



An artist's rendering shows the Ventura Condominiums at twilight. When the project is completed, the four-phase condominium buildings will cover about a quarter of the five-acre property. The remainder, as shown in the rendering below, will include landscaped green space and a courtyard with European-style piazza, complete with fountain. IMAGES (3): COURTESY OF TRIAD-APG CONSTRUCTION

Real estate PROFILE

A Q&A WITH CHARLIE ALBANO

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SPECIAL TO THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

Charlie Albano and Alfonso Puccio, co-presidents of Triad-APG Construction, founded the company together in 1988. Their first office consisted of a desk, two chairs and one phone, which they shared. Twenty-seven years later they are still going strong, taking on diverse building and land development contracts.

One of Triad's current projects is Ventura Condos (Pointe-Claire), in the heart of the neighbourhood Albano refers to as "downtown West Island." I met with him at the Ventura sales office on Brunswick Blvd., a few steps from the Fairview mall and bus terminus.

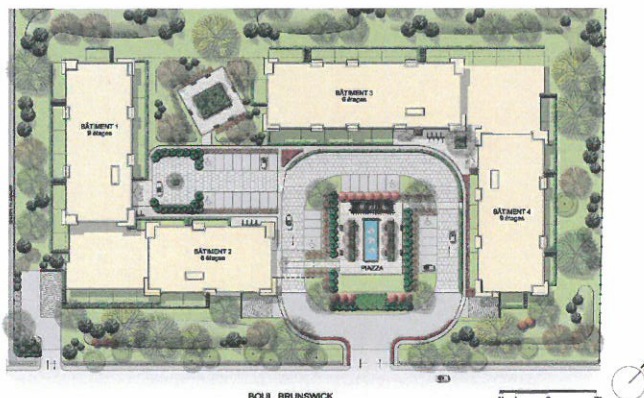
Question: Where did you grow up?

Answer: I was born in Ribera, Italy, and came to Montreal with my parents when I was six months old. At first, we lived in the east end and then moved to St-Léonard-de-Port-Maurice, now known simply as St-Léonard.

In those days, Jarry St. was unpaved and there were still farms in the area. One of my fondest childhood memories occurred when some cows wandered away from a neighbouring farm. The local police piled a bunch of us kids into their cruiser so we could help shoo the cows back to the pasture.

How did you get your first job?

I was staying business at Concordia when an executive from the pulp-and-paper giant, Price Ltd. (later Abitibi-Price) came around looking for students to hire for summer jobs. I landed an internal auditor position and loved it — the job required some travel and included an expense account.



This artist's rendering shows the interior of one of the Ventura condominiums, with numerous windows providing plenty of natural light.

They kept offering me more hours so I stayed on, worked my way up to plant manager and later accepted a three-year contract with one of their companies, in Chicago. My wife Luisa and I had been married for a couple of years and saw this as a great adventure.

What happened next?

We returned to Montreal and one of my close friends, real estate developer, Sabino Grassi, suggested that, with the business knowledge

and experience I had acquired, I would make a good partner for his brother-in-law, Alfonso Puccio, who was a builder. We met for coffee, hit it off immediately and decided to form a company, which we named Triad-APG.

We liked the word "triad" because it refers to a group of three, plus it's short, bold and sounds solid, like a building's foundation. The initials stand for Albano, Puccio and Grassi, who is a minority partner in the firm.

What kinds of jobs did you take on?

One of our first contracts was to build a community centre as an annex to St-Luke's Church, in Pierrefonds. I remember thinking what a blessing it was. After that, we took on a variety of commercial, industrial and residential projects. Along the way we had the honour to work on Église Mont Carmel in St-Léonard, a Syrian church in Laval, St-John's Anglican Church in Pointe-Claire, and to build the Coptic Church on Pierrefonds Blvd. We also converted a beloved West Island restaurant and landmark, Les Trois Arches, into a residential complex called Domaine des Arches, taking great care to keep much of the original facade intact.

How did the Ventura project come about?

When the Mirabel Racquet Club closed, we bought the land and were all set to construct a commercial building in its place. Then

there was a zoning change, so we had to adapt. That's when we came up with the idea for Ventura Condos.

The location, with all amenities within walking distance, is ideal for so many people. When it's complete, the buildings will take up only 25 per cent of its five acres of land. The rest will be trees, parks, courtyards and a piazza, complete with fountain.

Did you build your own home?

Yes, of course. Ten years ago I found a lovely piece of land and built a home for my family. I even found a way to pay homage to one of my favourite construction projects by incorporating three arches into our home's design.

Another feature is a very large bathroom, for my daughters, Patricia and Erica. It includes enough electrical outlets for several hair-dryers and a large vanity so they can both have friends over and all get ready to go out at the same time.

What do you like best about your profession?

Creating something from nothing is satisfying, like a farmer who plants seeds and sees them grow into trees that bear fruit. It's been almost three decades and I still wake up each morning before my alarm and spring out of bed, eager to face the day.

Do you have a special interest outside of work?

That's an easy one. It's all about my family.

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Alfonso Puccio (left) and Charlie Albano, co-founders of Construction Triad-APG Inc., look over some renderings at the company office in this 2012 photograph. VINCENZO D'ALTO, MONTREAL GAZETTE FILES