

Crossing paths with the notorious Boyd Gang

By Vincent Ball, Brantford Expositor

My non-smoking, non-drinking, law-abiding mother spent time in the same institution that once held the Boyd Gang, notorious criminals from the middle of the last century who were known for bank robberies, jail breaks and gun fights.

My mom has never had even so much as a parking ticket in her 80 years. So her journey to the big house was a whole lot different than that taken by a lot of nasty characters - some of whom hanged for their crimes.

And unlike some of the previous inhabitants, my mom never once tried to escape.

It all began at the end of February when plans were made to celebrate mom's 80th birthday in London, Ont.

She was to take the train to London, get picked up and spend the weekend with her family. A dinner with cake and ice cream had been planned. Everybody was looking forward to it.

But just a day or two before the big weekend, mom called to cancel. A day later, she was in a hospital emergency room. She was in a great deal of pain and couldn't walk.

Since then, she has been working on a return to good health. Her journey has included stays in Lakeridge General Hospital in Oshawa and St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, where she underwent surgery.

She remained at St. Mike's as the excellent staff there tried to find a place for her to receive rehabilitation therapy. Less than a week after the operation, I received an e-mail from my sister telling me mom had been moved.

"Mom has now been successfully transferred to Bridgepoint - a highly regarded rehabilitation hospital," my sister, Stephanie, wrote.

"Her room is beautiful - huge and a corner room."

It was indeed a beautiful room. In addition to being large, it provided my mother with an excellent view of the Don Valley with its trees and park-like settings. From her room, she could see groups of seniors doing tai chi in a park, dogs chasing Frisbees and families having picnics.

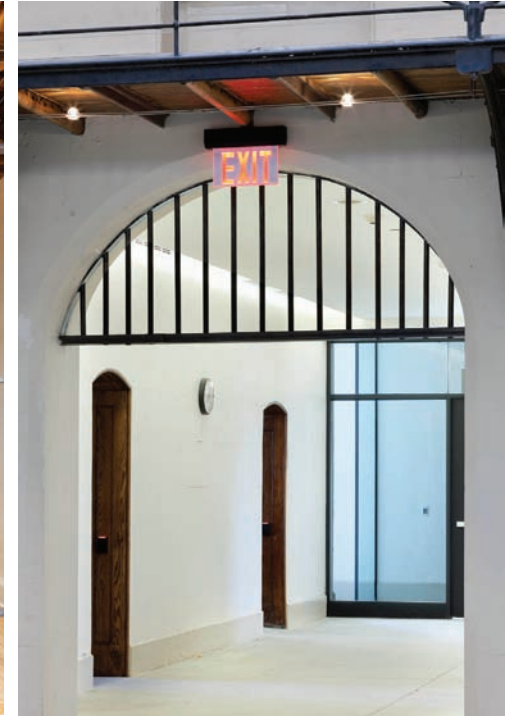
There were other viewing areas, as well; including a rooftop courtyard that provides a spectacular view of the Toronto skyline.

Formally called Bridgepoint Active Health, the magnificent new building, which officially opened just a few months ago, also provides a view of a Toronto landmark - the Don Jail.

There was something about the Bridgepoint name that was familiar.

I had heard it before. After percolating in my brain for a week or two, I finally remembered +VG Architects - The Ventin Group, a Brantford firm with an office downtown, right across from the former Expositor building.

The firm had worked on the creation of the joint Catholic-public elementary schools project, St. Basil and Walter Gretzky, in West Brant. I did the story on the firm a year ago and it was then - during an interview with Paul Sapounzi, of the Ventin Group, that I first heard about the firm's connection to Bridgepoint and the Don Jail.



It was the Ventin Group, of Brantford that had transformed the historical section of the Don Jail into the administrative offices of Bridgepoint Active Health.

Anyway, all of this was happening at the same time when I had starting working on Focus on Brant. The annual publication puts the spotlight on local award-winning companies, industries and individuals who make a difference in our community. It also provides stories about local companies making an impact beyond the borders of Brant.

Not one to miss an opportunity, I arranged to go to Toronto with Sapounzi to do a story on the Ventin Group's work on the Don Jail and, well, visit mom, too.

The results of that trip can be found in this year's Focus on Brant, which will be delivered with The Expositor on Tuesday. Readers will learn how a Brantford firm transformed the mothballed, historic section of the Don Jail into the administrative offices for Bridgepoint Active Health.

The Bridgepoint - Don Jail - Ventin Group story is just one of many features of this year's Focus on Brant, which also includes superlative aerial photography by award-winning Expositor multi-media journalist Brian Thompson.

This year's Focus on Brant also got a significant boost from Expositor multi-media journalist Michael-Allan Marion.

Managing editor Jeff Dertinger came up with some terrific section covers and page layouts.

And my mom?

She got out of the big house just over a week ago and is doing remarkably well.

And, thanks to all the wonderful staff at St. Mike's and Bridgepoint, we can begin to plan another party - one to celebrate mom's birthday and, more important, her good health.

Thank you to Bridgepoint Health and St. Michael's, and thanks to Sapounzi for sharing the story.



+VG Architects is a full-service architectural firm offering new design, expansions and heritage restorations for cultural, educational, municipal, justice, healthcare, residential and recreational facilities. Our staff of 50 operates in four offices in Ontario, in Brantford, Kitchener, Toronto and Belleville.

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