

# BUSINESS

## Dolls put face to Canadian identity

BY SIMONE JOSEPH  
Staff Writer

**K**athryn Gallagher Morton knew she wanted to make a different doll than the mass-market variety.

"The dolls available on the market or that you see on Saturday morning television mostly emphasize glamour, fashion or the need to be cool and encourage girls to act older than they are," she said.

The success of the Anne of Green Gables dolls, which her company, Newmarket-based Avonlea Traditions Inc., had been designing and marketing since 1988, spawned her idea to create her own line of Canadian dolls.

*"Our characters are meant to be both an inspiration to and a reflection of Canadian girls from coast to coast to coast."*

"It made me notice how hungry Canadians are for something that is ours," she said, adding she also recognized the increasing popularity of high-quality dolls in Europe and the United States.

But she had many questions. What would her characters be like? Would they be historical or modern? Which factory would she choose? Who would she use as a model?

She spent about 10 years researching her idea, often putting the project on hold while she worked on other company business. Ms. Morton, who has an MBA and a bachelor of social work, made a habit of writing down all her ideas and constantly revising her 50-page business plan.

Early on, she researched Statistics Canada information to get a feel for the Canadian population so she could create dolls that would represent different parts of the country.

"Our characters are meant to be both an inspiration to and a



Kathryn Gallagher Morton (left), owner of Avonlea Traditions Inc., shows off the line of Maplelea Girls dolls, which were modelled, in part, on Lexi Marton, 12.

reflection of Canadian girls from coast to coast to coast," Ms. Morton said.

She brought in high-quality dolls from the U.S. to sell at her company two months before Christmas, thinking they would lead to questions about what people liked about the dolls, how they would improve them and whether they would be interested in a Canadian doll.

While people were impressed by the American dolls, they seemed even more interested in the possibility of a Canadian doll exactly what she had hoped.

Another step in the process was focus groups. Ms. Morton asked York Region women to generate characteristics for the dolls.

Using a focus group of mothers, Ms. Morton hoped to find out what they wanted to see in the dolls and discover what their

daughters played with.

"We were setting out to make a doll that wasn't just a doll that girls wanted but (a doll) that parents want for their girls," Ms. Morton said.

She asked girls how they played with their dolls and if they thought it was important to have a Canadian doll. Specialty store owners were asked what they were interested in selling, which marketing supports they needed, what kind of packaging appealed to them, which products sold well in their stores and which types of promotions worked.

A big challenge was finding a factory to produce the dolls. With Canada's small market in comparison to the U.S., few dolls were developed and there were few offshore factories that could produce the high-quality product she wanted. The last Canadian com-

pany to make vinyl dolls went out of business in the early 1990s, about the time she began looking for a suitable manufacturer.

After two years of searching, she finally found a factory in Asia in 2000.

The next challenge was designing the dolls.

Ms. Morton and her production manager went to modelling agencies to go through profiles, finally deciding to model the doll's face after Lexi Marton of Aurora. To find a sculptor, they asked around and finally found one in their own back yard: Unionville.

Since the company wanted to produce a unique doll with specific features, Ms. Morton avoided what is called a "stock mould". Since the dolls were meant for girls eight to 12, it was necessary

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## Residential real estate back to normal

BY JEFF MITCHELL  
Staff Writer

An "illusion of weakness" in Canada's housing market belies the health of a sector that should continue to be solid throughout 2004, insiders say.

As long as interest rates remain low, properties will be bought and sold, said Jim Hill, a real estate agent with Prudential Renasant Realty in Keswick.

"I think we have this hot market as a result of low interest rates and I think we have low interest rates as a result of 9/11," Mr. Hill said, adding an economic lull resulting from America's war on Iraq may linger for months.

"If that's the case, I think the rates are going to stay down and our real estate market will remain good."

While the number of resales is down from last year, when a red-hot market set records for new home sales and resales, last month saw 6,986 single family dwellings change hands, the second-highest figure ever recorded for the month, according to Toronto Real Estate Board (TREB) figures, released Wednesday.

Sales were down 8 per cent from last year's remarkable 7,602 for March, while the average price for the board's area rose slightly to \$290,185.

Newmarket Re/Max agent Diane Mitchell said she has not seen the slump in listings and sales witnessed in other markets.

In fact, relatively few listings of resale homes mean when a prime piece of property comes on the market, vendors and agents are seeing multiple bids, Ms. Mitchell said.

"If you're not getting an offer in a couple of weeks, something is wrong," she said.

Deals on resales are closing in an average of 32 days in the GTA.

"If you're looking at resale, it's still a really good market for people to put up their homes," Ms. Mitchell said.

Meanwhile, new home sales in February returned to levels to which builders were more accustomed prior to last year's boom.

Locally, Markham led the way in

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### Expose Yourself to Art

Fifth Annual Art Auction and Silent Auction

Date: Wednesday, May 7, 2003, Preview 6:30 - 7:00 p.m.  
Location: Angus Glen Golf Club, 10080 Kennedy Road, Markham  
Price: \$40.00 (complimentary wine, hors d'oeuvres/Buffer)  
For Ticket Call: 905-477-9511 Ext. 221/226

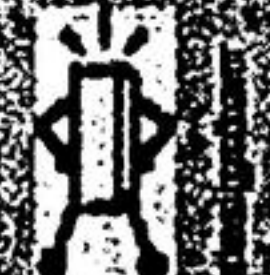
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