

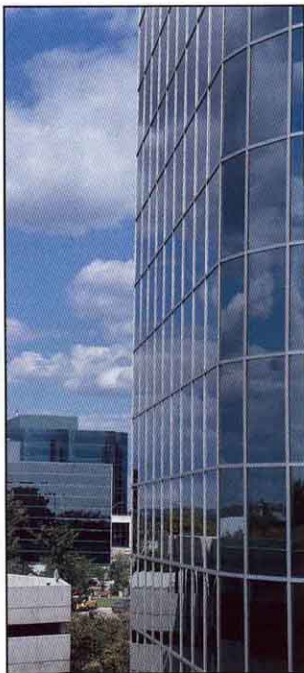
# YORK REGION IS ON THE CORPORATE RISE

by Dean Askin

The morning of June 21 — the first day of summer — couldn't have been a better morning for a building opening: that traditional ceremony where politicians, company presidents and chief executive officers, journalists, photographers, and a few hundred invited guests gather to mingle, listen to speeches, sip wine, and applaud when the yellow ribbon is severed and floats away to the floor. High above the Bull Corporate Centre, the early-summer sun beamed down from a cloudless blue sky, and the reflections of the adjacent ScotiaBank commercial tower and the Valhalla Inn shimmered on the blue-green, zig-zag glass walls, appearing to bend in a myriad of directions.

On the street, parked cars lined the curbs for two blocks. Inside, 250 invited guests admired the architecture of the building, with its cathedral ceiling and skylit, tree-lined atrium. At precisely 10:03 a.m., following the usual speeches by the politicians and dignitaries on hand for the occasion, including the president and CEO of Bull-U.S., Axel Lebois — who had arrived early that morning from a meeting at Groupe Bull headquarters in Paris for the occasion — Markham Mayor Anthony Roman posed for the cameras and then sliced through the yellow ribbon. With a dignified smile he declared into the microphone: "I hereby declare the Bull Corporate Centre officially open for business."

In fact, Markham's newest "premier corporate address" at the time, as it was billed by Orfus Investments, the developers behind the project, had been unofficially open and occupied since early spring, when Bull HN Information Systems Ltd, the Canadian arm of Groupe Bull of France, moved into the 133, 660-square-foot west tower. The east tower of the centre sports



the Pillsbury logo; Pillsbury Canada Ltd moved its corporate headquarters to the seventh and top floor of the 119, 567-square-foot east tower in May.

The rise of corporate towers in York Region began in 1989 when Canada's five major banks set up commercial banking centres around the intersection of Highways 404 and 7. Although some of the banks have attributed the presence of IBM Canada Ltd and American Express as their reason for setting up commercial shops in York Region, there is no question that business has followed the banks' lead.

From the sixth floor of the Bull

tower, the view to the north and west is one of a skyline dotted with similar corporate edifices: just across Highway 7 lies the Allstate building; a short distance north of Allstate's headquarters on the road named for it, Allstate Parkway, is a nine-storey tower that is the corporate home of Sterling-Winthrop Inc. The company moved its offices to Markham from Aurora last Easter weekend after closing the factory that had produced Aspirin there since 1957 (the result of a buy-out of New York-based Sterling Drug, the parent firm, by Eastman Kodak of Rochester, N.Y. in 1989). A little to the northwest, the Robin Hood symbol overlooks Highway 404 from atop the west wall of the Valleywood Corporate Centre on Columbia Way, another of what is known in the real estate business as a "Class A" address.

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***"By the year 2000, the area around the interchange of 404 and 407 will look the same as the area around the Don Valley Parkway/404 and the 401 does right now."***

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Robin Hood Multifoods, which had been headquartered on Consumers Road in Willowdale for the past 15 years, moved into the top two floors of the Valleywood tower, an Inducon development, this spring after scouting 12–15 locations for a new corporate headquarters in Willowdale and the Markham-Richmond Hill areas. "It's a case of the right building being in the right place at the right time," says Don Canning, public relations director. "We wanted a building that would be comparable to the quality of the one we had on Consumers Road, that was in a convenient location for our employees, and that offered good sign exposure; we got all of that."