



# A Journey From Finance to Real Estate, and Helping Communities That Need It

By Devin Meenan

**L**aMarcus Thurman, vice president of community lending at Howard Hanna Real Estate Services and co-founder of the company's lending division United Purpose Mortgage, is making an impact as both a professional and an activist. A member of numerous nonprofit boards, Thurman's efforts toward expanding homeownership earned him a spot as a 2024 RISMedia Newsmaker in the Crusaders category.

Here, Thurman—a banking sector veteran—talks about his shift into real estate, his collaborations at Howard Hanna and how he continues to help fulfill more homeownership dreams in his adopted community of Pittsburgh.

**Devin Meenan: What does it mean to be named an RISMedia 2024 Real Estate Newsmaker in the Crusaders category?**

**LaMarcus Thurman:** It's an honor. What it means to me is really just so-

lidifying all the work that we're doing in the communities we're serving. It's a great accomplishment. I'm looking forward to spending some time this September [at the Annual Newsmakers Reception & Dinner during RISMedia's CEO & Leadership Exchange], seeing all the ins and outs of the awards program, and exploring others who are impacting this industry as well.

**DM: Tell us about your role in launching United Purpose.**

**LT:** My background consists of 20-plus years in the banking industry. My last role was as a CRA officer for the Community Reinvestment Act, so for the bank, I focused on three pillars: investment needs, volunteer opportunity and monetary instruments that we can use to help in some of the underserved communities. I have a passion for helping people, and I got tapped on the shoulder about this opportunity under Howard Hanna Mortgage Services to lead their community lending division. It was a natural fit for me because of their commitment to the communities I already worked with, and the chance to make a difference and leave a legacy to say, "Hey, homeownership is possible here under the Howard Hanna umbrella."

Not only are we supporting the loan officers and roughly 15,000 agents underneath the Howard Hanna umbrella, but we're also supporting the agents who are doing good work in underserved communities.

**DM: Are there any specific programs or anecdotes you can share related to how the company has been able to help underserved communities?**

**LT:** One pillar that sets us apart from anyone in the industry is our free consultation. If you want to learn more about the industry and what steps to take on that homeownership journey, most of the time professionals will say, "Let's pull your credit and then let's talk." If the consumer's credit isn't where it should be based on their guidelines, they may or may not have a conversation.

You have the ability to go on our website to schedule a 30-minute consultation with anyone on our team without pulling any credit. It's a live website that plugs right into our calendar, gives a date and time, and sends them a link for a Zoom call.

We want to hear what their pain points are as well as the struggles they've been facing. Sometimes, they simply want to know what we offer. They have 30 minutes of undivided attention to educate themselves a little bit more so that they can be empowered to take the right steps. I haven't really seen in the industry where someone has that capability unless they pull credit or take an application.

**DM: How does your nonprofit work relate to and intersect with your work with United Purpose?**

**LT:** I'm currently on six boards. I started the boardmanship in my banking career about 15 years ago. I'm originally from Louisiana, but I've been in Pittsburgh for a very long time, so this was a way for me to give back. How that impacted my current role,

whether that was in the banking institution or currently with Howard Hanna, is by being a commitment for me to say I've been around, this is doing my part to make sure I give back. The National Association of Real Estate Brokers opened a local chapter here in Pittsburgh, and I serve as the treasurer for that organization, to help the Black and Brown communities in the mortgage industry. It's a dotted line to my passion and my heart for giving back to the community.

**"The market we're serving is all about affordability. Not just to get in the house, but to stay in the house."**

**-LAMARCUS THURMAN,**  
Vice President of Community Lending,  
United Purpose Mortgage

**DM: In what ways is Howard Hanna unique compared to other companies you've worked at before?**

**LT:** First of all, it's a family-owned business. Most organizations I worked with were corporate, so as you can imagine, in a corporate channel, there's a lot of red tape. Here, things get done quicker, decisions are made faster, and the entrepreneur side of the Howard Hanna family is very prevalent. They're willing to try anything that makes sense. You can't really do that in a corporate world unless it's how it impacts the bottom line. So their entrepreneurial spirit has been really strong, and that's what helped birth what we're doing now.

Keep in mind that this is a division. When you look at other independent mortgage bankers in this space, they might have loan officers who focus on this, but they don't have an actual

division. That alone showcases the entrepreneurial spirit and power that Howard Hanna is willing to take to make sure they help everyone.

**DM: As someone who works in the mortgage arena, what advice do you have for those who are concerned about today's mortgage rates?**

**LT:** When you look at today's rates, they're pretty much the same as before the pandemic. I think a lot of people are hoping and wishing they'll go back to the threes again, but I always tell my team, if we go back to three, there's a bigger impact that's occurring in society that caused that. So, if you find your dream home, why wait? I would say move forward because, at the end of the day, you don't know if the house is going to be on the market in two, three or six months. If you have the means and the ability, and you can afford it, pull the trigger today. If you don't, someone else is going to seize that opportunity. The market we're serving is all about affordability. Not just to get in the house, but to stay in the house. **RE**

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