

EGBERT PERRY

By Cindy Morley

EGBERT L. J. PERRY, A NATIVE OF THE CARIBBEAN NATION OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, IS THE CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE INTEGRAL GROUP, A COMPANY HE CO-FOUNDED IN 1993 WITH A MISSION TO "CREATE VALUE IN CITIES AND (RE)BUILD THE FABRIC OF COMMUNITIES." SINCE THEN, THE ATLANTA-BASED INTEGRAL HAS BECOME A PREMIER PROVIDER OF SUSTAINABLE REAL ESTATE AND COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS IN EMERGING MARKETS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND, MORE RECENTLY, INTERNATIONALLY.

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gbert Perry grew up in a mixed income community. Not your typical mixed income community, mind you. Perry grew up in Antigua, where he says the "gap between the haves and have-nots was not as wide as it is here. There was a gap, but we all

lived together as a community. That's why it's easy for me to envision a different way of living."

Community is a concept that Perry held on to. It's one that he brought to Atlanta years after his Antigua childhood days. It's one that became the foundation for the revitalization approach to community development that has been imitated in Atlanta and many other cities across the country. His forward-thinking ideas led to the nation's first urban mixed-use community, integrating mixed-income housing, K-12 education reform, recreation, wellness facilities and human services.

The "Atlanta Model," as it has become known, was the brainchild of Perry's company, Integral. And Integral's mission was first put on display in 1996 when Centennial Place grew out of the revitalization of Techwood Homes in Atlanta (at the time the most violent housing project in America).

"I visited 13 cities up and down the East Coast from January to June of 1993 to see what was happening in revitalization across the country," said Perry. "I soon realized that everyone seemed to believe that if you built a stadium, an arena or a performing arts center in the area, the community would suddenly change and begin to thrive. The theory seemed to be that if you did enough positive, it would outweigh the negatives. No one seemed to be attacking the real problem. And that was the problem of containment. It doesn't work."

But Perry's Atlanta Model did. With the debut of Centennial Place, Perry and his partners become overnight experts in community revitalization.

During our interview, he said Integral is now vertically integrated with subsidiaries in the community development, commercial real estate, investment management, property management and program management fields.

Specifically, Integral is a diversified, 300-person organization with projects in the mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Southwest and Western regions of the

United States. The company is headquartered in Atlanta, with offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas and Denver. And Integral and Perry have received numerous awards and are regarded nationally as innovators in the field of urban development and revitalization.

An honors graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Perry received both Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in Civil Engineering from the University's Towne School, and a Master of Business Administration degree with majors in Finance and Accounting from its Wharton School. In 1990, he was elected as the eleventh graduate in the university's then 250-year history to be named to the "Gallery of Distinguished Engineering Alumni" of its Engineering School.

Friends and colleagues note that is quite an accomplishment for someone who left Antigua in 1970 when he earned a scholarship to complete his final two years of high school in New York. That, he says, was the first of many blessings that have impacted his life.

"I have lived a charmed life," he says. "I have had many blessings in my life and it began with my parents. I was born to great parents in Heaven on Earth. And I had what I considered a rich childhood. I had no idea that we really didn't have much."

Perry says he spends every day working to be "25 percent of the man" his father was. "That's how I measure success," he says.

Perry's main regret is that his father died during Perry's sophomore year in college at the age of 51. Seven years later, his mother died.

While studying at Penn, Perry's life would be impacted in ways he would never imagine. He was assigned a student to mentor during his third year of grad school. He did not know at the time, but his mentee was the daughter of Herman Russell—an entrepreneur and philanthropist who turned a small plastering firm into one of the most successful African-American-owned real estate development and construction companies in America.

"I had no idea she had sent my resume to her father and told him he needed to hire me," says Perry. "He (Herman Russell) called me after my graduation, but I had no interest in coming to Atlanta at the time. I thought Washington D.C. was where I needed to be, so that's where I went."

But that didn't last long. Perry says he soon discovered the "glass ceiling" in D.C. and called Russell.

"He immediately flew me first class to Atlanta, and in January 1980, he hired me," said Perry.

