

# ottage that feels like a spaceship onmentally sustainable (8 photos)

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1 / 8 Gord Ball, left, of Sustainable Orillia, Brian Shelley, centre, vice-president of YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka, and Chris Magwood, of the Endeavour Sustainable Building School, are shown outside a new cottage that was built at YMCA Geneva Park in Ramara Township. Nathan Taylor/OrilliaMatters

A local attraction that has been around for more than a century has an ambitious plan for the future.

YMCA Geneva Park in Ramara Township is in a rejuvenation process, and replacing its dozens of rustic cottages is a big part of it.

The organization teamed up with Peterborough's Endeavour Sustainable Building School for the project, which started with the construction of a new cottage that will serve as a model for future projects on the 150-acre property on the shore of Lake Couchiching.

Before Endeavour got involved, a new cottage was built in 2018, using as many renewable and reused products as possible, but Geneva Park volunteers and donors wanted to see it taken a step further.

"They pressed us, knowing we could do better," said Brian Shelley, vice-president of YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka.

The cottage built in 2018 "is good, but this is a spaceship," he said, referring to the new duplex cottage that was completed at the end of July.

"The coolest part is it doesn't look like a spaceship," Shelley said.

It has a rustic feel — part of the appeal for those who stay at Geneva Park — but what went into its design and construction is anything but antiquated.

Wood framing and dense-packed cellulose insulation were used, along with locally sourced, formaldehyde-free wood and hempcrete and hemp batt insulation, as well as linseed-oil paint.

"There's more carbon stored in the building than was emitted in the making of it," said Chris Magwood, co-founder of Endeavour, noting the cottage stores 100 kilograms of carbon per square metre. "With every aspect, we did the research to see what would be the best things to use to make this environmentally sustainable."

It is now the only four-season cottage on site.

The project was completed with the help of the Endeavour school's student apprentices. Many are already involved with the trades, architecture and engineering, and attend Endeavour to learn more about sustainable construction.

"They got to be the hands-on crew for a project like this from start to finish," Magwood said.

That was attractive to Geneva Park and its donors, as education is a big part of the organization's mandate.

Their reaction to the finished product was "spectacular," Shelley said.

“They see a state-of-the-art, environmentally sustainable building,” he said, adding it didn’t hurt that it came together “on time and under budget.”

The connection between Geneva Park and Endeavour was made by Gord Ball, a member of the Sustainable Orillia task force who is also on the steering committee for Geneva Park’s capital campaign.

“It’s a model for what we think developers and home builders should do,” Ball said.

He also wants to see municipalities, including Orillia, look at their building codes and find ways to include incentives for builders.

Ball is passionate about sustainability, but also about Geneva Park. His family has been cottaging there since 1943.

“This place means more to me than probably any other place in my life. I care about it deeply, and my grandkids are now hooked,” he said.

Making the cottage environmentally friendly and sustainable “is paying it forward to future generations of Geneva Park cottagers,” he added.

There are 43 cottages at Geneva Park.

“We’d like them all to be built to this level,” Shelley said. “We have a 100-year history of leadership and we want another 100 years of environmental sustainability. This one building is the beginning of a \$12- to \$15-million investment.”

The goal is to replace all of the cottages and “rejuvenate” the conference centre over the next 15 to 20 years.

Find out more about the plans for Geneva Park [here](#).

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***About the Author:* Nathan Taylor**

Nathan Taylor is an experienced multimedia journalist and editor who covers Orillia and other parts of Simcoe County.

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