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# The Highlander

Thursday December 8 2016 | Issue 266

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FREE



Meghan Walker, Quinn Camlis, Jack Walker, Kate Nelles and Jessalynn Thompson wear festive hats as they wait for a wagon ride to Santa's village during Abbey Gardens' Winter Festival this past weekend. See more coverage on p. 24. Photo by Lisa Genova

## Harcourt's Nomi Resort in turmoil

### SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

By Mark Arike

It's been almost a year since the former Martinwood Resort was rebranded as Nomi and reopened to visitors.

At that time, the owners of Tier 1 Capital Management Inc., a Markham-based company, took over management of the property and had big plans to build 51

cottages and expand the resort's amenities. Its new focus would be health and wellness, along with community events.

A grand opening was well-attended in February and several locals showed up that night.

Susan Elizabeth Blouin, a 47-year-old with an MBA degree, and her company had been contracted to manage the operation. She marketed its new direction and organized that first event, which she dubbed

"Winterficious."

Her employer gave her a glowing review at the time.

"She can get things done," said Tier 1 CEO Dewarka Persaud in May. "She's a very success-oriented person and she will get the job done if she's allowed to do it." But despite their optimism, not all has gone according to plan.

The property is listed as owned by Carino & Lally Developments, a company

registered to John Graham Simmonds. But in 2014, Simmonds transferred the title to lawyer John Paul Fletcher, the trustee, according to documents obtained by *The Highlander*.

Tier 1 took over management of the resort shortly thereafter.

It was Fletcher who fired Blouin less than five months after the grand opening and filed a complaint with Durham Regional

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# Investigative report

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## Manager fired, under investigation

### Investors put \$2.1 million into former Martinwood property

Continued from page 1

Police.

That led to an investigation by the fraud unit—one of two separate ongoing investigations—The Highlander has learned.

#### Allegations against Blouin

Although she has not been charged, Blouin's former employers allege she stole a \$50,000 deposit for timber purchased at Nomi by a logging company and funnelled the money to her company, Stylus Finance Corporation. The other allegation is she installed and used her own debit/credit machine at the resort to receive funds for services.

But it's another complaint that has led police to pursue Blouin more aggressively.

Oshawa resident Anna Argente says she was duped out of \$27,000 after providing construction loans for two projects that never came to fruition. Argente claims that when she requested updates on the projects, Blouin wouldn't cooperate and instructed her to speak to her lawyer, Glenn Bogue.

"She won't deal with me," said Argente, who filed a complaint with police in June.

Argente claims she loaned Blouin \$5,000 to build a new home in Port Perry and \$22,000 for a similar project in Oshawa.

A summary of Argente's report to police describes her loans and interactions with Blouin.

Although Blouin was interviewed by The Highlander in March, she has not responded to several requests for further comment by telephone and email. In June, her lawyer sent The Highlander a cease and desist email.

"My client has been clear," wrote Bogue. "She has no comment to make regarding any article you are writing. I demand that all attempts by your staff to contact my client stop."

The lawyer has not replied to several messages for comment regarding the allegations against his client. Yet through it all, Blouin continues to run the operation. Tier 1's managing partner, Julio Ramirez, claims his company is currently in negotiations to purchase the property from a receiver, in order to buy out the first mortgage holder and, in turn, remove Blouin.

Fletcher delivered a letter to Blouin, terminating her employment on June 29. Ramirez says they changed the locks and instructed Blouin to stay off the property. However, he claims Simmonds gave Blouin a letter authorizing her to return, change the locks again and continue running the operation. Later, he said Simmonds denied ever having knowledge of such a document.

The Highlander approached Simmonds in-person in July but he was reluctant to say much.

"I actually resigned from that company," he said, refusing to confirm which company he was referring to.

Further attempts to reach Simmonds for comment on any of these matters have gone unanswered.

#### Property has storied past

Located near Benoit Lake on 800 acres, the Nomi property has a storied past. G.W. Martin Lumber Limited, once one of the largest producers of hardwood lumber in North America, had its head office in what is the resort's main building and operated a mill next door.

It was a huge economic driver in the 1970s and '80s for the entire county, said Dyan Reeves Murray Fearey.

"It was really booming," he said, adding the company employed hundreds of people.

"I'd say it was by far the largest employer we had in town."

Unfortunately, it shut down after its owner, Greenville Martin of Bancroft, died in a plane crash in 1984.

In 1999, a man named Michael Wade purchased the property and opened Martinwood Resort. Wade designed and built its golf course.

The property has undergone several ownership changes since then and was most recently known as White Pine Shores.

Now Nomi is advertised as a year-round, all-inclusive getaway close to Algonquin Park with a health and wellness center, golf course, spa and more.

But the resort's website contains some questionable content.

Its homepage indicates Nomi is the recipient of two awards—one from Trip Advisor, the other from Spafinder Wellness 365. (The logo for Spafinder Wellness 365 was recently removed from the website, but the Trip Advisor logo remains.)

Both deny giving the resort any awards.

Blouin says her company, Stylus Finance Corporation, has helped turn around many businesses. Stylus provides businesses financing and accounts receivable administration, according to its website. Ten case studies provide information about projects ranging from \$25,000 to \$750,000, but client names are not given.

#### 'That's all I'm trying to do, is my job'

The Highlander has been unable to locate or speak with any of Stylus's satisfied clients.

In March, Blouin said she wanted to put the past behind her and focus on her job at Nomi.

"I don't want you to think I'm a harm to society here when I'm doing a job for a company that's hired me to do a job. That's all I'm trying to do, is my job. I don't want to be harassed."

See "Investors" on page 11



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# Investigative report

Continued from page 10

Close to 50 investors have sunk \$2.1 million into the Nomi property since 2012, long before Blouin was hired and when it was known as Martinwood under Carino & Lally Developments.

The type of arrangement used is called a syndicated mortgage—where several investors pool funds together to create one mortgage.

The investors were promised returns of up to nine per cent annually, to be paid quarterly over a three-year term. Collectively, that's \$189,000 per year or \$567,000 in payouts on the \$2.1 million mortgage.

As for the cottages, which were planned near Benoit Lake, the pre-sales launch was scheduled for early March 2016, said Blouin. Registration began May 1.

A revised site plan was approved by Dysart council earlier this year, but it doesn't appear building permits will be issued anytime soon, according to chief building official Dan Soyars, the Ministry of Environment hasn't even approved a septic system for the development.

"I know they keep saying it is in the works but I have not seen any evidence that it is," he wrote in an email on Nov. 24.

Nomi's Facebook page says the cottages will start at \$250,000. Sales material advertises top-of-the-line design and construction, and many amenities, steps away from the lake. It's currently being

promoted as Lodge @ Nomi on Facebook.

## Trail ends in empty office unit

The builder named on the cottage development is Sieta & Pikes, a company that was formed on April 22 and claims its team members have a combined 30 years of experience. Blouin is listed as the administrator and her husband Gregory Blouin as the director. Its corporate address is unit three of the Keele/Rutherford Corporate Centre in Vaughan.

But leasing manager Charlene Lafrance has never heard of the business or Blouin.

"That wouldn't be anybody that's in [unit] A3," said Lafrance.

Two separate visits to the location revealed an empty office space with wires dangling from the ceiling, exposed drywall and a concrete floor.

A corporate search also uncovered a health and wellness business that Blouin formed in October of last year. One of its three-day, weekend wellness retreats is advertised on Nomi's website as an "all-inclusive" package starting at \$1,580. Blouin's cell phone number is listed as the contact. (The starting price along with Blouin's cell phone number are no longer on this section of the website.)

The company, Treatment Under Labs (TULA) Limited, specializes in "preventative health care management,"

according to its website. Calls to its Don Mills office were greeted by an automated female voice answering service with options leading to a message stating: "Your call cannot be completed at this time."

As is the case with Sieta & Pikes, names of staff or directors are nowhere to be

found.

Tier 1's Ramirez says Blouin continues to manage the resort as of press time. A holiday-themed event, with tickets priced at \$60 per person, is being advertised on Facebook for Dec. 10.

## The Nomi story:

**2012** – Close to 50 investors put \$2.1 million into the property, which was then known as Martinwood Resort under Carino & Lally Developments.

**November 2014** – John Graham Simmonds of Carino & Lally Developments transfers title to lawyer John Paul Fletcher. The property has been registered to the company since July 2011.

**January 2015** – Tier 1 Capital Management Inc. assumes management control of the property.

**Spring 2015** – Susan Elizabeth Blouin's company is contracted to begin working at the renamed Nomi Resort.

**Early 2016** – Dysart council approves a revised site plan

for the construction of 51 cottages at the Nomi property.

**February 2016** – Nomi Resort hosts its grand opening party, dubbed "Winterlicious."

**June 2016** – Lawyer John Paul Fletcher terminates Blouin. Fletcher files a complaint against Blouin with Durham Regional Police.

**June 2016** – Oshawa resident Anna Argame files a complaint against Blouin with police. Argame claims she provided Blouin \$27,000 in construction loans for two projects that never came to fruition.

**Present day** – Despite being terminated by Fletcher, Blouin continues to oversee the Nomi property. A holiday-themed party is being promoted on Facebook for Dec. 10.



The Township of Minden Hills would like to recognize and thank the following for their support and participation in this year's Santa Claus parade:

- \*The OGP auxiliary for their help with road closures
- \*all the businesses, organizations and individuals who made the effort to enter a float
- \*the volunteers who helped out the day of
- \*the Minden Lions Club for marshaling floats and providing the awards

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