

TDSA HOUSING FORUM-

Jacob Cohen from The Daniels Corporation

The Daniels Corporation builds with a passion for creating vibrant communities in every sense of the word. Daniels looks beyond the bricks and mortar, including social, cultural and economic infrastructures that will create a unique sense of place. This commitment has been an integral part of Daniels' corporate philosophy for over 35 years. Daniels has built more than 30,000 award-winning homes and apartments, master-planned mixed-use communities, and commercial and retail spaces, and has earned its standing as one of Canada's largest and preeminent builder/developers.

Company founder John H. Daniels is a towering figure of the North American real estate industry. In a career that has spanned over 50 years, the former Chairman and CEO of Cadillac Fairview Development Corporation has left an indelible mark on the quality of the places in which people live, work, play, create and shop. Over the course of his career Mr. Daniels played a key role in the development of Canadian landmarks such as Toronto's Eaton Centre and Toronto-Dominion Centre, the 4,700 acre Erin Mills community in Mississauga and the brownfields reclamation of the Goodyear Tire Plant in Etobicoke.

1. Why is Daniels so committed to building affordable social housing?

The History and roots of the Daniels Corporation are based in the affordable housing world. Our President, who happens to be my father, Mitchell Cohen began his work experience in the non-profit world in Montreal, working for the YMCA. It was 1973 and at the time he was working with a group of tenants who were being thrown out of their apartments, this was at a time when these tenants would have had no choice, no control over their destiny or future and simply because they had an overbearing landlord who wanted to turnover the units. This was also at a time when vacancy rates were less than 1%. All power was in the hand of the landlord. With these evicted tenants and this experience Mitchell created one of the first housing co ops for this group in the province of Quebec. Many lessons were learned during this experience that would shape how he would want to do business going forward. Lessons about being aware of the real need for supportive housing. Lessons about the need to create housing for everyone, and opportunities for people who could not afford to buy a home and lessons about those with accessibility needs that restrict homeownership opportunities.

The non-profit housing program was terminated in 1984 and when we looked to the private sector Mitchell spoke to our CEO John Daniels who fully agreed and fully supported the mission that the company would be committed to creating affordable housing even as we charted a path into the private sector. Mr. Daniels encouraged the team to think outside the box and be as inclusive as possible. As the financial partner and backstop to the company Mr. Daniels gave the green to be continue to sensitive to creating affordable housing of all kinds, and to think about housing broadly because housing of all kinds is a necessity.

The Daniels commitment to creating opportunities for home ownership comes from real firsthand experiences and when The Daniels Corporation thinks about development opportunities we always are thinking about how we can utilize our platform as a developer to ensure we were sensitive to real people with affordability and housing needs.

2. Why does Daniels see benefits of partnering with non-profits?

Non-profit groups bring a connect us to the real people who have real needs that need to be serviced. In terms of a developer we operate very much as an open book and can do many kinds of development. We can do Seniors housing, RGI housing, student housing, condo buildings, purpose built rental, you name it. Having connections with non-profit client group is incredibly beneficial as these groups help inform us of their specific needs. As an example, we have very much enjoyed working with Raphael from L'Arche as they have been from the get go very specific in terms of what there needs are. They have been clear in what it is they are trying to accomplish and that has enabled us to form a great relationship and be a delivery mechanism for them and their people.

3. If you had any tips for non-profit agencies on how to build a strong relationship with housing developers?

Know what you want, establish your program before you sit down with any developer. That is the key to success on these types of programs. What's the size of a space do you need? What is the configuration, physical requirements, the more you give to the developer the easier it will be to build a business plan around that program. The more you can be very specific the more successful and smooth the project will be.

4. What do housing developers need from non-profit service providers?

Once we are into the creation of project, it is crucial for you to have one voice who speaks to us, one voice, and project manager on the non-profit side, who is very knowledgeable and be able to answer questions in a timely way. This person needs to have been given the authority of the group to make decisions in a timely manner. Time is crucial for making a project work with a developer. We have all heard it before but in development and construction, time literally = money so we need that one voice to help the flow of information go smoothly. If a group can answer questions quickly, be decisive in terms of what your needs are, you will save money and create a great and smooth working relationship with a developer.