

Enterprising Women 2005

Annie Burton-Byrd

president/CEO

Newcomer finds her new home needs her

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Staff

People end up in Baltimore for many reasons — a lover, a job, family ties.

Boston native Annie Burton-Byrd attributes her move to God.

One day four years ago, her husband Kevin sat her down and told her some news. “The Lord is leading me to go to Baltimore, Maryland,” he said.

She didn’t answer right away. After a few seconds, she quipped, “He hasn’t said anything to me.”

But Burton-Byrd, 38, says she knew her husband must follow his calling. She agreed to move, leaving a prestigious position at Harvard University, where she was the administrative, financial, and development officer in the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research.

Driving around some rough streets in Baltimore, she felt depressed. Here they were without jobs, family or friends in a city she knew little about. “Why would God bring us here?” she asked herself. Burton-Byrd, a mother of three, doesn’t ask herself that anymore.

In four years, she and her husband went from owning one property to 200 through their company, Signature Management Realty LLC. Still an advisor to Harvard’s Du Bois Institute, she has launched the institute’s Martin Luther King Jr. After-School Program in three city sites and is working on a fourth at a church in Irvington.

She is now busy building her own nonprofit, 21st Century Communities, which will provide housing and community services to the homeless and people with HIV/AIDS and chronic substance abuse. She is working with the Harbor Bank of Maryland and the Enterprise Foundation, a nonprofit started by the Rouse Co.

Burton-Byrd’s rapid involvement in her new city caught the eye of Leadership Baltimore, the Greater Baltimore Committee’s leadership training group. She is in the Leadership’s 2005 class.

Julie Mercer, who was appointed Burton-Byrd’s mentor at Leadership Baltimore, calls her “the most incredible self-made success story I’ve ever seen.”

Mercer said Burton-Byrd is humble about her rise from public housing in Boston to Harvard. What Burton-Byrd has done in Baltimore so far is only the beginning, she said.

“I’ve learned a lot from her,” Mercer said. “She pursues dreams with dogged perseverance.”