

# Through their eyes

Two small developers and an attorney with dreams for remaking her neighborhood tell how they hope to bring a little prosperity — not to mention your basic services — to D.C.'s neglected corridors.

## Bo Menkiti Brookland

DO SOCIAL CHANGE and real estate go hand in hand? Bo Menkiti thinks so. While working at College Summit, a nonprofit that helps boost low-income student enrollment in college, he pursued a real estate license after getting frustrated with his own Columbia Heights neighborhood. "The whole block I lived on had been all boarded-up and empty," says Menkiti, a Harvard University grad whose father is a philosophy professor.

He left the nonprofit to start his real estate sales firm, surprising his father but eventual-

ly winning his support. The housing market drove the firm's growth, and Menkiti became the D.C. franchisee of Keller Williams Realty in 2006. He now has 70 agents.

His firm, operating under the umbrella Menkiti Group, morphed into development; it bought, renovated and resold a townhouse on North Capitol Street. He's now done 11 such renovations aimed at moderate-income home buyers; Menkiti himself financed 10 and recently added an equity partner for one.

Last year he set his sights on helping the community in an even bigger way, buying a vacant 21-unit apartment building near the Rhode Island Avenue-Brentwood Metro in Northeast. He is converting the building to

condominiums with EVI, a private equity firm based in Baltimore. The \$4 million project, The Ilora, will deliver this summer, and half the condos are reserved. The 14 one-bedroom units qualify for programs targeting low-income buyers. Menkiti next is planning a ground-up 30-unit affordable project at Rhode Island Avenue and 16th Street NE.

Since moving to Brookland in 2003, Menkiti has completed four projects valued at \$2.5 million, three on 12th Street NE in Brookland and one on D Street NE. The area reminds him of his hometown, Somerville, Mass.

"I was fascinated by the neighborhood feel of it. I was really impressed by the diversity."



JOE BRIER

RHODE ISLAND AVENUE NE is loaded with potential for small mixed-use and commercial development. Bo Menkiti, above, plans a 30-unit affordable housing project at 16th Street, while attorney Janice Booker, right, has big dreams to revitalize the Woodridge neighborhood in the 2000 block of Rhode Island.