

WHY I ULI

Our work is made possible by our member-volunteers who generously contribute their time and talent to create impact.

Why I ULI shares your stories of member leadership.

KOLU WILSON

CO-CHAIR, ULI MN REAL ESTATE DIVERSITY INITIATIVE (REDi)

DIRECTOR, MN DEED OFFICE OF ECONOMIC EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Tell us about yourself.

I was born in Liberia in West Africa and raised there until the age of 7. My family fled due to civil war, and I lived in the Ivory Coast for a year before immigrating to Minnesota. I moved to North Minneapolis during the height of the 90s gang violence. I was shocked by the poverty that surrounded me.

In high school, I took a geography course and it was the first time I was fully engaged in a topic. I wanted to learn more about how disenfranchised communities of color came to be and how I could effectuate change. This led me to major in Urban Studies at the University of Minnesota. I always knew I would work to build equitable communities and improve the lives of the disenfranchised.

I also knew I wanted to advance my education and that a law degree would provide me with an understanding of legal frameworks that led to inequities and how laws can be used to drive change at a systems level. I graduated from Arizona Summit Law School and became a licensed attorney in Minnesota.

With hard work and dedication, I've been able to do what I set out to do, but there is still more I can and will accomplish in advancing equity.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

During my free time—which I don't have much of—I enjoy doing activities with my family (husband and two girls ages 3 & 4). During my free time alone, I enjoy health and wellness activities like yoga, renovating our fixer-upper house, and using that time to recharge. I also provide pro-bono legal services to members of the Liberian community.

What are some of the biggest challenges you're working on at DEED?

Minnesota has some of the worst disparities in the U.S. for communities of color (i.e. poverty, education, income, etc.) At DEED, we are working on addressing economic disparities. The hardest part of this work is navigating and breaking down individual, institutional, and structural racism.

We are doing this work by advancing racial equity principles in the agency and across the State enterprise. This includes normalizing conversations about race and outcomes, operationalizing new behaviors by removing "race neutral" concepts and being more race conscious in DEED's work, and engaging communities of color in DEED's decision-making. Some examples include implementing a racial equity analysis in our Request for Proposals and including community reviewers in our grant-making process.

Tell us about your experience as a participant and now as Co-Chair of the REDi Program.

REDi was an amazing professional development opportunity for me! It filled knowledge gaps, connected dots, and connected me with some amazing participants and presenters. It took us on a journey from the conceptual aspects of development down to the technical details.

As a co-chair, it has given me a greater appreciation for diversity and inclusion programs because of the amount of thought and action it requires. I love that I am able to help shape the program for the better in ways I would've liked as a participant.

I highly recommend the program for anyone looking to expand their knowledge and network in the industry.

[Learn more about REDi](#)



Kolu Wilson

Director

MN DEED Office of Economic
Equity and Opportunity

LIGHTNING ROUND QUESTIONS

Make a recommendation.

The movie "Belle." It's about how the mixed-race granddaughter of the Chief Justice of England plays an important role in a court ruling to abolish slavery in England. It intersects law, race, wealth, love and power! Learn more about "[Belle.](#)"

Give us one fact about yourself most people don't know.

I was a member of the University of Minnesota Women's Softball team (2001-2002) that played in the NCAA Sweet 16 tournament. We eventually lost to the University of Arizona who was led by pitcher Jennie Lynn Finch, the most famous softball player ever.

Finish this sentence however you like. "I wish I could..."

Visit Liberia. I have not been back since we left in 1990.

[Connect with Kolu on LinkedIn](#)

REDi PROGRAM HOLDS HIRING PRACTICES DISCUSSION

Getting Someone to Take a Chance

The February 5th session of the 2018 REDi Program was a panel discussion focused on the real estate industry's employment and hiring practices. The topic fostered a rich conversation about barriers women and professionals of color face when entering the industry.

One participant highlighted that many real estate professionals got to where they are today through a mentor who took them under their wing or a company that gave them a chance, even when they did not have the experience or career path of a typical member of the industry. He pointed out that getting this 'chance' is often more difficult for people of color for reasons including a lack of opportunity to cross into the networks of industry leaders or because a name stands out as being different on a resume.

Taking this as a call to action, panelist Eva Stevens, the President and COO of United Properties, offered to meet with anyone willing to give her a call. Participants are already taking her up on her offer. United Properties has identified a need for deeper goals around inclusion and diversity, and is sponsoring the REDi program as part of that commitment. Sessions like the employment practices panel are helping participants, mentors and other REDi sponsors understand the experiences of women and professionals of color in the real estate industry as they work toward better representation.



Eva Stevens
President and COO
United Properties

2018 REDi PROGRAM SPONSORS



YLG ANNUAL PROGRAM DRAWS MEDIA COVERAGE

"Not-So-Big Real Estate" Encourages Developers to Think Both Big and Small

On March 8th, the ULI Minnesota Young Leaders Group held its annual program for a packed house at the Holden Room at Hennepin Made. The event was covered by *Urban Land*, the Urban Land Institute's magazine and MinnPost in two recently published articles (links below).

The program, "Not-So-Big Real Estate: Growing Cities 3,000 Square Feet at a Time," featured Portland developer Kevin Cavanaugh discussing his approach to developing small-scale infill real estate projects. People love these kinds of developments in their neighborhoods, but they are harder than ever to build even in places where they already exist. Cavanaugh shared how he has made them work, including sharing his pro formas publicly.

[Read the Urban Land article](#)

[Read the MinnPost article](#)

[Get Kevin Cavanaugh's Presentation](#)



Kevin Cavanaugh
Owner
Guerrilla Development

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