

# NYC's New W

These five New Yorkers are the Doogie Howsers of their respective fields. Even though they're 26 or younger, they are making serious waves—and the big bucks to go along with it. By Kate Torgovnick

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY LIEBMAN

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# underkinds

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### The Hollywood whiz kid

Liz Meriwether is a 26-year-old screenwriter working on two movies and a TV show to be directed by Kevin Smith.

At the moment, Liz Meriwether is sitting in her apartment, twiddling her thumbs. But when the writers' strike is over, she'll be a very busy girl. Liz is creating a sitcom for Fox Television called *Uncle Artie*, a dark comedy about a schlub who finds himself raising a kid. If the show gets picked up, she'll be one of the youngest head writers in television history.

Her chances look good, too, as some serious heavy hitters are getting excited about *Uncle Artie*. Cult hero Kevin Smith has signed on to direct, a turn of events Liz describes as "surreal. I grew up in Michigan and my parents were careful about which movies I watched. I remember seeing *Clerks* at a friend's house. It blew my mind. Kevin's humor always pushes the envelope, but without being alienating."

Liz first caught Fox's attention

in 2006 when one of her plays was produced by a theater company the network had a relationship with. Fox offered her a deal to write a comedy pilot, and set her up with a mentor, producer Dawn Parouse.

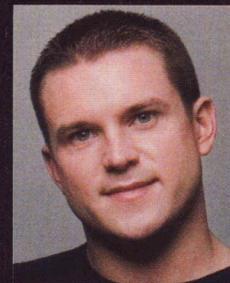
"Dawn asked me to type up ideas, and I wrote all these pages of really fleshed-out concepts," Liz says. "Soon, I was brain-dead and listed, '1. *Grey's Anatomy* with nuns. 2. *Sluts*—hot sluts in New York.' The next day Dawn's assistant called and said, 'We're moving ahead with *Sluts*.' I was surprised, but Dawn pointed out that in every show idea I had written down, there was at least one slutty character. It turned out to be the show I wanted to write. In a focus group, one woman described the show as a stoner *Sex and the City*."

Liz flew out to Los Angeles to produce the *Sluts* pilot last February. "All of a sudden, I was in a golf cart driving across the Fox lot, past the soundstages for *How I Met Your Mother* and *Bones*," she says. Unfortunately, *Sluts* didn't get picked up by the network, but it ultimately led to *Uncle Artie* as well as a couple of movie deals. Liz

**"It's more money than I ever thought I could make writing. I'm set for a long time."**

has been commissioned to write an adaptation of *Maynard and Jennica*, the critically beloved debut novel by Rudolph Delson, for Miramax with Scott Rudin Productions. She's also penning the screenplay of a twisted romantic comedy called *Friends with Benefits*, for DreamWorks and Montecito Pictures.

So how do these projects line the pockets? Liz made \$35,000 for *Sluts* and significantly more for *Uncle Artie*. Plus, for each screenplay, she earns in the \$80K-to-\$100K range, with bonuses if the films actually get made. "It's more money than I ever thought I could make writing," she says. "I can't buy a plane, but I'm set for a long while, even if I splurge on cab rides all the time."



### The breakout business star

Michael Kopko is the 23-year-old founder and CEO of DormAid, a \$3 million

company that provides cleaning services for college students.

Back in 2003, Harvard freshman Michael Kopko wanted a clean living environment, but couldn't find time to do the scrubbing himself—so he hired a maid to clean his dorm room every week. Turns out he wasn't the only one missing the comforts of home. "Half of my building was like, 'Can you hook me up with that? I'll pay you,'" he remembers. It made him think: Why not start a company to help students with mundane tasks? And so DormAid was born—and within a few months, he'd made about \$4,000 in sales.

But it wasn't until *The Harvard Crimson* ran an editorial about the company in 2005 that things really started happening. "They said it's a service that divides classes into the haves and the have-nots," says Michael. "At the time, I was upset. But looking back, the *Crimson* did so much for me I should send a commission check." After the story got picked up by the Associated Press, a media whirlwind ensued. Michael appeared on *The Daily Show* and *Fox News*, and was quoted in *The New York Times* and on CNN.

DormAid is now valued at about \$3 million, and is available on more than 20 college campuses. Their bread and butter is everyday services—cleaning, laundry, water delivery—but Michael has expansion plans of branching out into student lending and scholarship aid. Meanwhile, he doesn't let the fact that he's a student at Columbia Business School get in his way. "Everything I'm learning applies to what I'm doing," he says. "Last semester I used my homework in accounting class to build an acquisition offer I just made."



### The property prodigy

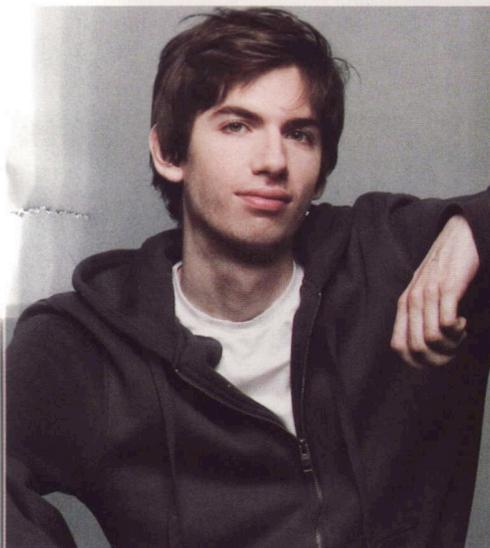
**Caroline Bass, 24, has been a real estate broker for less than two years—in 2007, she nabbed a Rookie of the Year Award and pulled in \$130,000 in commissions.**

Caroline Bass never imagined going into real estate. She studied art history and photography at the University of Connecticut, and pictured herself working in a gallery after graduating in 2004. But a few months spent assisting a

sculptor in Connecticut convinced Caroline the art world wasn't for her. One day, on a whim, she says, "I woke up and decided I wanted to sell real estate in New York. I'm from a cow town, so my parents were like, 'Are you kidding?'"

The gamble paid off. After passing her real estate exams, Caroline landed a job at megabrokerage Citi Habitats in 2006. Her first few months were slow, but Caroline has found her niche in the real estate world—she tends to work with people in their 20s and early 30s, the kind Realtors rarely take seriously. "No one wants a Realtor who thinks, 'Oh, they're just kids,'" she says. "Many of my clients have turned into friends and they send a lot of referrals my way." In 2007 Caroline made 82 deals and pulled in an income of \$130,000 in commissions—more than twice what new agents typically make. She was named Rookie of the Year last year, but she's not just giving the newbies a run for their money. She's also brought home the coveted Outstanding Customer Service Award for her 70-agent Upper East Side office. Twice.

Still, Caroline is sensitive about her age. She says, "I have a really young face, so I wear a nice suit almost every day. If someone says, 'You look so young,' I play it off like it's a big compliment"—even though they're just noticing the truth.



### The Internet's boy wonder

**David Karp, 21, is the founder and president of Tumblr.com, a blogging site worth \$3 million.**

Most 21-year-olds are drinking \$2 Pabst—not sitting at the helm of a company valued at \$3 million. But David Karp is not your average guy. A computer whiz, he grew up on the Upper West Side and, with his parents'

blessing, dropped out of high school before his sophomore year. At 17, he was hired as chief technology officer of Urbanbaby.com without an in-person interview. ("They had no idea how old I was," he says.) When the site was bought in 2006, he got a hefty stock cash-out, and used the money to found his own company, Davidville, which created business applications. But David had an idea of his own, too. "I saw this site, Project.ioni.st, and it blew my mind. It was run by seven people who posted bits of information—a photo, a video clip, anything meaningful. I wanted to make that type of blogging accessible," he says.

Tumblr.com—a site that allows users to create multimedia blogs—launched in March and now has 150,000 users. And David has raised close to \$1 million from investors. But he isn't looking to sell to Google. "There's this notion: 'Come up with an idea, execute it, and sell it for millions,'" he says. "But I want to build something that's still going to employ me in 20 years."



### The fundraising phenom

**Carolyn Cavaness, 24, is deputy finance director of the Hillary Clinton campaign in**

**New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.**

Carolyn Cavaness is good at getting people to donate money. Really, really good at it. The 5'2" powerhouse grew up in New Jersey and moved to the city in 2001 to attend Barnard College. After graduating, she landed a job in the school's Office of Alumnae Affairs—and in her first month, Caroline reeled in an enormous gift. "My boss was like, 'You need to take a bow,'" Carolyn remembers. "You just got a \$2 million donation."

Carolyn's work attracted the attention of Andrea Stewart-Cousins, who was running for the New York State Senate in 2006, and she invited the then 23-year-old to be her finance director. In four months on the job, Carolyn raised \$600,000—a huge amount for a local election.

It was during a fundraiser breakfast for

**“My boss was like, ‘You need to take a bow. You just got a \$2 million donation.’”**

Stewart-Cousins that Carolyn met Hillary Clinton. "She was someone I looked up to," says Carolyn. "I started to build a relationship with her people. And when she announced her candidacy for President, I got an invitation to join the campaign." Carolyn is now Hillary's deputy finance director for the New York region.

Over the past 10 months, Carolyn has been part of a team that's raised almost \$18 million dollars for the candidate. The workdays can stretch to 14 hours, but Carolyn loves it. The secret of her success? "I'm being myself and thinking, 'How would I want to be solicited if I were on the other side of the table?'" she explains. "Whatever happens, I am part of making history. That is a huge deal."