



Reclaiming the American Dream for home ownership

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By Eliezer Rodriguez

For the past twelve years, the Bronx has been my home. My two boys were born here and I live in a community that I have grown to love. I watch out for my neighbors and they watch out for us. "We, the people" are proud of our borough. The Bronx is the home of the Yankees; an astonishing Zoo; a gorgeous NY Botanical Garden; a marvelous YMCA; an active Chamber of Commerce; a striving Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (BOEDC) and the South Bronx is being revitalized by the South Bronx Economic Development Corporation (SoBro). Our hosts and hostesses at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Montefiore Medical Center are providing great hospitality to friends and neighbors in need of care. When you hear that the Bronx is booming, it's true. Many local businesses and large institutions are thriving and the Bronx will soon have a Marriott Resort at the expanding Hutchinson-Metro Center office complex.

It is also true, however, that there is a cry for help in my community that I cannot ignore. That cry reminds me of how much better we can be as a borough if we just stop for a moment and really listen and then act accordingly. The world around us is changing rapidly and many families are struggling to stay afloat and some do not know where to turn for help. There is so much that we can do to help build a stronger borough of the Bronx.

On January 1st, 2013, when I began my new role as the Association Executive Officer for the Bronx-Manhattan North Association of Realtors, Inc. (BMAR), I realized the wonderful opportunity I was given to make a direct and positive impact on the borough I love - the Bronx. But, I know all too well that before I can help the communities in need, I must get their attention. To get their attention, I must better prepare and equip my members with the tools they need to serve my neighbors. I look at my new role not only as a player in the real estate industry, but as a builder of communities. A recent survey indicates that although the consumers are down-right angry at the lending institutions, and anyone else associated with them, for clouding their American dream of home-ownership, 90% of the surveyed group still believes in home ownership. However, 59% say it will be harder for their children to achieve the American dream.

Recently, I attended a ReThink session produced by the National Association of Realtors. The goal of the session was to view several possible alternative futures for the real estate industry. It was clear that our industry must change to meet the demands of a changing world that is driven by data mining, social networks and the Internet. While the consensus was that change is the law of life, there was a gentleman who sat at my table and argued how we must embrace change, yet he refused to change tables after the first session as required by the exercise.

I know that change is not easy and that change is easier said than done. President Kennedy said, "Those who look to the past and the present are certain to miss the future." I have been listening and what I have been hearing is the need for more education for our members, more information on

the technology to enhance our industry, more classes on digital hygiene, more creativity to encourage participation on topics such as financial wellness, credit restoration, and how those educational sessions ought to be scattered throughout the community.

I am committed to making the Bronx stronger, but it takes the involvement of many with a shared goal. It takes leaders that encourage courage, people like me with fire in their bellies who believe in statistics, but do not ignore intuition; community activists who also believe that playing it safe is the riskiest move of all, Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) that are willing to join forces to share resource to provide better services to our members and community boards leaders who support programs that arm their constituents with the tools to remain relevant and in-sync with the trends.

BMAR is being proactive in addressing the future of the Bronx as it is our plan to turn BMAR into an integral part of the community. We have already started our outreach and the many talented leaders are responding to our call for action. They see the wisdom in the words of Benjamin Franklin when he said, "If we do not hang together, we will hang separately."

I am optimistic about the future for the Bronx and the action we are taking to preserve the American dream of home ownership. I love the Bronx. My office is in the Bronx. I live near my office and my kids go to school down the street. I love my job! My drive to help make the Bronx the best borough it can be is simple - "there is no place like home."

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