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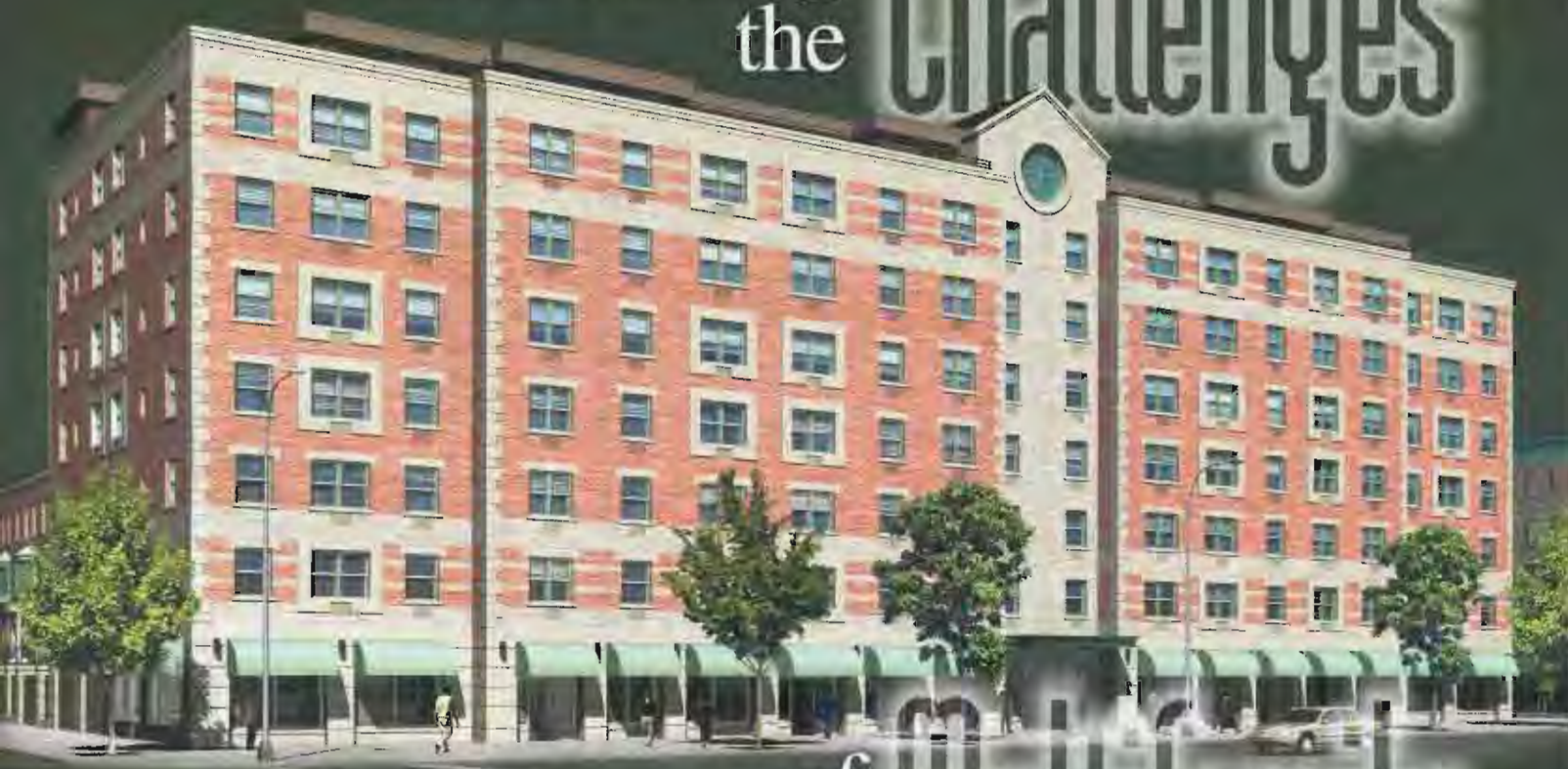
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## Understanding the

# Challenges



## INSIDE

Builder Profiles:  
The Briarwood Organization

# of Multifamily Housing



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# The Briarwood Organization

## — a Full-Service Real Estate Firm

*You can't grow as a business if you don't get involved in every aspect of the business. We've been around for 90 years, and to keep growing we have to keep our hands in every aspect of the building industry — Vincent Riso.*



by Marie Grogitsky

What began as a carpentry business back in 1912 has evolved over the past 90 years into The Briarwood Organization — a full-service real estate firm, owned and operated by four partners whose dedication to the industry and affordable housing can be seen through the dozens of projects they are involved with around the New York City area.

The fourth generation family business was started back in 1912 by Luigi Riso. During its early years, The Briarwood Organization was a family carpentry business. It was in 1920 that the company took on the construction of its first homes. Since that time, the business has grown to become a full-service real estate firm.

Briarwood's four partners include James, Raymond and Vincent Riso and Howard Goodman. All have "very strong" engineering and construction backgrounds. Goodman is the in-house architect, while James also holds a bachelor of architecture degree. Both James and Vincent are licensed real estate brokers and began their careers as their father and grandfather did — as carpenters. "Growing up, I worked in the field for a number of different contractors," said James. "I saw what was out there and came back to the family business. I guess I had to go out on my own and find out."

Vincent explained The Briarwood Organization as a full-service building firm. "We are general contractors, construction managers, property managers, real estate brokers and home builders," said Vincent. "You can't grow as a business if you don't get involved in every aspect of the business. We've been around for 90 years, and to keep growing we have to keep our hands in every aspect of the building industry."

The Briarwood Organization is an umbrella group controlling subsidiary firms. Briarwood has expertise and experience in all phases of real estate development from conception through permanent ownership. The group has the capabilities of project evaluation, planning, design, construction, marketing and property management.

## Builders of Affordable and Multi-Family Housing

Over the past five years, Briarwood has been focusing on the construction of affordable two and three family homes and multifamily housing in the Bronx, Queens and Manhattan areas. As a company, they have worked with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development Department (HPD) on over 2,000 affordable housing units.

Currently, they are developing 100 two-family units in Arverne, New York. They are also work-

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## Builder Profile

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ing on several developments in Harlem including 17 three-family units and two high rises which include 51 rental units and 69 co-op units. In the Bronx, they are building two 100-unit co-ops

Working as construction managers, The Briarwood Organization is currently partnering with Flushing Promenade LLC on 350 apartment units in Flushing, Queens. They are working closely with them on environmental cleanup at the site, which will lead to the construction of a waterfront on the Promenade Flushing River.

"We want to be involved with projects that make us proud," said both James and Vincent. "Whether we are developers of the project or work as the construction manager, we are working to provide quality and affordability."

The Briarwood Organization is also working on assembling several shopping centers and office buildings, and they own commercial properties including strip stores, factories and office buildings. They are planning to construct affordable housing projects around several of their commercial properties. All four of The Briarwood Organization partners believe that housing needs to be in and around where the jobs are and affordable to those working the jobs.

Briarwood is comprised of 18 office employees, 15-20 field employees and has strong working relationships with the highly qualified subcontractors they utilize on their projects.

Taking the affordable housing issue one step further, The Briarwood Organization worked with the HPD to establish a nonprofit business in the construction of the Waters Edge Development in Arverne. Vincent explained that the concept was undertaken to lower construction costs. Savings realized by the nonprofit status were passed on to the purchasers. "This nonprofit status provided a cost savings on construction," he said. "We passed that on to those buying the homes. This project was the first of its kind in New York."

## Earning the Award of Excellence

The Briarwood Organization was the only recipient in the state of New York to take home a 2001 National Home Builders Association Best in American Living Award. For the Fifth Avenue Partnership Homes project located between Fifth and Madison Avenues at East 117th and East

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## Builder Profile

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118th Streets in East Harlem, they were awarded the HUD Secretary's Award for Excellence, an award that makes them very proud. "It was the silver award, and the only award given out in the state," said Vincent. "It's always rewarding to be recognized for your efforts. We are proud of that."

## Getting Involved in Local and State Associations

Both James and Vincent believe that involvement in local, state and national builder associations is important to keep informed on issues and to join forces with others on those important issues. "It is true: in numbers there is strength," said Vincent. "To make an impact on this industry you have to get involved and stay involved. Builders need to join forces through their local and state associations."

The two Risos, along with James' father Raymond, are past presidents of the Queens County Builders & Contractors Association. Raymond and Vincent are founding members of that association. Vincent was the third president with Raymond to follow. James served three terms as president from 1995-97.

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**Builder Profile**

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James said that two major issues facing his local association are problems with the city building department expediting certificates of occupancy (COs) and approvals as well as a move to abolish weekend construction in the city. "We are having much more of an impact on these issues by being united within our association," said James.

Their involvement in the political end of the building industry also spans to several past and current board and commission appointments. Vincent has served on the Building Commissioner's Cabinet, advising the building commission on builders' concerns and is currently the only building industry representative on the NYC Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioners Cabinet.

Outside of the building industry, Vincent serves on nonprofit boards including Citizens Housing and St. Vincents Catholic Medical Center. "It's very important to give something back," said Vincent. "We feel fortunate and make sure we give something of ourselves back to the community we live in."

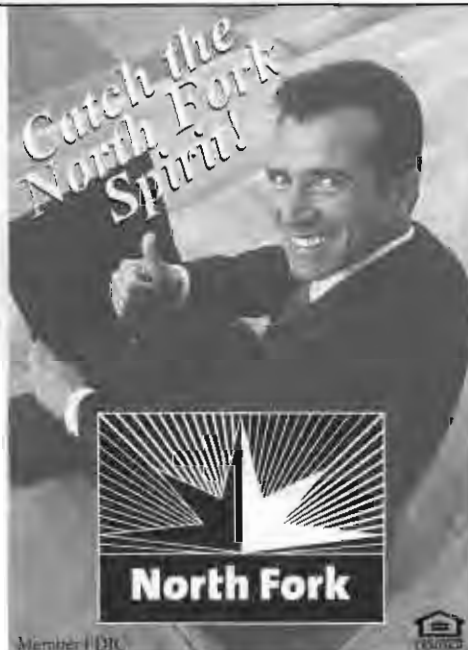
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