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New initiative looks to diversify pool of Memphis developers

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Development has long been an old boys' club type of industry.

Generally, in Memphis and elsewhere, it is white men with means who decide what gets built and where.

Memphis is trying to change that — in part through the Memphis Real Estate Diversity Initiative (REDi). The initiative is led by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Memphis, which received financial support from the Downtown Memphis Commission (DMC), Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development, and the City of Memphis Housing & Community Development (HCD).

In its first year, the initiative gave 20 women and people of color 14 weeks of instruction from real estate professionals including Gill Properties vice president Brown Gill and Shopping Center Group partner Shawn Massey and then had them present hypothetical projects to a panel that included Henry Turley Co. VP of real estate Alex Turley, United Housing Inc. executive director Amy Schaftelein, and Memphis HCD director Paul Young.

Connecting established local professionals to people who want to learn is just as important as the program's curriculum, said Anna Holtzclaw, who leads the initiative for ULI.

"[Established real estate professionals] want to give back. They want to be inclusive, but they don't know how," said Holtzclaw, who is the executive director for ULI's RegionSmart initiative. "You can't just open your doors and say, 'Anyone who



MICHAEL SHEFFIELD

Juan Self and Jimmie Tucker of Self Tucker Architects

wants to come meet with me, I'm available.' ... My hope is that [we] can serve as an intermediary."

The first, 20-person cohort included architects, project managers, and emerging developers. Jimmie Tucker and Juan Self of Self Tucker Architects, Allworld Project Management CAO Brent Hooks, and Malone Park Commons developer Andre Jones were a few of the students.

ULI's hope is that some of the students would also participate in its development bootcamps, which help emerging developers fine-tune projects they're working on.

At a graduation event for the program on Dec. 16, Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland urged the students to develop "as much as you possibly can in our city."

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