Innovation & Entrepreneurship Awards

(From left) Blaise Rastello, Tom Burton, Henry Cisneros, Michael E. Johnson, and Jeffrey Abramson

This issue is all about the inaugural 2015 Maryland Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Real Estate Awards sponsored by the Colvin Institute. This first awards dinner was held on March 31st, at the Riggs Alumni Center on campus. Over 150 guests (we had to add seats—a good problem to have!) gathered to honor the honorees and enjoy key note speaker Henry Cisneros, Chairman of CityView, a global real estate investor, as well as Clinton Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

The highlight of the evening, of course, was the presenting of the awards (shown from above) to Jeffrey Abramson, Partner at the Tower Companies, based in Rockville, MD, UMD alum Michael E. Johnson, President and CEO of UrbanCore based in San Francisco and Blaise Rastello of the Transitional Housing Corporation of Washington, DC.

Get a glimpse of the innovative inspiring work of our three honorees and enjoy the rest of the photos from the evening shown below. And if you missed the inaugural this year, save TUESDAY, MARCH 1st 2016, on your calendar for next year for a not-to-be missed evening of good food, great music and inspiring real estate innovations.
David Cronrath, Dean of the School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation was joined by Alex Triantis, Dean of the Smith School of Business in opening the Awards program with a welcome to campus and their alums. Pictured above with Dean Cronrath, is Maryland alum, Michael E. Johnson, who was recognized for his mixed use and residential projects that not only produce profits, but uniquely uplift communities through real estate development. In particular, the Fillmore Heritage Center just west of downtown San Francisco not only funded new market rate condo homes but brought back a jazz venue and jazz heritage museum and community space to its original home base.

Mr. Johnson's company is a for-profit company with a mission focus on urban core areas. UrbanCore, and it's predecessors, has produced over $300 million in mixed use developments in California often including cultural or affordable housing using innovative financing techniques. Mr. Johnson is also celebrated for his ideas in construction innovations with modular prefabrication and moves to implement modular construction for high rise structures.
Jeffrey Abramson and Hossein Lavasani

Pictured above from left is Jeffrey Abramson with UMD Doctoral Candidate in sustainable real estate, Hossein Lavasani. Mr. Abramson was honored for his over 20 years of leading thought and action in sustainable development. As he put it, when he started “doing green building” people thought he was painting them green. Jeffrey is the inspiration behind the Tower Companies’ leadership in sustainability. The Tower Companies emphasizes how built environments enhance the everyday lives of their occupants and is leading the way to producing buildings that are not only green in design and materials, but recognize that human capital—the people who work in the buildings and designing for them—is the key aspect for the next waive of innovation in real estate.

(From left) Mariachiara Baroni, Blaise Rastello and Dr. Dean Chang

Last but certainly not least, Blaise Rastello, Director of Affordable Housing accepted the award for the Transitional Housing Corporation for their work of combining (seemingly impossibly) high standards in green building with affordable housing. Blaise is pictured above with graduate real estate student Mariachiara Baroni who assisted Dr. Chang in presenting the awards. Dr. Chang is the University’s Vice President for Innovation and Entrepreneurship across the campus.

THC has designed and developed Washington’s first multifamily Passive
House, meaning the building is designed to use net zero energy. Zero is a tough standard to meet in milder climates than our region, but even more so, THC did it with an existing structure – not with new construction. The benefits to the residents (with much lower rents to serve THC’s target population), plus the benefits to the planet are a unique combination of meeting environmental and social goals all in one building. The Passive Home standard is the most energy efficient in the world with solar energy, exterior insulation, and completely airtight construction reducing heating costs by 90%. The THC project has 150 units serving 500 low income families.