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## **Coffee Connectors hosts summit to introduce first-generation college students to careers in commercial real estate**

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Boston, MA Beatrice Thevenot grew up in the Maverick housing projects of East Boston and was the first in her family to attend college. Now in her third job in commercial real estate, Thevenot, a director at NorthBridge focusing on investor relations, designed a recent summit for first generation college students with a personal appreciation for their life experience.

“I do this for my younger self,” said Thevenot, “for little Bea,” who navigated the path to college and then juggled jobs all through school. “I am a testimony to the value of mentorship and with Coffee Connectors, I hope to continue making the landscape of commercial real estate more diverse and accessible to all.”

The student summit held by Coffee Connectors and Builders of Color aimed to prepare first-generation and underrepresented college students for good jobs in the commercial real estate industry, educating them about the field and teaching them how to network to build connections.

Among the more than 160 first-gen college students attending was Claude Delille, who learned about the summit from a Boston University campus newsletter. She said she liked the way it fueled confidence in students to pursue opportunities. “You typically don’t know what opportunities are out there until someone tells you. These professionals want to help speed up the process for you and to help you get ahead.”

The program offered practical experience in networking opportunities with one-on-one conversations with industry veterans. Thevenot said they also made the event accessible by paying a stipend for attendance so the students didn’t lose money from missing work.

The Coffee Connectors program also provides a six-week, hands-on internship that includes an end-of-program capstone project and the “How I Got My Job” podcast hosted by Thevenot and Dean Atkins featuring industry professionals sharing their career paths and insights. Since Coffee Connectors started doing mentoring programs seven years ago, over 500 connections have been made with students and professionals in a wide range of business fields. The summit focused solely on the commercial real estate industry.

“My business partner, Greg Lauze, and I started Coffee Connectors to address a critical need we saw in leveling the playing field for first-generation students entering the professional world,” said Dean Atkins, managing partner of NorthBridge. “These students lack access to the professional

networks that can fast-track careers and illuminate the unwritten pathways in industries like commercial real estate,” he said. With Coffee Connectors, we aim to bridge this ‘last mile’ of the opportunity gap by equipping first-gen students with access to mentors and networks to empower their journey to becoming successful business and civic leaders.”

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