

Condo king rides boom

It is no surprise that a city that elected Mel Lastman as mayor is awash in celebrity owners/pitchmen. Dave McGinn is profiling some of the most intriguing this week:

Everything could have been so different for Brad Lamb, the "condo king" of Toronto. No being the public face of the city's condo boom. No being mocked in song. No seeing his head on a lamb's body. No public profile whatsoever.

"My first choice for the name of the company was Toronto Condo Inc., but they wouldn't let me do it," says Mr. Lamb. "The registrar said that it was too specific. My backup was to name it after me."

And the rest, as they say, is infamy.

Since opening Brad J. Lamb Realty Inc. in 1995, the agency has grown to a staff of more than 40 and last year racked up \$525-million in sales. The company spends nearly \$1-million a year on advertising, and last February, Mr. Lamb entered the world of reality television with the premiere of *Big City Broker*, a behind-the-scenes HGTV show that follows him and his sales agents as they navigate the cutthroat condo industry.

His name has become synonymous with condominiums.

Part of the company's success is due to ads in which Mr. Lamb plays the starring role, often in odd or self-deprecating ways. In one, Mr. Lamb lies in a come hither pose under a tagline that reads "OK, he's no Brad Pitt, but he sells tons of condos." In another, easily his most famous ad, Mr. Lamb's head appears on the body of a lamb under the line, "This Lamb sells condos."

It was that ad, says Mr. Lamb, that put him in the public eye.

It was the same ad that inspires some musical mockery.

In 2006, Final Fantasy, a.k.a. Owen Pallett, included a song on his LP, *He Poos Clouds*, called *This Lamb Sells Condos*, a wicked piece of Brad Lambasting. Mr. Pal-



GLENN LOWSON / NATIONAL POST

Brad Lamb, condo king

LAMB TIPS

Tip 1 "If people want to be successful beyond their job, they have to learn to eliminate fear from their life. It's very, very difficult to do. But if you can take away the sense of being afraid or cautious about everything you do, people would be happier and more successful."

Tip 2 "People need to be very careful in today's marketplace as to what they buy. If you're buying a run-of-the-mill condominium that's \$700 or \$800 a square foot, you need to have your head examined."

lett sings, "Contentment? What's contentment? I am bald and impotent." Ouch.

"It was the most incredibly nasty song," recalls Mr. Lamb. But he's almost used to this kind of thing. "Because of the fact that I am kind of the face of condos in Toronto, good or bad, I get maligned a lot about things that people think that I believe in or that I'm about," says the 45-year-old.

Of course, this is a consequence of making yourself the public face of your company, especially when that company

is on the front lines of one of the most heated controversies in the city.

And since that fateful day when he registered the name of his company, Mr. Lamb has been set on being its face.

"My name is my brand and you have to remember my brand. How am I going to make you remember that? Well, if I do something silly and make you take a second look at it, then you'll remember me at least, and you might remember what I do."

Mr. Lamb bought his first property shortly after graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering from Queens in 1984. "It was a townhouse in London," recalls Mr. Lamb. He sold it a year or two later and bought three townhouses. Then he sold those and bought 10.

Meanwhile, he was working as an engineer. "One day I asked my real estate agent how much money he made from me that year. He said he made \$50,000 or \$60,000 in fees, and I was only making \$50,000 as an engineer at the time," Mr. Lamb says. "I thought, 'F--- that, I'll just sell real estate to myself.'"

He quit his job, got a real estate licence, flipped a condo on Jarvis Street and soon enough found himself working for Harry Stinson, the colourful Toronto real estate developer. After seven years of working alongside Mr. Stinson, the two split.

"Harry was sort of the star and I was the second banana on his team. I never liked being second banana," he says. "I sucked it up for seven years and after seven years, I had to do my own thing."

Doing his own thing has meant being vilified by some and praised by others. Yes, according to Mr. Lamb, people will approach him on the street every now and then with nice things to say.

Still, it weighs on him sometimes to be the public face of condos in Toronto. Doing hundreds of millions in sales each year surely eases the pain. But asked what it is people don't know about Brad Lamb, he replies, "I don't think people realize my commitment to this city. I'm not for polluting the city with garbage."