



Richard Baron became the fifth recipient of ULI's prestigious J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development.

Inset: 2003 J.C. Nichols Prize Winner Vincent Scully with 2004 Winner Richard Baron.



RICHARD BARON: BUILDING A BETTER WAY OF LIFE

By Christine Imbs

"Never look back, because someone may be gaining on you."

This quote by baseball pitching star Satchel Paige is one of Richard Baron's favorites. It's also a source of frustration. As chairman and CEO of the St. Louis-based McCormack Baron Salazar Inc. (MBS), Baron sees little in the way of competition and it bothers him. "We've been looking back for 30 years, and there's nobody there," he says.

As one of the nation's most successful developers of inner-city mixed-income communities, the 62-year-old Baron and MBS are re-creating vibrant neighborhoods in some of the toughest inner-city areas across the country. "We've gone into areas you wouldn't want to drive in during the day," he says. "I see our firm as an agent of change. We set out to change the economics of communities and empower families."

Nowhere is this more apparent than in St. Louis' Murphy Park. Situated across from the old Pruitt-Igoe public housing project, this

once abandoned, crime-filled neighborhood was called a "hellish place to live" by residents. Today, it exemplifies the total

turnaround that Baron and MBS have been able to achieve in neighborhoods nationwide.

"I'm interested in being a part of the community and doing what I can to help. That's what our firm is all about," he explains. "We're a mission-driven company that's focused on improving the lives of families and children."

Since 1973, MBS has developed more than 11,500 units of affordable and market-rate housing in 102 developments in 28 cities across the United States. But Baron says it takes more than just well-designed, well-built resi-

dences to bring about change. The success of MBS' developments also hinges on the success of mixing incomes. And for this to happen, the needs of the families must be considered. This is why MBS takes a holistic approach to community development, placing an equal emphasis on connecting residents with the social services they need to succeed in life—such as job training, child care, after-school programs, youth activities and elder care.

"The issue of economic integration is an issue that revolves around values, not incomes. When families share a desire for their kids to succeed, economic integration is not a problem," Baron says. "We have individuals earning six figures living next to mini-

mum-wage families, and it works fine."

Current St. Louis developments, by Baron include the Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhood just north and east of Powell Symphony Hall, in the former Blumeyer public housing development; and the ambitious 195-acre Chouteau Lake and Greenway to anchor development near the new Busch Stadium. He's also continuing to upgrade some of his earlier developments, such as Allen Market Lane in Soulard, the Falstaff Brewery at north 20th, and the Washington apartments.

Last fall before a crowd of 3,000 people at the Urban Land Institute's annual meeting in New York City, Baron became the fifth recipient of the ULI's prestigious J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development—the real estate industry's equivalency of the "Oscar." The \$100,000 prize is given to an individual whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

In his acceptance speech, Baron commented on the struggling condition of the nation's weaker cities stating, "Public and private policies over the past 50 years have encouraged the devastating migration from these cities. We have done it as a nation, and it is time to deal with it as a nation. We cannot wait any longer. Let us agree that cities are worth saving, and let us support the efforts that are being made to restore urban centers."

Baron joins Nichols Prize laureates Charleston, South Carolina Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr.; the late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan; Gerald D. Hines, founder and chairman of the Hines real estate organization; and the architecture professor Vincent Scully. ■

Talking POINTS

BORN: Detroit, Mich. Moved to St. Louis in 1968.

EDUCATION: BA in Political Science from Oberlin College; MA in Political Science from University of California at Berkeley, juris doctorate, University of Michigan.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 2004 National laureate of the ULI's J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development; co-founder and developer of The Center of Creative Arts (COCA) in University City; co-founder and co-chairman of the Vashon Education Compact, a partnership of the St. Louis Public Schools and major corporations; founder of the Center for Urban Redevelopment Excellence at the University of Pennsylvania.

SECRET TO HIS SUCCESS: Persistence and a very strong sense of humor.