

Market St. revival a testament to late developer Paul Oberman

Market St. is the only street in Toronto purpose-built for restaurant patios and has no elevated sidewalks or curbs.



RICK MADONIK / TORONTO STAR

Eve Lewis stands on Market St. which will be dedicated to her late husband, Paul Oberman, who was instrumental in the revitalization of the buildings and the plans to make it more pedestrian friendly.

By: [Patty Winsa](#) News reporter, Published on Mon Apr 21 2014

Eve Lewis is sitting in one of the new restaurants on historic Market St. when the beautiful green and white bouquet of flowers she has sent to the owner arrives.

Tom Antonosakis peers at the greeting card curiously to see who is congratulating him on the opening day of his restaurant, Market Street Catch, one of [seven new eateries that line the street](#) .

The flowers may be for the restaurateur but they also mark a major milestone for their sender, who lost her husband, developer [Paul Oberman](#) , three years ago in a plane crash.

Lewis has completed her husband's dream of restoring the buildings on the west side of Market St. and turning the asphalt roadway into an old-world cobblestone path.

"I was able to focus on this. I was able to focus on Paul's business and it really gave me something to immerse myself in," says Lewis, who took over as CEO of Oberman's company, Woodcliffe Landmark Properties, after his death. The two married 20 years ago and had a blended family with six kids.

The restaurants will all be open by the middle of May and the city will have a ceremony to dedicate the street as [Paul Oberman Walk](#) in June.

"It's a great tribute to Paul," says Sherry Pedersen, a preservation co-ordinator with the city who worked with the developer on projects such as the restoration of the North Toronto train station,

now the Summerhill LCBO.

“Paul certainly stands out in my mind as being really exceptional in the projects he took on, the enormity of the challenge in conserving these buildings and the cost,” Pedersen says. “He wasn’t daunted by the complexity. In that way he is certainly a leader in demonstrating what developers and builders can do to support heritage conservation in the city.”

Lewis faced similar challenges with Market St.

Restoration of the 1850s buildings was complex and Lewis says that when they removed the paint from the old fish market, which is halfway down the street, they found the bricks were so deteriorated they had to turn them around one by one.

And although the design for Market St. had been approved in principle when Oberman died, the bulk of the work lay ahead.

“It took another two years to get all the processes and paperwork in place,” says Lewis. “There were a lot of different moving parts to getting it approved.”

Market St. is now a unique Toronto road, the only street purpose-built for patios, says Mark Van Elsberg, an urban designer for the city.

The street doesn’t have elevated sidewalks and curbs, a concept that allows the restaurants to open patios out front and still maintain walkways for pedestrians, who will be separated from traffic by metal bollards. In the winter, the bollards come down to make room for on-street parking.

“With no definition between the sidewalk and road, the street responds to seasonal needs,” says Elyse Parker, a director in Toronto’s transportation department. “There is more parking in winter, and cafes in summer, and pedestrian movement is never compromised by either one.”

Woodcliffe contributed \$2 million to redo the road, including stormwater and sewer work. The other \$500,000 came from development fees paid to the city as well as the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood BIA.

“I think as another opportunity to create an environment where people can enjoy and appreciate the built heritage along the street, I think it’s a great thing that’s been done there,” says Pederson. “I’m very anxious to see how it functions when the restaurants are occupied. It will be very interesting to see how the public uses that space.”

The innovative design has motivated the city to look for ways to enclose the St. Lawrence Market’s outdoor concourse on the other side of the street so it can be used year-round for retail.

And the city is now using Market St. as a prototype for other “flexible streets,” including a new design for John St. from Front St. to north of Queen St. W.

Lewis says Oberman’s concept for Market St. still hasn’t been fully realized. The developer hoped that one day, the street would be entirely closed to traffic.

“It was Paul’s wish that they would close it for the nicest part of the year,” says Lewis. “It’s going to be a process like everything else. But there are a lot of people that want it to happen.”