



2019 Women in Real Estate: Ericka Keller, Brisa Builders Development LLC

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Name: Ericka Keller

Title: Managing Member

Company Name: Brisa Builders Development LLC

Association/Organization Affiliations (REAL ESTATE ONLY): Women in Housing and Finance, New York Real Estate Council

What is your favorite motivational quote?

“True happiness.... is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose”
~ Helen Keller. Developing affordable housing in the city of New York is a challenging endeavor. Coordinating with the agencies, lenders, syndicators, general contractors, architects, engineers, attorneys and service providers in order to bring a project from concept to reality proves to be a miracle—yet it happens—and it is so rewarding to be a part of this process. To know that because of your work, individuals from all walks of life will have the opportunity to live, grow and commune in this great city by developing affordable housing for the community.

What recent Project or transaction are you most proud of?

Ebenezer Plaza is a three-phased 100% affordable housing development in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, in total the project will provide 530 units of attainable apartments with rents that meet various incomes and will provide 40,000 s/f of community facility space in the form of house of worship and social service programming as well as 25,000 s/f of commercial /retail. This project is a partnership with the Church of God of East Flatbush, who owned two city blocks, when we met the church, it was in jeopardy of losing the land due to a non-conventional loan that required a huge balloon payment, not only were we able to overcome that challenge and maintain the property but we were able to take the site through full Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) from an M-1 to R7D/R7A which allowed for the development of housing along with community facility and commercial/ retail spaces which will be so impactful to the community. Our first meeting with the church was in November 2014 and to now have two phases of the project currently under construction with the first building topping-off before November of 2019 is truly a phenomenal feeling.

Who inspired you to join the CRE community?

My father was the inspiration for my transition into the CRE community. I spent 22 years as an educator watching my father work in this industry, as he became older, I realized that there was no real succession plan for the family business. I couldn't imagine just letting all his good will and hard work come to an end one day, so I decided to leave my career and join the family business. My father was a general contractor, however he really was a developer at heart, because he would help not-for-profit and faith-based organizations develop projects just so he could build it—because what he really loved to do was to build multifamily buildings and he somehow figured out that in many instances in order to have something to build, you may have to spark the imagination of those that have land to build on. So he would talk to pastors and executive directors about providing housing and would show them other successful projects and would have architects do pro-bono zoning analysis and before you knew it he had gotten the ball rolling in the right direction and somewhere in the future a shovel would actually meet the ground!

What was one of your biggest accomplishments in the last 12 months?

Brisa Builders Development LLC works with faith-based organizations to develop affordable housing and other amenities for the community. In the past 12 months we are responsible for the construction of 554 units of affordable housing for families and seniors across four projects in the Bronx and Brooklyn. In some instances, we have endeavored to ensure that rents are as low as \$250 for a single person studio apartment. All of the projects are partnerships with faith-based organizations that were in jeopardy of losing land that had been owned for decades, whether it be through legislation that allows church-owned land to be taxed if the church cannot prove that it is being used for religious purposes, attrition in tithes and offerings from parishioners, or non-conventional loans with unreasonable terms, in each instance we were able to avoid tragedy and triumph with the development of housing for the community on the properties owned by the church.

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