

Investing in the Future

BY SARAH LEVY



When asked to bring a prop for his portrait, Andre Hammel (2L) didn't bring a little token to represent himself. He brought a construction truck ... a real, two-ton Dumpster-hauling truck.

This is typical of Hammel, whose ingenuity has helped him succeed as an entrepreneur and accomplish plenty in his 24 years. Not only does he own his own real estate investment company and waste-management company, he also is a second-year law student.

After graduating from Florida A&M University in 2003, Hammel, who was student body president at FAMU, deferred his acceptance to UF Law and worked for the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and Gov. Jeb Bush's office for the next two years. To earn money, he also took a job as a hotel bellman.

"I would work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Capital, and then from 5 p.m. to midnight, I would work as a bellman at the Doubletree Hotel," he said. "My friends from college would ask me, 'Andre, what are you doing working as a bellboy?'"

But Hammel, who is 6 feet 5 inches tall, had a plan. He saved his money to start a real estate investment company, Hammel Solomon Tyler Holdings Property. The company invests in urban communities and troubled neighborhoods where housing is typically in disrepair. Hammel bought his first property in the fall of 2004, and has since acquired nine other units in Tallahassee, Gainesville and Atlanta.

"Most landlords don't care about these places or take care of them," he said in a deep voice that is surprisingly soft-spoken. "We do."

According to American Bar Association standards, law students are not allowed to have jobs as first-year law students, so Hammel hired property managers to take care of his investments when he began law school last fall. With business obligations looked after, he decided to do something for the Gainesville community. He started the Caring and Sharing Mentoring Project, which in its first year paired 70 law students with elementary school students.

Hammel's peers took notice of his dedication, as well as his humility, in his first year as a law student and selected him as one of three Students of the Year. Most students are chosen in their third-year as law students. Hammel believes anyone who had created that type of program would have received the award.

"It's humbling and scary," Hammel said of his award. "Some of these students are on a supe-

rior level academically, and I'm just average. It is empowering when people say they see these good things in me, but I'm not sure if I see them in myself."

What Hammel doesn't have is a plan to slow down. This past summer he expanded his business to include a waste-management company, EAT Waste and Hauling,

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which he started after realizing it would be more cost efficient to own his own Dumpsters for use during property renovation rather than renting them. As a second-year law student he is allowed to work up to 20 hours per week, but he hopes to hire a secretary using money from grants so he can better balance school and work.

After law school, Hammel hopes to grow his business and increase his public service using whatever platform is available. He believes UF Law has helped him develop as a person and as a student, and brought him closer to reaching his goals.

"My whole thought process has been enhanced and developed at UF Law," Hammel said. "I've learned so much from my professors and my peers. It's a training ground and a great place for a legal education."

