

PETERBOROUGH EXAMINER



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CRAIG, ZEIDLER AND STRONG

They Designed Ontario Place

If Ontario Place is the place to be this summer, then its particular attractiveness should be credited to an architectural firm which was born in Peterborough around the turn of the century.

Architects for the elaborate provincial showcase, which opens today, were Craig, Zeidler and Strong, whose Peterborough office is at 147 Hunter St. West. They designed it from the ground, or rather, from the lake bottom, up.

Originally formed under the name W. and W. R. L. Blackwell, the architectural firm became Blackwell and Craig in 1945, when James S. Craig joined it.

In 1953, Eberhard H. Zeidler joined Mr. Craig, and the firm became Craig and Zeidler.

Ten years later the firm acquired its present name, when the Toronto firm of William A. Strong amalgamated with Craig and Zeidler.

Mr. Craig is now the only partner living in Peterborough, although Mr. Zeidler lived here some years ago. The firm's main office is in Toronto now, but numerous projects have been undertaken in Peterborough.

Mr. Craig related to The Examiner the history of the firm's involvement with Ontario Place:

After interviewing four architectural firms and looking at their work, he said, the provincial department of planning and development appointed Craig, Zeidler and Strong the project's architects.

"They felt that our firm would do the best job for what they

wanted," he said.

So the drawing boards and pencils came out, and what was to become Ontario Place emerged.

"We conceived," said Mr. Craig, "not the idea of Ontario Place, but the architectural concept of pods standing in the lake connecting two islands."

In March of 1969, the Ontario Place project was announced. Soon afterward construction of the 90 acres of land, islands, lagoons, breakwaters and buildings began.

Where there was water just south of the Canadian National Exhibition Park, over two million cubic yards of fill from Metro Toronto excavations were dumped to create islands.

TWO ISLANDS

Craig, Zeidler and Strong laid out the shapes of the two islands. A breakwater was formed on the lakeward side of the islands by sinking three lake freighters, end to end, and covering them with fill.

The five pods standing on stilts between the islands were built along with the Cinesphere, the Forum, a 300-boat marina, three villages of boutiques and restaurants, canals, reflecting pools, garden areas and beaches.

"The design for the project went 'very smoothly'," said Mr. Craig. "We gave them three basic concepts, all based on the idea of being near the water, and emphasized the one which was eventually accepted. And it was accepted fairly quickly."

"I don't think we've had any real problems," he said, "except that of sticking to the timetable, which has never chang-

ed. Right from the start, Ontario Place was going to open on this weekend."

The \$19 million project, said Mr. Craig, is not the most expensive his firm has undertaken, but "it is definitely a prestige job," he said.

Craig, Zeidler and Strong are currently completing a \$70 million health-science centre at McMaster University, which includes medical and nursing technical schools, a 400-bed hospital and a number of research laboratories, all in one building.

They are also planning the construction of Harbour City, another land-fill project extending out into Lake Ontario near Ontario Place. This project's estimated cost will be \$500 million, he said.

In Peterborough the firm has designed the Peterborough Memorial Centre, the Peterborough Civic Hospital, Thomas A. Stewart Secondary School, Adam Scott Collegiate and Vocational School, the police station, Fairhaven Home for the Aged and others.

The firm employs approximately 80 persons, about 15 of whom have been totally involved in Ontario Place since its original conception, said Mr. Craig. Another dozen construction and electrical engineers were involved for most of that time, he said.

Craig, Zeidler and Strong designed Ontario Place with flexibility in mind. Now they will sit back and watch the future of the province and its reflections in what is done with Ontario Place.