

# condo boom brings good will

Cleaning business seeks niche market while serving community



by Jacquelyn Francis

**N**ot many can say they've turned a class project into a job, but that is essentially what Tomislav Rimac did.

While working towards his MBA at the University of Toronto, Rimac's Organizational Change and Development class introduced him and other classmates to the work of social agency St. Christopher House. For 92 years, the non-denominational agency has offered a variety of programs to immigrants, seniors, low-income earners, youth, and more. But like many social groups faced with donation freezes and cuts from government and private sectors, St. Chris has been strapped for cash. As part of their studies, Rimac and his partners were asked to put their business acumen to use in an environment threatened by perhaps a technological, political, or cultural shift.

The group had only to look around the agency's west downtown surroundings to see gleaming towers and communities recently built or under construction and they hatched an idea: All Through the House, a cleaning and concierge service for new condominium owners.

"There are a number of new condominiums in this area," explained Rimac, 36, sitting in a meeting room at St. Christopher's Ossington and Dundas location. "It's becoming quite trendy to live here, so obviously these are people who are busy and need these services, but this is a way of getting a service you would pay for anyhow while supporting St. Christopher House."

Great on paper, but with the help of St. Chris' feisty Executive Director Susan Pigott, Rimac's team approached Social Capital Partners for seed funding. The Toronto-based venture capital company is the brainchild of entrepreneur Bill Young who upon, retiring, wanted to put his technology-related wealth into small, socially conscious business.

"It's a good business idea because it works within the context of the Toronto housing market in that we have this

massive condominium boom and there is this opportunity to supply services to those individuals," says Sean Van Doorselaer, director of investments for Social Capital Partners, which fronted ATTH \$50,000 towards marketing, start-up, and hiring staff. Technically termed as a social enterprise, ATTH is a not-for-profit organization that, if successful, will accrue profits for use by St. Christopher House. Currently, Rimac and two bonded cleaning staff have been hired and even if each home is individually assessed, rates start at a reasonable \$22/hour.

While ATTH's core component is its cleaning service, a long-term goal of having staff consistently cleaning in one building would enable "concierge" perks. That element appealed to Van Doorselaer.

"I live in a condo and I don't know if you've ever tried to collect a courier package, but it can be pretty frustrating. This is an example of something this service can do. It can pick up packages or dry cleaning, even water plants," he says. "If you can create a market in the building, you can create ancillary benefits, and key in on the people living in these buildings, who work strange hours and save them time."

In its pilot phase until the end of January, ATTH is looking to grow via word of mouth, marketing, and the media. For Pigott this was a welcome and somewhat American alternative to standard fundraising tactics, and one she hopes will raise the profile of St. Christopher House.

"We ramped up our fundraising efforts, but we thought we should look at other ways. This profit-making enterprise has potential to make money, but it will also help us to build a bridge between the new residents in the area and St. Christopher House."

For more information on All Through the House visit [www.atth.ca](http://www.atth.ca) or call 416-998-2884.