



## School of Continuing Education

Marketing

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Minority Entrepreneurship Program Helps Black Businesses Build Black Communities**

MILWAUKEE—Once upon a time there was a place called Bronzeville. It was a robust and thriving African American entertainment and cultural neighborhood. In the 1930s, world-renown musicians such as Duke Ellington, Dinah Washington and Cab Calloway played to appreciative audiences of all races. The number of black businesses in Bronzeville exceeded those owned by whites. And Bronzeville was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is no fairy tale. Bronzeville was a primarily African American business and entertainment district on Walnut Street between North 3rd and North 12th Streets. After the 1950s racism, segregation, and freeway construction all played a role in Bronzeville's demise.

Now a group is hoping to play a central role in bringing Bronzeville back to life.

Banneker Developers is a partnership between Andrea Nembhard, Rick Norris, Bennie Joyner Jr. and Mark Holland who are all established African American business owners. Nembhard has owned a real estate agency for over 20 years, Norris has a civil engineering business, Joyner is a commercial painter and Holland rounds out the group as a general contractor.

The partners in Banneker Developers were a part of the inaugural session of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Minority Business Roundtable. With this partnership, insights from the roundtable session have gone beyond the board room and into the community. After the 10 month Minority Business Roundtable session, the partners decided to create a new business that would focus on bringing Milwaukee's housing boom to the African American community.

The reason for the partnership can be summed up as Rick Norris said, "We have to take advantage of the chance to create new businesses when that opportunity arrives."

According to the SBDC, taking advantage of opportunities is what successful business people do. One issue the Minority Business Roundtable address is business growth. The growth channels they concentrate on are attracting new customers and diversifying the business through partnerships.

"This is what we have been dreaming of. The Minority Business Roundtable encourages business owners to grow larger scale businesses. Partnerships and new business growth like this is the goal of our program," says Lucy Holifield, director of the UWM Small Business Development Center in the School of Continuing Education.

The scope of Banneker Developers is firmly focused on the redevelopment of Bronzeville. Bronzeville was a historically black neighborhood and noted cultural and entertainment center. The goal of the Bronzeville project is to bring the area back to its former prominence as a mecca for African American culture.

The new district is in the heart of the African American community and adjacent to the historic district. The new boundaries are between HWY-43 to the west and Martin Luther King Dr. to the east and Center Street. on the north and Garfield Avenue to the south.

Rebuilding this part of the city's history is vital to the black community and the economic health of the Milwaukee. According to the market research performed by the City of Milwaukee Department of City Development, the area's current property tax value is around \$7million yearly. The report also says the area boasts annual business revenues of about \$230 million, but has the potential to increase that to \$400 million. The new Bronzeville has the potential to generate over \$20 million in property taxes.

To tap into that potential and to revitalize the area, the Common Council has approved \$3.5 million in funding and the creation of a tax incremental district to make the new Bronzeville a reality.

Banneker Developers is poised to build that reality. Nembhardt says that Banneker Developers will be "aggressive and deliberate in our approach" with its operations in Bronzeville. "We will primarily focus on developing new commercial and residential properties, but we will also rehab some existing properties."

The Minority Business Roundtable can be credited in laying the ground work for Banneker Developers. The program was created to produce outcomes like this. "We are proud to offer these services to participants who have the vision to work together. The outcome of this Minority Business Roundtable will benefit many people inside and outside the African American community. Their leadership will set a great example for many entrepreneurs to come," says Holifield.

To learn more about the Small Business Development Center, the Minority Business Roundtable or Banneker Developers, contact Lucy Holifield at [Lucyh@uwm.edu](mailto:Lucyh@uwm.edu) or (414) 227-3242. ###