

# Blending work to help Boston's inner city

By Keith Regan | Special to the Journal

Imari Paris Jeffries always wants to take his work home with him.

The Gulf War veteran, who in January joined Boston Rising as partner for community co-investment — his fourth nonprofit startup in the city — always strives to blend his work helping Boston's inner-city communities and his role as a father to three.

Jeffries joined forces with Boston Rising CEO Tiziana Dearing after growing Friends of the Children-Boston — which connected young people with mentors who committed to staying with them through all 12 years of schooling — to an organization of 31 employees from 3.

It was after a successful Friends staff meeting that he realized it was time to seek a new challenge.

"I told my wife how great the meeting was, how we'd raised the most money ever in October and how we were firing on all cylinders," Jeffries recalled. "She said, 'You know what you have to do.' It was a light-bulb moment for me. I never thought of leaving an organization at the top. But I see it was exactly the right time."

## What are your top three goals for the year?

First and foremost, it's to support the efforts of Boston Rising as two things are happening. First, we're building an organization from protocols and financial systems to culture and climates. At the same time, we're building on the unique mission of using engagement and investment to create a culture of prosperity and break the cycle of poverty in the inner city. It's not a new war, but how we engage the community is different. The third and equally important goal for me is maintaining and marbling this work-life balance.

## What are your guiding principles for good management?

I think a lot came from my background in the military, but I believe an organization can only be as effective as its people. You need to have the right people on the bus and create a culture where people feel valued. You spend a lot of daylight hours with your co-workers, so there needs to be an environment where people feel cared about and know their opinions are respected.

## What is the best business decision you made?

Leaving an organization on top. We don't want to give up things that are familiar to us. But in five months since leaving Friends and being here at Boston Rising,

## IMARI PARIS JEFFRIES



**Title:** Partner for community co-investment, Boston Rising

**Age:** 38

**Hometown:** Roslindale

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in history/Africana studies 1997; master's in education, 1999; master's in American Studies, 2003; all from University of Massachusetts at Boston

I have felt myself growing and stretching from being put in a new situation.

## What is the toughest business decision you've made?

Personally, my wife and I used to own a yoga studio. We grew it to 11 employees and it was thriving but also consuming a lot of our time and energy. We had to ask ourselves whether our mission was to operate the studio or to bring this resource to the community. We decided it was the latter and we decided to walk away and trust others to take it to the next level. It's still thriving today.

For more with Imari Paris Jeffries  
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