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Movers & Shakers

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Get to Know Unicorp's Lee Maher and Chuck Whittall

Unicorp National Developments, Inc., is one of the fastest-growing retail, residential and resort developers in the country. Headquartered in Orlando, Unicorp's mixed-use village centers and master-planned communities continue to set the bar. Headed by two visionaries, Lee Maher and Chuck Whittall. Unicorp continues to make the American dream a reality. Case in point, Unicorp's project at Baldwin Park in Orlando, which includes 177 apartment homes atop 212,000 square feet of commercial space. With such highly sought-after tenants like Publix, AmSouth, and Sun Trust, Baldwin Park is an example of Unicorp's forward-thinking in planning grand-scale developments that enhance and benefit the surrounding communities.

Partners Lee Maher and Chuck Whittall are very busy guys. But both of them instantly channeled a warm energy and familiarity that made me sit back. This was going to be fun. Maher's laugh seems bigger than life. He's swift. Shrewd. Funny. And Whittall keeps up with him all the way. The partnership epitomizes the fantasy of making it big, becoming major players in their field, but remaining unchanged. What makes Unicorp an original in a business full of clones is that Whittall and Maher are guys like us.

Whittall, a general contractor and broker for twenty years, formed the company with Maher ten years ago. "Lee and I met at a Morton's Steakhouse, and decided to do a few projects together," said Whittall. Those "few projects" quickly spawned one of the most dynamic partnerships in the industry, with over 50 projects in development at present. "What I love most is building architectural monuments," said Whittall. "I enjoy being instrumental in the development of the way people live their lives." Both Whittall and Maher share the same vision. "The key to our success is hard work and that we're always trying to set the bar a little higher," said Whittall.

With over twenty-seven years experience in real estate development and commercial construction, Maher holds a BA in Architectural Engineering from Florida State and an MBA in Real Estate and Development from Nova Southeastern University. But he agrees with Whittall that the secret of success is good friends and hard work. "It's important to be in the right place at the right time," said Maher with a laugh. "But you've got to work sixty hours a week in order to be in the right places at the right times!" What he loves most is seeing the "before and after" transformations of his art. "It's like Extreme Makeover for real estate!"

Maher and Whittall bring their love of life into every project. "We're doing a golf course

project in North Augusta, South Carolina," said Maher. "And the fun part of this job is that we got to golf Augusta National, *twice*. Nobody can get on that course! It's almost impossible!" Maher lives at Bay Hill with his wife of twenty-five years, Mary, his son, Blake, 16, and his daughter Brooke, 12. "Mary's wonderful," said Maher, "She puts up with me. And I love the camaraderie of all the players at Bay Hill, the 'Shoot-Out Group'!" The highlight of Maher's life has been traveling with his family through Europe. "I do love America, but over there, they live life like it's an art. They know when to work, and more importantly when to rest."

But both Whittall and Maher admit there's trade-offs for success, like long hours away from their families. Whittall has been married for eighteen years to Ronna, and they have a 4 year-old daughter, Riley. "I do whatever I have to do so my family can live a nice life together," said Whittall, explaining why Unicorp works. "The goal of Lee and I has always been to achieve excellence. It's that simple. But that goal brings many challenges and we work very hard. So when we play, we play hard." Maher agreed, "I could never have done it without Chuck, though he's not nearly as fun or as handsome as I am!" It was apparent to me that the true success of Unicorp has really been this truly successful partnership. "Lee's just lucky he hooked up with me!" added Whittall.

Their pride in their latest projects is pure. One is a billion-dollar project in Richmond, Virginia, called West Broad Village, which contains one thousand residential units, 500,000 feet of office space, two hotels, and 480,000 feet of retail. Unicorp also bought the property formerly known as Mercado on International Drive in Orlando. "We're building a new condo/hotel/retail project there that will be a landmark... trust me," said Maher. Whittall and Maher are also excited about another Unicorp project in Orlando, The Dellagio off Sand Lake Road. "It's big stuff... handsome big," Maher laughed.

Luxury Homes and Estates magazine is proud to showcase Unicorp's Chuck Whittall and Lee Maher as this month's *Movers & Shakers*. Their visions are an assurance of the good life and that it works. For more information about Unicorp National Developments Inc., they invite you to visit their website at <http://www.unicorpdevelopment.com>.

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