



# Interview with Howard Ramin, Houston Developer



Jim Tates, Howard Ramin & Mayor Parker



**REDNews:** Good morning, Howard: To those of us with 'grey hair', you are an icon in commercial real estate in Houston. Can you share-for the benefit of newcomers to the CRE game-a summary of your career, including your educational background and how you first got started in real estate?

**Howard Ramin:** I attended high school at Deerfield in Connecticut and Kinkaid in Houston, and University of North Carolina and SMU. Starting at nine years old I had part time summer jobs ranging from paper boy, golf caddy, grocery clerk, truck mechanic assistant, bank clerk, YMCA coach, and work at a CPA firm.

In my first job out of college my firm was suddenly sold and I found myself out of work, married with a child. I had a friend who developed apartments, so I thought I could do it, too, so I got investors and bought an apartment project. Then I developed a Howard Johnson motel on the Gulf Freeway, and later a Hilton on Dairy Ashford and I-10.

Soon after buying the apartment project, I met Dan Moody, Jr., and we developed some zero lot line patio homes on Woodway. Dan had an established real estate brokerage firm, but we decided home building was not for us, so we developed some low rise residential-feel office buildings on Richmond Ave. between those of Gerald Hines and Ken Schnitzer (Greenway Plaza).

Dan and I evolved with our company, Moody Ramin, into providing commercial real estate services for third parties, such as owner and tenant rep in leasing, management, and investments. One deal I especially remember is representing Shell Oil on a lease for over one million SF.

**RN:** How was the Houston real estate scene different then from how it is now?

**HR:** In 1969 there was a "frontier" mentality. Houston was booming and there were huge tax benefits then from making investments in real estate. Wealthy people were seeking to place their money to create shelter for their ordinary income. This combination gave lots of opportunities to young entrepreneurs. The 1970s were a boom time just like the 'dot com boom' and oil & gas booms, but like all booms, it was followed by a bust in the 1980s created by oversupply and sudden and retroactive tax law changes. Today the market has matured overall into more institutional ownership.

**RN:** What about financing and governmental regulation back then?

**HR:** Financing has gone from smaller entrepreneurs seeking loans to bigger credit players. Today's regulatory environment can create an incredible burden, whereas back then it was virtually nil.

**RN:** How long have you been with Moody Ramin?

**HR:** I have been a major partner with Dan for 49 years now, although there are now some smaller partners with us in the firm. We have had institutional partners over the years who supplied capital for our deals. My partner Dan and his family developed Town & Country Village re-do, razing the indoor mall and creating the "village" type shopping which is there today. I did not participate in the ownership although Moody Ramin leases and manages this successful project.

**RN:** What do you think are your personal core strengths, Howard?

**HR:** Adaptability, or the ability to work on a variety of projects; team work, learned through participation in sports; and education in finance and accounting through my early association with a CPA firm. I have always believed in 'giving back' to the community, and in 1979 I founded an organization called Keep Houston Beautiful, which exists to this day. I noticed litter shredded by TXDOT mowing along the service road of Loop 610 while showing an international investor our area, and he commented on the trashy appearance as well. This non-profit organization now specializes in anti-litter, beautification, and recycling and has had over 320,000 volunteers on various projects over the years.

**RN:** Howard, since you became semi-retired, you seem to be busier than ever. Tell our readers what you are doing now that is so fulfilling to you?

**HR:** I am providing coaching services to business execs, recent college grads, prison inmates, and addicts. I decided I could help others by sharing my life and business experience through mentoring and coaching [www.jhr-coaching-confidant.com](http://www.jhr-coaching-confidant.com) I charge for business owners but not for recent college grads, addicts, and current and former prisoners. I do not know of a specific program for mentoring CRE people. Most of this type of learning is done through internships at CRE firms (shadowing older brokers), and informal mentoring from friends in the industry.