



LEFT: The Ilora

BELOW: The project's development team stands in of the property.



## Illuminating the Ilora A Condominium that Creates Community

BY JESSICA WHITE

From the outside, the Ilora is a flashback to a time when craftsmen (not contractors) built buildings. Originally designed as an apartment building in 1940 by architect Sam Novak, even a passing glance at the Ilora is enough for one to notice that artistry enhanced the functionality of the building in ways that modern builders cannot or will not duplicate.

The art-deco style of the brickwork and ornamentation is apparent in the repeating, multi-colored vertical columns, drawing the eye upwards along the side of the building; and the horizontal row of brickwork, which by alternating in pattern and color, encourages one's gaze to pass lengthways along the building.

These architectural details were what initially attracted Bo Menkiti, of the Menkiti Group ([www.MenkitiGroup.com](http://www.MenkitiGroup.com)) to purchase the 21-unit building last year. He approached the project with the vision to restore this abandoned building and help revitalize the neighborhood by creating high quality housing for those who serve the community. Both the Menkiti Group real estate sales team (of Keller Williams Capital Properties) and Menkiti Group development team are working towards the vision by using creative marketing strategies to reach the targeted buyers and thoughtfully approaching the renovation to include high end finishes while preserving the historic character.

The pricing was designed to be affordable to the middle market buyer, with

one-bedroom units starting in the \$180,000s, and two-bedroom models starting in the \$290,000s. This price point works perfectly with the District's many first-time homebuyer programs.

"We are trying to increase the housing stock for service professionals, such as police officers, firefighters, teachers and healthcare professionals and make sure they can take advantage of the right financing programs to purchase the homes," says Menkiti.

The Menkiti Group sales team has worked to target these service professionals through their marketing campaigns. They host community events at the building and offer monthly classes for first-time homebuyers to educate buyers on the various financing programs available. The sales team uses a unique approach, which relies heavily on teamwork and a salary based compensation structure that incentivizes the team to give the same high level of service to every client regardless of the value of the transaction. "We work with a lot of young professionals, first-time homebuyers, families and seasoned professionals – different pools of people with the same needs but different backgrounds," says Kymber Lovett-Menkiti, director of sales. "Teamwork is the key, from administration to processing to negotiation. We have five people that combine skills on all different levels to benefit the client."

The Development team has approached the project with the same commitment to the middle market buyer, and has produced a high quality product at an affordable price point. They hired architect Mark Rengel – of Einhorn,

Yaffe, Prescott Architecture and Engineering PC – to transform the interior and upgrade all the systems. The Ilora now boasts 21 fully-redesigned condominiums with seven different floor plans. “It offers views of the Basilica [of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception] on one side and the Capitol dome on the other. We restored the original floors, and where we had to replace parts of it [because walls were moved], we found a source for fundamentally the same type of wood,” says David Toland, vice president of development for the Menkiti Group. The building is prewired for high speed wireless Internet, has an exercise room and a community Flexcar onsite. Some units have exposed brick, others have 11-foot-wide closets in the bedroom. All offer the same level of finishes you find in high-end luxury buildings in Northwest – solid wood cabinetry in the kitchen, granite countertops, stainless steel appliances and an updated, modern interior design.

“It has been a really rewarding experience. The building sat vacant for two years and was a haven for nefarious activity... Now, the same people who were calling the police are coming over in groups and are amazed with the transformation. And first-time buyers and service professionals have already started moving in to six of the units,” says Menkiti. The mission of the Menkiti Group is to enhance the fabric of life in the neighborhoods of DC, and with the completion of 21 affordable luxury units at the Ilora, it seems that they have succeeded.

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