

Q+A

WITH **JOE VACCARO**,
CEO OF THE ONTARIO HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION

by MARLENE EISNER



NextHome chats with Joe Vaccaro, CEO of the Ontario Home Builders' Association (OHBA) on what's on the horizon in 2018 for the new-home market.

NextHome: In new homes, demand is expected to remain very high and supply very low. What can prospective new-home buyers expect in 2018? More of the same?

Joe Vaccaro: New-home buyers should expect more of the same. OHBA members continue to have challenges in bringing new homes to the marketplace. People can only buy what is available, so these challenges end up limiting the housing choice and supply for those new-home buyers. People are

priced out of the communities and neighbourhoods they want to live in.

NH: What can builders and developers do to bring more homes to market?

JV: The challenges haven't changed. In order to bring new communities to the market, builders and developer will still require government approvals. The better the government can be at getting housing to the approvals process, the more homes and choice the industry can bring to the market. What continues to be the issue is that every level of government seems to find a new policy or idea they want to apply in how we build communities, and that puts everything into paralysis.

The more policies government piles on, the more they limit and frustrate the industry's ability to get more homes to the market.

NH: Affordability issues have triggered a migration away from the GTA. This has put a strain on the supply of tradespeople in such places as the Niagara-Hamilton corridor, and even in the GTA. How much of an issue is this and how does it affect home prices or the delivery of new homes to market?

JV: The shortage of skilled trades across Ontario is a real problem. We're seeing more of this reality as more and more veteran tradespeople retire. There simply aren't enough new tradespeople to close the skills gap.

With all the new housing happening outside the GTA, tradespeople are following the work, and that's creating shortages across the province. Then the new challenge becomes not just getting a house to the marketplace and selling that home to buyers, but also delivering it on time.

We're seeing more and more trades-based delays simply because there aren't enough tradespeople to get the job done. We are going to see more of these issues over the next three to five years because the government simply hasn't done enough to close that skills gap.



NH: How can you attract more young people, including women, into the industry and in doing that, develop more apprentices?

JV: OHBA and the industry continue to look for opportunities to support training and apprenticeship in Ontario. It's going to take a collaborative effort by industry, government and colleges to modernize Ontario's trades training environment.

Also, women make up half the workforce in Canada but there is a perception that women are not a fit for certain careers like the trades. In order to combat this misconception, examples of effective collaboration include Skills Ontario and Loyalist College, who recently hosted a skilled trades event aimed at women, and 100 female high school-aged students attended. This is only one of many tour stops for Young Women's Career Exploration Event by Skills Ontario. Or, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, who held the annual Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) Leadership Conference celebrating students pursuing careers in the skilled trades.

Over the last several months, OHBA has been spearheading an apprenticeship pooling project that should open more opportunities for apprentices across Ontario. The skilled trades are great career opportunities and we need to do more to build the next generation of tradespeople in Ontario.

NH: Housing may be a leading issue in the June 7 provincial election. What has OHBA been doing

to inform the public and politicians about the current state of housing in Ontario and where it's heading?

JV: In the last 15 years, the price of housing, whether low- or highrise, has increased by more than 160 per cent. It's pricing people out of the homes that they want. This is why housing will be an upcoming election issue. What's really important is that people still believe in the great Canadian dream of homeownership.

What OHBA will be doing is asking politicians how they can help people achieve that dream. OHBA and our members will be engaging, educating and informing all candidates as we continue to meet with them and share our concerns.

NH: What are you hoping the next provincial government does to address the issues facing home builders and their customers?

JV: We need a government that applies a "More Homes Not Politics" approach to every piece of legislation that affects housing policy and choice. So many of the policies and ideas introduced in the last 15 years are counterproductive to delivering more homes – they simply add more politics.

If government is serious about building communities, they need to focus on increasing supply so that more Ontarians find more homes they can afford, and in communities where they can live, work and play.