

AN EYE FOR

# OPPORTOR

HASANI STEELE IS  
HELPING REVITALIZE  
STRUGGLING CHICAGO  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
WHILE RAISING THE  
EXPECTATIONS OF  
INTEGRITY AND SERVICE

BY PATRICIA TERRY  
PHOTOS BY KEVIN PENCZAK



# TUNITY



**SWEET HOME CHICAGO**  
ASSOCIATE HASANI STEELE  
ENJOYS BOATING ON LAKE  
MICHIGAN WITH HIS WIFE,  
DIANA MITCHELL, AND THEIR  
3-YEAR-OLD TWIN DAUGHTERS.



**T**he elegant Montgomery Club lobby, located in a modernist high-rise in Chicago's River North district, crackles with energy as developers, brokers, investors and Realtors network before the Chicago Association of Realtors' Good

Neighbor Awards presentation.

Amid the guests, Hasani Steele, a trim, sharply dressed, 36-year-old agent, moves from table to table greeting colleagues – smiling, laughing, exchanging a few words. He seems to know everyone in the room.

Steele is accepting an impressive 13 Good Neighbor Awards for his work with developers who rehab properties in depressed Chicagoland communities.

Although the Chairman's Club member with RE/MAX Premier Properties is based in Chicago's affluent Gold Coast neighborhood, Steele also spends time scouring the Greater Chicago area for dilapidated properties with potential – and opportunities to create new, high-quality housing. His Steele Consulting Group partners with investors, developers and fellow Realtors to bring each project to fruition.

On the city's South Side, for example, Steele recently transformed a vacant lot littered with abandoned cars and trash into award-winning homes. On the Southwest Side, he completely remodeled a boarded-up, single-story bungalow and transformed it into a 3,819-square-foot mini-mansion.

His projects are all privately funded, and Steele says a big challenge with each new development is persuading investors to commit funds. Steele has also created a merchandising brand, Steele Consulting Integrity Homes, to distinguish projects in which he's been involved from conception to closing.

"It's important that people can say, 'I know that's an Integrity Home and that Hasani was involved from the start,'" Steele says.

Seventy-five percent of Steele's business is in residential properties – both new development and existing homes – and he says the Integrity brand serves him well with these buyers and sellers, too.

"When you're developing in changing neighborhoods, it's





**PILOTING SUCCESS** Hasani Steele, who's loved technology and electronics since he was a child, builds and flies radio-controlled aircrafts.

## RE/MAX ENCOURAGES INNOVATION AND GIVES YOU A GREAT AMOUNT OF FREEDOM, WHILE ALSO OFFERING THE BEST IN SUPPORT."

hard to get your first sale," he says. "People don't know you, and it's important to have a reputation you can bank on."

Steele's parents, Kim and Homer Steele, are proud.

"It's ironic that South Side neighborhoods and streets where my wife and I grew up – and, in a way, fled for better opportunities and more safety – are now being improved by our son," Homer Steele says. "To us, he is like a prodigal son, returning to his roots with great energy and vision, transforming once depressed neighborhoods and communities for the better."

### ENCOURAGING INNOVATION

A Chicago-area native, Steele has racked up some impressive stats during his 13-plus years in real estate, including \$180 million in total sales.

He was the No. 1 individual RE/MAX agent in the RE/MAX Northern Illinois Region and No. 37 on the RE/MAX Top 100 Individuals list in 2013. This year, the RE/MAX Hall of Famer is on track for \$40 million in sales.

"Sales of \$40 million is not huge by some standards, but my revenue model is different," Steele says. "We do a large number of projects that range from a \$10,000 REO to properties valued at \$3 million-plus. My fee structure varies depending on the scope, which allows me to serve all price points equally."

Steele Consulting Group offers an array of services – including residential and commercial sales as well as real estate

development consulting from conception through construction to delivery. Building close, long-term client relationships based on trust and proven performance is the glue that holds it all together, Steele says.

"Some of the investors I work with have been in business many years – starting as carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers or other tradesmen and working their way up to becoming developers," he says. "They may not have had training in how to run a business, and that's where we come in." His clients also include entrepreneurs from other industries who want to learn real estate investment strategy.

Steele says RE/MAX Premier Properties, headed by Broker/Owners Janice Corley and Cynthia Bauer, is the ideal place for Steele Consulting Group.

"RE/MAX promotes a spirit of independence, of entrepreneurship – allowing its Associates to work with whomever they want," says Steele, who was briefly affiliated with RE/MAX and longtime friend Corley in 2002. In the interim, he worked at two other real estate firms before returning to RE/MAX in 2012.

"They encourage innovation and give you a great amount of freedom, while also offering the best in support," he says.

# HASANI STEELE'S PILLARS OF SUCCESS

## FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Steele also receives support from his family, whom he credits for his strong work ethic. His father studied at Illinois Institute of Technology before joining IBM, and later launched a computer consulting business. Steele's mother is nearing retirement with FedEx. His sister Helen and brother Harrison have successful careers in medicine and IT, respectively.

Steele's wife, Diana Mitchell, is a pediatric doctor and assistant professor at the University of Chicago Medicine Comer Children's Hospital. The couple has 3-year-old twin daughters, and they're expecting a third child this fall. And although his family lives in the city now, Steele grew up in suburban Glen Ellyn, where he and his father shared a passion for computers and gadgets.

"My dad and I would fix broken radio-controlled toys together," Steele says. "We also worked on computers. If we wanted to play games, we had to program them."

In fact, Steele got into rehabbing homes in his early teens to finance his electronics hobbies. "An associate of my father's, Gloria Woerheide, hired me to remove wallpaper, put up siding and strip paint off wood doors," he says. "She taught me about real estate with hands-on experience, and she became like an aunt to me."

Steele played high school football at Glenbard West and landed a full scholarship to Northwestern University, where he was a member of the 1996 Rose Bowl team and earned a degree in computer engineering in 1999. "Northwestern taught me how to look at any goal I wanted to accomplish and create a plan to successfully execute it," Steele says.

## BUILDING A BRAND

Steele bought and leased his first properties to supplement his cash flow while working for a telecommunications company. He continued buying properties, often renovating them by himself, until the market crashed in 2001 and he was laid off.

That's when Steele moved into real estate. As Steele's business grows, so does his enthusiastic staff. "Hasani is great to work for because you get to do a little of everything, and he values everyone's opinion," says Alicia Nsemo, client manager for Steele Consulting Group. "He'll ask for your ideas and then tell you to go do it."

Steele Consulting Group is on the leading edge of technology. The outfit is entirely paperless and relies primarily on the Sales Force database and tools such as Gantt charts to keep track of projects. Steele's robust social media and other marketing efforts are geared toward driving traffic to his interactive website, [whatasteele.com](http://whatasteele.com). ♦

## THE VALUE OF MENTORS

► My parents, and my family in general, were my first mentors, and that laid the foundation for my success today. Just the benefit of perspective from their hindsight and foresight helped me in so many ways. Coaches, bosses, business associates and so many others also influenced me over the years. They helped me to see that with enough time, energy and focus, I could become a pro at whatever I pursue.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

► I'm a problem solver, but success is not about just solving a problem. It's about having a mindset of methodically approaching anything you face, no matter how insurmountable it seems at first, breaking it down into manageable chunks and then figuring out how to accomplish what you need.

## ADVOCATING FOR CLIENTS

► My clients are looking for expertise, and that's what I offer. Most people don't buy or sell homes every day – maybe once every 20 years – so it's the agent's responsibility to be their advocate; to educate them, advise them and get them fair market value. It's worth the extra time and effort to make yourself indispensable to your clients.

## BUILDING ON PAST BUSINESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

► We receive nearly all our business from past clients' referrals. Our goal is to establish more referrals within the RE/MAX organization, and that's happening more and more. People are seeing some of our posted success, and they're calling because they know we have a unique specialization.

## WORKING HARD TO PLAY HARD

► My team and I work very hard for our clients, but we also know how to prioritize personal time and time with our families. Just like with clients, you have to schedule time for yourself, too. Otherwise, what's all that hard work for?