

TEN TO WATCH

Editor's Note: The common denominator among the executives in NREI's second annual "Ten to Watch" feature is boldness. Their vision and willingness to take calculated risks sets them apart from the stewards of the commercial real estate industry.



Mike Bush, Executive Director, REAP

Mike Bush gave up his post as vice-president of real estate for Giant Foods in 2000 to fulfill a vision of diversity.

Over the years the industry veteran and Harvard law grad, also an adjunct real estate professor at George Washington University, watched other professions absorb talented minority candidates while commercial real estate lagged.

To address the shortfall, Bush had launched the Real Estate Associate Program (REAP) in 1997, with support from the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). But he soon realized REAP needed his full attention to set it apart from less substantive "feel-good" programs.

So he "retired" to cultivate REAP in

Washington, D.C., in office space donated by the Urban Land Institute. Soon, an Atlanta version of the demanding classroom/networking program was added. Later this year, New York will come on line in space donated by ICSC, according to President Michael Kercheval, followed by future programs in Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and either Dallas-Fort Worth or Houston.

Gary Rappaport, recent ICSC Chairman, says "REAP has become the industry's most popular way to recruit minority professionals, because it taps talent the industry doesn't reach."

Thus far, Bush has helped place two dozen highly skilled minorities into prominent mainstream firms. "We're not marketing affirmative action," Bush says. "We are in the business of marketing talent. That's why the industry has been so responsive. REAP adds bottom-line value."

But progress comes in baby steps. The percentage of minority professionals "is still well under 1,000 in an industry of perhaps 100,000."

Bush, 61, always had a bent for community service. "My Jewish upbringing... taught me that each person must work to make the world better, and each has a unique way to serve his fellows," says Bush.

REAP courses are taught by real estate companies in nearby university classrooms and include weekly three-hour classes for 24 weeks. Courses focus on enhancing net-operating income, tenant retention and marketing, leasing and renovation strategies. The average student is about 30, holds a bachelor's degree, has business experience, and was picked from 200 applicants.

Women comprise half of each class. From each 25-member class, five are selected to serve in 12-month, on-the-job

associate programs, and those employers usually opt to keep the candidate permanently, Bush notes.

Richard Rosan, ULI President, says that REAP "has credibility in both our industry and the minority community."

Traditionally, real estate industry jobs are gained through friends, family and personal contacts, and those networks have been mostly white. REAP's goals "are basically commercial real estate's goals," emphasizes Bush, "and that's to change the profile of the business and take advantage of a talent pool that's traditionally not had access."

Thomas Bisacquino, President of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties (NAIOP), which provides operating support, says his group "is strongly encouraging its membership to actively participate in this worthy program."

The Society of Industrial and Office Brokers (SIOR), which provided REAP with seed money, recently gave a Leadership Award to REAP associate Lynn Smith at Cushman & Wakefield.

Industry heavyweights like Cushman & Wakefield, CB Richard Ellis, Simon Property Group, Jones Lang LaSalle, Prudential, Wachovia, Westfield, Trammell Crow, General Growth, Regency Centers, Staubach and Wal-Mart are on REAP organizing committees, and have hired graduates. Simon, in fact, has plucked three associates, including Bryon Wall, who is now the mall manager at the Indian River Mall in Vero Beach, Fla.

Irv Kravitz, Simon's senior vice president of human resources, says Bush's approach to building REAP has been prudent. "It's a great success story," he says. Kravitz is quick to add that Bush "is a tireless worker who truly believes in what he's doing."

—Steve McLinden

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"Ten to Watch" included Larry Silverstein and the CEO's of Jones Lang LaSalle and Developers Diversified Realty. The full article is at http://nreionline.com/mag/real_estate_ten_watch_2/



For further information,
write reap@uli.org,
visit www.projectreap.org,
or call 202-624-7197.