recently, Gentrac Building Corporation is working to be selected as the developer for the proposed new County art gallery, an adaptive reuse of a historically significant building within the downtown core.

The Wood Haven Condominium Project in Tillsonburg is a 17-unit upscale townhouse condo project with optional loft and French Country flair, giving each unit its own distinct outside appearance. The luxury suites have unique sunlit layouts, extensive upgrades including cathedrals, hardwood, ceramic, glass and granite finishes, Arriscraft stone façades and landscaped cobblestone entrances. The







development is situated within a park-like and wooded surround. “My wife, Sandra, and I consciously tour unique upscale developments and designer shows, borrowing features and details that appeal to our target audience,” says John. “We try to be attentive to customer comments, incorporating the best ideas and latest trends. Site selection is also important, taking location, zoning and surrounding features into account.”

For Gentrac Building Corporation, development and construction have generally occurred within smaller communities and surrounding areas in southwestern Ontario. “We are not that far from Toronto, but in smaller communities, there are often infill and redevelopment opportunities too small and overlooked by larger developers and contractors. We generally can build a good working relationship with the local planning and building

departments, and projects tend to receive approval quicker than they might in larger centers. The cost of land and inputs also tend to be less, making our luxury homes even more attractive to that group calling themselves ‘zoomers.’

“We are thankful to have a great team, including architects, engineers, surveyors, legal representatives, subcontractors, decorators, salespeople and dedicated staff. Fortunately, each has their own unique abilities, allowing our small operation to do some very exciting things.”

*To find out more about Gentrac Building Corporation and some of its related projects, please go to [www.gentrachomes.com](http://www.gentrachomes.com) and [www.firstsarniplace.com](http://www.firstsarniplace.com). ■*

