

BUSINESS

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Duo sees market potential behind rehabbed houses

For 27 years, Dr. Max Weisfeld has mended the ailing feet of his patients who have shuffled through his doors at Hamilton Foot Care on Hartford Road and Joppa Foot Care.

But the other day around lunchtime, the podiatrist stood in a rowhouse in

Patterson Park, explaining the finer points of a "coffered ceiling" demonstrating the newly installed self-shutting cabinets in the gleaming kitchen and admiring a sleek, new banister that runs up the stairway.

"Do you like this little touch?" asked his partner, Nina Houck, pointing to a delicate curve in the banister.

"It's nice," Weisfeld said. Nearly two years ago, Weisfeld and Houck started Sunday Morning Properties LLC, a company that has been acquiring and rehabbing broken-down houses north of the park. They have raised \$800,000 from

DOUG KAPUSTIN: SUN STAFF
Max Weisfeld and Nina Houck, founders of Sunday Morning Properties, own 50 homes north of Patterson Park. They buy run-down houses and rehab them for renters and for resale.



move into the area.

So far, they've snapped up 50 homes, some sight unseen, and they aim to buy another 50 for a portfolio of 100 rental properties. Money is already flowing in, and investors are receiving returns on their investments, Weisfeld said.



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Now, Weisfeld, 57, is even talking about getting out of podiatry in a couple of years, Houck quit her job as a CPA.

"I have when I have to leave" Patterson Park for the office, Weisfeld said. "Everybody is having fun. It is wild. It is totally wild what is going on down here."

This kind of unbridled euphoria could be living proof that the housing market has gone haywire. Isn't this reminiscent of dot-com mania? Didn't everybody have a stock tip and boast about all of the money they made?

"I would recommend him against quitting his job, this is hugely risky," said Dean Baker, an economist and co-director at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, an independent eco- [See Atkinson, D6]

Duo makes strides rehabbing city rowhouses

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nomics think tank in Washington, D.C. "When they [investors] hear that real estate always goes up it just kills me."

But Weisfeld doesn't see a downward scenario, at least not yet. Prices are still soaring, and investors from outside Baltimore are piling in.

"That 'if' is a long way away," Weisfeld said, while at a newly renovated house he and Houck own at 107 N. Linwood Ave. "I am not worried, definitely for the short term. The demand is just very, very strong."

Weisfeld and Houck bought the house on Linwood for about \$110,000. They plan to list it for sale in about two weeks for \$312,000. Weisfeld is certain there will be a bidding war.

Houck came up with the idea for the business. She and Weisfeld had known each other for years — Houck did his taxes. She had another client who began buying property in Patterson Park and told Houck she should get into the business. Houck saw that her client was making good money. She couldn't resist.

On July 17, 2003, over Chinese lunch, Houck unveiled her plan to Weisfeld. He told her to count him in, and Sunday Morning Properties was born.

"I have never stopped to look back," said Houck, 35, who quit her job January 2004. "From the day I gave my letter of resignation it has been nonstop."

The duo has bought homes for as little as \$13,000. Some don't have roofs. Others have been charred by fire, or are trashed and reek of cat urine. Weisfeld's and Houck's crews gut the houses, rewired them, install new plumbing and remodel



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Max Weisfeld, co-founder of Sunday Morning Properties is thinking about trading podiatry for real estate. "We are helping Baltimore come back. It is saving a neighborhood," he said.

the interiors. They even pour concrete patios to cover up weeds or dirt backyards that are havens for rats.

About 37 homes Sunday Morning owns are rented and a number of the tenants receive assistance from the state and federal government.

Weisfeld and Houck screen tenants by visiting them at their homes or apartments to make sure they have kept up their residences. Once a tenant is approved, Weisfeld and Houck deliver a gift basket with cheese, late, coffee mugs, tea, jelly and bathtub cleanser. Sometimes they deliver batteries for smoke alarms, or furnace filters.

"They are very good landlords," they are very understanding," said Darlene Trent, a

custodian with the Baltimore public school system who also cleans homes for Weisfeld and Houck.

"We have a pleasant impression of them," said Amina Osman, who works with the Patterson Park Community Development Corp., an organization trying to revive the neighborhood.

"They are actually doing quality work. Those are the kind of people we welcome into the fold." Weisfeld likes the money, but he believes he is helping to rebuild the city.

"We are helping Baltimore come back," he said. "It is saving a neighborhood."
Bill Atkinson's column runs Tuesdays and Fridays. Contact him at 410-332-6961 or by e-mail at bill@bktrnsn.com #17a