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IREM President's message: Priority for 2021 is diversity

April 02, 2021 - Owners Developers & Managers

As I mentioned at the beginning of the year, the most important of IREM Boston's strategic priorities for 2021 is our focus on diversity. Diversity has always been a core value of our chapter – diversity, inclusion, and equity create our strength – but we still have work to do in fully embracing and valuing our differences while cultivating an environment of equal opportunity for everyone associated with IREM.

One person who has helped us move forward in our efforts over the last few years is Kimberly Parker, CPM, C21P, COS. Parker is a senior property manager for the Abrams Management Company, and first came to IREM with the goal of earning her CPM just three years ago. She shares that when she came to her first meeting of the Boston chapter, she found the experience nerve-wracking – “as a person of color, walking into an organization without knowing anyone can be awkward,” she recounted – but now says that joining IREM was life-changing.

Shown (from left are: Ka-Ling Flynn, Pietrina “Patty” Staples, Boston city councilor Ed Flynn and Kimberly Parker.

Soon, she found herself on the chapter's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, and took on the role of chair. As she continued on in the organization, she realized that her career had allowed her to turn her situation around – pulling her family out of poverty – and she wanted to do what she could to help other young folks like her. And so, her committee of three (Parker along with Pietrina “Patty” Staples and Ka-Ling Flynn) started attending career fairs and visiting community colleges and high schools to talk about a career in property management. They made connections with teachers and professors, and they asked their fellow IREM Boston members to share job openings, which they then passed along to potential candidates.

Pietrina “Patty” Staples, Kimberly Parker and former Mayor Martin Walsh.

This committee of three not only recruited countless minorities into the field, but also recruited some of the chapter's members to support the cause and join the DEI Committee. And her efforts started to receive national attention. In fact, Parker served as vice chair of the national Diversity Advisory Board for IREM last year.

Unfortunately, the DEI Committee had to adapt to last year's challenges, as we all did. But Parker went back to that idea of how it feels to walk into a room and not know anyone, and so started welcoming all of our new members and anyone who earns a professional designation with a note of congratulations. The DEI Committee uses that opportunity to talk about what the DEI Committee is all about, and to make each individual feel connected, welcome, and part of something bigger.

Kimberly Parker

Parker has ideas for something bigger for the future too. She's currently collaborating with other organizations throughout the commonwealth to rework a minority training program for property managers, something she hopes to eventually be able to expand to the national level.

Parker is an incredible representation of what our organization offers. At the end of 2020, she was named chair of the Diversity Advisory Board for the national IREM organization, in addition to her continued role as chair of the Boston chapter's DEI Committee. And just last month, she completed her CPM.

Because of Parker's efforts, IREM Boston is a more inclusive organization. We know it's important to have a diverse array of people as our members, but it's just as important to make sure everyone feels welcome and included in the conversation. Let's keep the conversation going.

Melissa Fish-Crane is the 2021 president of IREM Boston and principal & COO at the Peabody Properties.

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