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BUSINESS COURIER

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Cincinnati developer Model Group hires project inclusion director

Business Courier of Cincinnati - by [Lucy May](#) Senior Staff Reporter

The commercial development firm **Model Group** has hired local minority business owner Michael Connelly as director of economic inclusion.

Such a position is unusual for a company the size of Model Group, which completed about \$30 million in projects in 2009. That was far below the \$84 million in projects completed by **Duke Realty Corp.** in 2008 or the \$79 million by **Al Never Inc.** that year, according to Business Courier research.

"It shows you can make money and also do the right thing in business," Connelly said.

Unlike those larger firms, however, Walnut Hills-based Model Group focuses on what it calls "transformative" urban property development with an emphasis on affordable housing. And that mission makes it all the more important for the company to emphasize economic inclusion to have a meaningful impact on the neighborhoods it serves, said Toby Asbury, the company's president.

Model Group's current projects include several senior housing developments, including a project in Madisonville and some senior apartments in Over-the-Rhine.

"Mike's role here is to make sure we have maximum impact with our dollars in these neighborhoods," Asbury said.

Connelly remains an owner of the Fortress document management company, although he won't be involved in day-to-day operations there. He also is board chairman of the **African American Chamber of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky**.

In his new role, Connelly will help Model Group set supplier diversity goals on its development projects. He'll also help increase the company's minority work force by finding neighborhood residents who can help with property management.

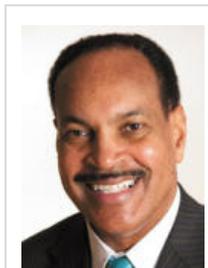
African American Chamber CEO Sean Rugless applauded Model Group for being so actively engaged.

"We hope they're pioneers here," he said.

Crystal German, the **Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber**'s vice president for economic inclusion, said the new position underscores the idea that economic inclusion is good for business.

"Anytime a firm decides to make economic inclusion a priority and sink resources into it," she said, "they're valuing diversity."

Model Group declined to release revenue figures, although Asbury said sales have grown 30 percent in the past year. It recently announced its merger with **CFS Construction**.



Michael Connelly

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