

JMU alumni duo flips houses, reaps rewards

HGTV show features partners' sweat equity and expertise BY JEFFREY CRETZ ('03)

If you looked up the word "entrepreneur" in the dictionary and photos were included, you might see the faces of **David Maier ('91)** and **Jeff Leighton ('09)**. Long before Bravo TV's *Flipping Out* series became a popular household name, Maier was finding homes, fixing them up and selling them at a profit.

Maier made a decent profit on the very first house he flipped. "I enjoyed putting my mark on it," he recalls. "I liked the work and put my own sweat equity into the house." Although it is more common to hear about houses "being flipped," Maier and Leighton also sometimes use the term "rehab" to describe their process.

Maier was featured on a July 17 episode of HGTV's *My First Place*. "The buyer for one of my properties was scheduled to be on HGTV and worked with several agents before choosing me," says Maier. "Now I have a relationship with the HGTV producers, and they regularly contact me for future episodes."

Leighton is not as experienced in the business, but according to his more experienced JMU alum partner, "His enthusiasm and passion are second-to-none." Maier began looking for a partner/right-hand assistant in February 2010. He placed a classified ad on Craigslist and began reviewing and interviewing candidates. The JMU link and similar career goals were principal reasons Maier hired Leighton. "Jeff is fascinated by architecture and running a business," says Maier. "When you flip a house, you can design your own vision while still making a profit. It's the best of both worlds."

Both alums agree that their particular line of work comes with some fantastic benefits. Maier loved building a business and a vision from the ground up. "Being able to set my own schedule and working in a team atmosphere is great," he says. Leighton says they each work around 50 hours a week,

but he stresses, "Each week is different. Sometimes we go to mega mansions and ultra-luxurious townhomes that have great panoramic views of the D.C. area. It gives me the inspiration to keep working hard and doing what I love."

Maier and Leighton have fond memories of their Madison

Experiences. Maier remembers the great friendships he formed, and he is still in contact with many of his JMU friends. Leighton, a political science major, remembers a particular evening after he first arrived at JMU as a transfer student. "My roommate and I climbed onto the roof of our townhouse and watched the sunset over the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was about 75 degrees with a nice breeze. I thought this place was a paradise." Leighton's younger brother, Matthew, is also a Duke and is currently "having a great time at Madison."

Maier's philosophy and psychology double majors have come in handy. "Knowledge of psychology is great for the real estate business. We're creating houses that people fall in love with," he explains. "Dealing with buyers, sellers, investors and contractors requires a lot of understanding about how people work."

Fortunately, the economic downturns that have affected much of the country have not slowed the work pace for Maier or Leighton. Maier explains, "I've been focused

on growing my business and working with bank-owned foreclosures." Both grads are excited for what the future has in store. They are established in the Northern Virginia area and are looking to increase their presence in the Maryland and District of Columbia markets. Leighton says, "We're also hoping to expand our operations into the realm of commercial real estate." ❏

* Learn more at www.Davidsellsproperties.com or www.hgtv.com/my-first-place/show/index.html.



Real estate entrepreneurs David Maier ('91) and Jeff Leighton ('09) buy, fix up and sell "rehab" real estate projects and have been featured on HGTV's *My First Place*.