

MIAMI TODAY

WEEK OF THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019

SERVING SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST IMPORTANT AUDIENCE

Elvis Dumervil sits in his office underneath a large sign designed to look like the railroad property in the Monopoly board game. At the bottom of the sign beneath the image of the iconic Monopoly train, it reads "Keep Pushing."

That saying has been Mr. Dumervil's personal motto from his upbringing in North Miami to a successful career playing 12 seasons as a defensive linebacker in the National Football League (NFL) with the Denver Broncos, Baltimore Ravens and San Francisco 49ers. He signed four multimillion-dollar contracts and credits a lot of his ability to deal well with different kinds of people and situations to his background in sports.

Although he originally wanted to be a CIA agent, Mr. Dumervil has now made a successful transition into the real estate market in Miami with his property management and investment firm, Prestige Estates. Mr. Dumervil is planning to expand by purchasing one to two buildings each year.

Although Mr. Dumervil currently lives in Coral Gables with his wife and children, he grew up in low-income neighborhoods as the youngest of four children of a single mother. He and his family moved around Miami living in various areas, including Liberty City, Little Haiti, North Miami and Opa-locka. His mother and father both emigrated from Haiti to Miami in their early 20s and he still has family there today.

Now, his firm's headquarters is only a few streets over from one of the houses he lived in as a child. He remembers it clearly because the landlord wouldn't fix the air conditioning for three months during the summer, even though his mother worked several jobs to always pay the rent on time.

After experiencing less-than-ideal living conditions as a kid, coming out of the NFL in 2015 and retiring after a successful football career, he decided to focus on buying and renovating apartment complexes in North Miami but keeping them affordable. His focus is not just on making money but on bringing immense

THE ACHIEVER



Elvis Dumervil

Founder
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Age: 34

Born: Miami

Education: Bachelor degree in Justice Administration Degree, University of Louisville, 2006.

Personal Philosophy: "Keep pushing. Be a pro. That goes for anything you do in life. Whatever you do, do it the right way and try to make sure you care about what you do. Your legacy, what you leave behind, only you can create that. Do what you do, the best you can do. No one is perfect."

value, comfortable living and job creation to the neighborhoods that raised him.

His firm recently completed the gutting and renovation of Prestige Waterfront, a two-story multifamily building in North

Miami Beach, and it has another building that's currently under contract.

All told, he has about 25 employees and 588 units between 11 buildings. His firm owns properties in Fort Lauderdale, North Miami and Oakland Park. His goal is to make North Miami into the New North, while keeping it affordable for the people who have lived there for generations.

His sales center is busy on the day of the interview, filled with both employees and clients looking to sign leases. Mr. Dumervil modernized his systems to make everything as easy as possible for both tenants and employees.

"We rebooted our whole branding, marketing, everything. We're just trying to scale off our social media and attract the Millennials and just make things more efficient," Mr. Dumervil said. "As you can see, there's a lot of traffic here. We try to keep things as seamless as possible, and that way we can focus on work. We have portals online where you can email us work orders to make everybody's job a little more efficient."

Mr. Dumervil spoke with Miami Today reporter Katherine Lewin in his office.

Q: What do you miss the most about playing football?

A: I would say the crowd. You know there's nothing like playing in front of 80,000 [people] and they're just screaming and you're going to war with your guys that you worked all season with and you put in all that dedication and hard work and to lay it all out each Sunday. There's nothing like that. We work so hard and then we get one game to showcase all the hard work we put in and after that game it doesn't matter anymore; now you're on to the next one. Football taught me every day is a new day."

Q: How did you transition from football to real estate and why?

A: As a kid, I always enjoyed playing Monopoly. I used to sell candy for the church I attended as a kid. We had to go to downtown Miami and catch the bus and I had to be able to deal with people and promote what I was doing.

After a football career, Elvis Dumervil returns to establish...

I think I learned a tremendous amount of those tangibles as a child. I just so happened to be athletic enough to play sports, so that happened to work out. And there was one year in Baltimore and I got injured and I was asking myself, what am I going to do, being blessed with the money?

I had a successful career in 2014 so it was like, what do I want to do? I wanted to do something I enjoy and also something to give back and it dawned on me to go back to my backyard and try to expose to a lot of the people who didn't have the opportunity I had to do something nice to things they may not realize exist.

So I figured it was an opportunity and I came to North Miami and I saw a tremendous amount of inventory that was... I won't call it slumlord... but it was not to the level that I felt people deserved. And so that's when you can make an honest living, you can create jobs and you can make comfortable living and give back and it all just made sense to me.

Q: What was your first purchase in real estate?

A: My first purchase was a 37-unit [building] in Fort Lauderdale. That's really not my backyard but it was a great opportunity where the price made sense. So it was like a test run for me and it definitely was a test. It didn't go as smooth as I wanted it to go but it was a lot that I learned so it wasn't a loss.

So I learned from that and I was able to make it productive. From there I was able to learn how to deal with tenants and how you have to set up a team and you have to have a vision, you have to have a plan in place.

It's just not like Monopoly, where you just collect rent and go around Go. I was able to have the opportunity where someone was selling five buildings, almost 233 units in



Elvis Dumervil uses the lessons he learned playing both professional football and Monopoly as he builds Prestige Estates operations at its North Miami headquarters. Photo by Cristina Sullivan

North Miami. You don't have that opportunity often in real estate. People either get 50 units in one building, but to have 200-some units in different locations, great locations.

This office we're sitting in now was not an office. It was a storage room. I had a vision where we could turn this into an office where this is our main hub and just buy around the main hub to where we could leverage the cost of employees having to drive all the way to each building and we can just come here. It just made sense.

We started hiring the right people. We call them the Prestige people: people who get people first, and that is how we all started. We have a few people who work for us who live in our buildings and it's a lot of locals.

A lot of the guys who work for us, as far as landscaping, painters, they're locals. This is who we're able to give the jobs to.

When I first got to North Miami, North Miami was considered... 'You sure you want to invest in that area?' And now we have a slogan where it's the New North. We have something to where people are going to understand, things of the old are gone. This is the New North. This is the new way of living, it's comfortable, it's affordable and it's luxury

altogether.

Q: When you were buying your first property, did you have a mentor or another athlete who did something similar before you? Did you have anybody guiding you?

A: Truth be told, I had to learn about financing. I went to almost eight different banks. The first bank said, "Mr. Dumervil, you have cash but unfortunately you don't have the experience for us to invest with you or the credit."

So I started to build my credit. It's not that I had bad credit; I just never had anything that I had credit on. I just had everything paid for. That's when I started getting an American Express card to start building my credit and not buying everything cash.

Then I went to the next bank. I took my notes down and I went to the third bank. By the time I got to the eighth bank I understood exactly what they were looking for. I was able to purchase my first building and I had a broker involved. Once I learned I don't need a broker, I was able to move that guy out of the way.

It was a process. Google, I admit, it was something I studied every night. I talked to my wife about it. She was a person I talked to all the time about it until I understood it and I had a good relationship

with a lender that introduced me to a couple guys who actually owned buildings, a guy named Michael Gordon, and I saw how he was doing things and from there I made my own tweak and from there it started to flourish.

Q: Emotionally and mentally, what was it like to be able to come back here and to make better housing and a better living where you grew up?

A: I remember as a kid, in the summer, my mom worked two to three jobs and she paid her rent on time. We had a landlord who wouldn't fix our A/C in the summer. I remember going three months in the summer just hot. It was ridiculous. I couldn't understand the fact that somebody who's working two to three jobs and paying rent on time and you have no sympathy of trying to make sure they have A/C.

For that reason, whenever we buy buildings, the first things we do is install new A/C. We install new windows, we refresh the property. That's just customer service. I think that's what's deserved.

That's why we do the renovations we do. We want to make sure that people are comfortable. Emotionally for me, it was more sensitive to see folks paying their rents and not being treated accordingly.

It's bigger than having a nice building. It's a way of giving back to people who work so hard for what they want. We are able to give them something nicer that you don't have to go downtown, Brickell for. You don't have to go to Sunny Isles. You don't have to go to Aventura. You can come to North Miami and it's reasonable and comfortable living.

Q: Do you have a median rent for the buildings here in North Miami? What's your typical rent for an apartment?

A: A one-bedroom starts at \$1,200 and it goes to \$1,350. So depending on your criteria,

...growing rental realty operation in areas where he grew up

what you expect, what you want to pay for. We have those options. For two bedrooms we started at \$1,450 and they go to \$1,675. So it all depends on the appetite of the residents and what their desires are.

We also have a new building that's more luxurious; it's brand new everything. Those have washers and dryers inside the units and we have three-tvos for larger families. It has a fitness center.

Each building we have is unique. Some have a pool but most of them don't. When you come to the sales center, we can show you everything that we have. We now have it online as well where you can see what best fits you so that way we can accommodate you for what you want to pay.

All of our properties are in North Miami or North Miami Beach. Waterfront is in North Miami; it's 51 units, it's right off of Memorial Highway on the water. It's a really nice building.

Q: Are you planning on purchasing anything more in 2019?

A: We're under contract on a 90-some unit building. It's close to North Miami downtown. It's a really unique building. We're excited for it.

Our goal is to try to buy one to two buildings a year so we continue to expand. As long as we're being productive and expanding – we're at 97% occupancy right now – the opportunity of growing is always possible.

We believe in growing the company and having people who work for us grow with us as well. We have a team atmosphere. Everybody has to do their job. Everybody is no bigger than the logo and we all have a selfless type of attitude and as long as we all do our jobs, everybody will grow within the company.

Q: When you were first starting out in real estate, did

you have any "failures"?

A: I don't want to use the word failure. I had a few lessons.

It's only a loss if you don't learn from it. That's my mindset. You're always going to have issues or difficulties, and that's why the first thing we did is we hired the right people. We had the right people and if you hire people to do their jobs it helps minimize the headaches.

We stay away from negligence. We don't fall into negligence, and if everybody stays on top of their thing and is proactive, it gives us a strong chance. Most importantly, no matter what happens, we're going to keep pushing. Because everything we do we're going to keep pushing to the maximum.

In property management, there's always something. People move out and come back and destroy the building, so we had to get a security team to make sure the new building we just acquired [is safe]. We're bringing new people in and they're feeling safe. We have to have cameras, we have to have lighting. We do things to make sure we make it fair for all the new folks who come into our community so they feel safe and like we care about them staying.

Q: You're a Miami native. Can you tell me a little bit about what your childhood was like here and where you grew up?

A: It was great, it was different. We moved around a lot. My mom came from Haiti when she was 21 years old. She was a single mom and she worked hard. A lot of my fundamentals come from her.

As I came to middle school, we met a gentleman from our church that was in the military. His name was Frank. He was my father figure. I called him dad to this day and he helped teach me consistency of every day being professional; you got

to wake up and do something. Between my mom and Frank, it was great.

Even though my father left us when I was 3 years old, I still felt I had good guidance. And obviously, coaches, playing sports, I was able to learn. I think playing sports taught me how to deal with teammates and differences and how to deal with people. So it was different but it was I wouldn't change it.

Q: What was what was your favorite part about your childhood growing up here?

A: Being with my brothers; competing. I loved the weather always as a kid. I didn't realize it until I went to Louisville, to school, and I got drafted to Denver and I realized Miami was pretty awesome. A lot of my teammates always wanted to come back to Miami and I realized then Miami was a unique place. Miami has always been great for me. It's a melting pot of different languages. It equips you for the real world.

Q: As a kid, what did you want to do as a job? Would you ever have imagined yourself owning this much property?

A: I had brothers ahead of me that were very successful in sports. For a time I wanted to be a CIA agent. I failed the application to be a CIA agent and I didn't know what I was going to do and football ended up working out. From there, football took off.

The real estate part of it was always intriguing. I always enjoyed playing Monopoly and to be able to make it into real life. It's a huge responsibility. But at the same time it's an honor to be able to provide homes and a community with something that you actually care about.

Q: What do you consider your greatest achievement?

A: Being a father. I have two beautiful kids, my son, my daughter; a gorgeous wife who's tremendous. So just family. My mom and my

brothers. Doing something bigger than myself.

I keep pushing every day; I never really reflect on things that I have done in the past. I think every day is a new day. As long as you have that mindset, it keeps you from being complacent.

Q: What advice would you give to others, such as other athletes, who have this money that they might want to spend in real estate? What advice would you give to others in your situation?

A: Save. When you get drafted, you're young and you don't really understand until you get more mature and older. I learned that from my mom. She taught me how to save. I'm just fortunate I listened to her.

Typically, listen to your parents; they want the best for you. Start with your family and then from there once you become a man and you have to make decisions, I would say just take your time, be patient and once you're mature...

My mom always taught me every seven years a person gets more mature and thinks differently. So you're 21 you typically get drafted. By the time you're 28, that's when you really understand what you want to do in life. If you can wait until you're 28 before you make any drastic decisions that might give you a better chance.

Q: Could you touch on the work that you did in Haiti after the earthquake?

A: It was awesome because a lot of homes there were supposed to be temporary to where it was six months and it went to almost six years. We were able to provide homes after natural disasters, earthquakes and hurricanes. We built 58 homes. That was my jersey number in the NFL.

Those homes are still standing tall. We partnered up with New Story. Those guys did a great job and have a great vision.