

269

MAGAZINE™

THE
SMALL BUSINESS
EDITION

From Startup to Growth Stage

inside:

YOUR GUIDE TO SMALL
BUSINESS RESOURCES
IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

BUSINESS STRATEGY
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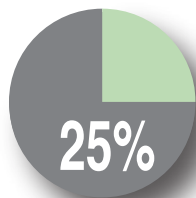
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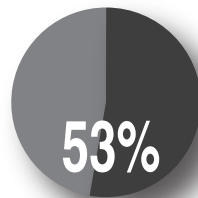
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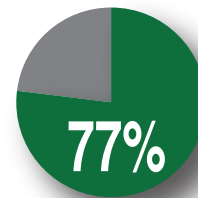
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THERE'S NOTHING SMALL ABOUT SMALL BUSINESS IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN.

Here's a sampling of our favorites.

My wife and I always love the fantastic meals and elite service at any of the **Millennium Restaurant Group** establishments.

The Kalamazoo location of **Gazelle Sports** offers the best service and shoe fitters in town!

Big T in Lawton is a crazy, busy, and fun place. It's off the beaten path, with great food (an occasional frog leg or two), and a beer list that goes on and on.

The **Golden Needle Tailor Shop** in Kalamazoo always delivers, whether it is stitching alterations on a new suit, an emergency repair of a tear, or letting out of a waistband.

Perennial Accents in St. Joseph offers the hottest trends in kitchen products if I'm looking to dish up the perfect gift or spice up my culinary collection.

Water Street Coffee Joint Oakland in Kalamazoo is a great place to relax with a latte and a creative project.



Our hope is that the readers of *269 MAGAZINE* will become active participants in the world around them and join our mission to make Southwest Michigan the place to make a home, go to work, and bring dreams to reality.

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BY
HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR IN CHIEF

PHOTO
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Sunshine and Lemonade

IT'S SUMMERTIME! BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

S **ON THE SCHOOL BELL WILL RING FOR THE LAST TIME** (or the last exam will be turned in) signifying the official start of

summer for students ranging in age from preschool to college. When it does, be on the lookout for budding young entrepreneurs out and about in your neighborhood.

Much like the character Lucy in the Peanuts comic strip who opens a booth to share her psychiatric “opinions” for five cents with others in her cartoon neighborhood, the entrepreneurial spirit starts early in some. Indeed, time off of school during summer months offers fertile opportunity for the seeds of entrepreneurship to be planted, bolstered too by the well-intentioned edicts of parents to their children to earn some spending money with the threat of withholding movie or gas money.

What should you look for? Lemonade stand owners positioned streetside. Lawn mowers cutting

fresh lanes of grass. Babysitters leading lines of little ones to the playground. And painters brushing fresh coats of paint onto fence posts and front doors.

That entrepreneurial spirit can manifest itself later in the invention of new products like widgets and gizmos, or making things from scratch. For others, it centers on offering specialized services around personal skill sets like web design, app development, catering, or landscaping.

The card table and chair anchoring that lemonade stand on the corner can be the start of building important skills vital to the success of entrepreneurs and small-business owners in later stages of life. Beyond the pitcher of lemonade, the young entrepreneur is building:

Communication Skills
Good conversation builds a returning customer base.

Ambition
More sales equal success which, in turn, feeds an internal craving for more sales.

Work ethic
Squeezing lemons isn't easy. The tough task builds stamina for hard work.

Responsibility
If you do a good job, you won't let customers down.

Marketing skills
You have to get creative to attract customers.

Collaboration
Teaming up with others teaches you how to pool resources to accomplish tasks.

Strategy
Setting goals and working toward them develops operational tactics.

Discipline
Lemonade stand owners can't run off with friends to jump in the pool, missing potential sales.

Leadership
When a customer pulls up (either by car or bike), someone has to stand up and take the order.

Planning
Five lemons? Twelve? Or twenty? It takes some foresight to plan the grocery list.

Organization
You need to find the perfect spot, build the stand, design your sign, and make the lemonade. It's a lot to juggle.

Confidence
If at first you don't succeed, then try, try again. Not every passerby translates into a sale. It takes a brave soul to keep hawking the goods.

Financial Skills
The hard lesson of economics becomes apparent if you end up buying more lemons than selling glasses of lemonade.

Entrepreneurial Spirit
Awakened by customer “thank-yous” and compliments, the entrepreneur becomes driven to look for new ways to increase business.

So, instead of blowing by that lemonade stand on the way home, pull over and grab a cold (and legal) one for the ride home. You just might be starting the career of the next Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or Joy Mangano.

READ ON,

Heather

Tell us about your entrepreneurship @269Mag with #MyLemonadeStand!

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What services are or should be available in Southwest Michigan to support entrepreneurial startups and small businesses?

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STEVE NEWELL

INTERIM ASSOCIATE DEAN AND PROFESSOR OF MARKETING

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
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JAMIE HEADLEY

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS MANAGER

MICHIGAN MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY CENTER

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF GREAT RESOURCES FOR ENTREPRENEURS IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN,

and, in particular, at Western Michigan University.

At the Haworth College of Business, we have recently added a major and a minor in Entrepreneurship for students planning to run their own business. We also operate Starting Gate, a business accelerator that provides students with resources to help develop their startup companies. In addition, every year we sponsor the Pitch Competition in which students develop and present a short presentation about a new product or company idea to business experts for their feedback. Also, the college hosts a regional office of the Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC) that provides consulting, training, and research for new and small-business ventures.

THE REGION OFFERS A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONS.

Its strategic location, academic strength with multiple public and private colleges and universities (including a medical school), workforce availability, and organizations committed to maintaining a solid economic environment make this community an ideal setting for businesses.

However, to sustain this synergistic economic climate, it is essential that emerging or fledgling businesses have the opportunity to prove that they can, within this positive climate, overcome challenges and become successful corporate citizens. The community needs to nurture its developing and at-risk businesses to assure that it has a solid, diverse economic base that can effectively nourish its members in good times and bad.

Over the years of mentoring, as a SCORE mentor, I have seen two things that are consistent challenges for potential new startup organizations and growing organizations: (1) resources, including funding and professional expertise, and (2) knowledge of business support available.


This means that the community must willingly partner with its constituent organizations to create a network of mutual support. In fact, our community's future depends on the ability of our local organizations to grow, be competitive yet collaborative, and change with the times.

AS A BUSINESS SOLUTIONS MANAGER WORKING WITH SMALL TO MIDSIZE COMPANIES, I ASK OUR CLIENTS: "What keeps you up at night?"

A consistent answer is their ability to market their business successfully. Many start-ups and small businesses have a great product or service but do not have the budget to effectively reach markets they need in order to grow. With social media and the internet, there are a lot of free or low-cost marketing tactics available, but understanding what tools, old or new, are best for a specific type of business can be challenging or even confusing. Assisting manufacturers with such marketing challenges is one of many ways the center can help Michigan companies grow and prosper.

THE JUMP FROM STARTUP TO GROWTH STAGE

STORY BY RICK VAN GROUW PHOTOS BY BARRY ELZ



In the fall of 2013, Adam McFarlin was working full time at ONEplace at the Kalamazoo Public Library, a management support organization that offers resources and services to nonprofit organizations in Kalamazoo County. He was also a competitive powerlifter. But he could feel himself getting bored.

“I Googled things I could make with my hands and came across candle-making randomly,” McFarlin recalled. He spent the next two days immersed in online message boards, then went to a craft store and purchased some basic supplies. At home, he proceeded to craft what he remembers as “some pretty terrible candles.”

But he kept at it. The Western Michigan University graduate in music (tuba performance) said he enjoyed learning the process of making candles. “It was similar to practicing music, where you spend four or five hours a day alone in a room, and you work on things nobody in the audience will ever hear. I found that same creativity, the same attention to detail, in candle-making.”

On October 6, 2013, McFarlin took a few completed candles to Handmade Kalamazoo on West Vine Street. He knew the owner, who said she was willing to put his samples up for sale.

That first day, one of his candles sold. Kalamazoo Candle Company was in business.

By Christmas 2013, McFarlin had products for sale in five stores. A year later, his candles were available in 18 brick-and-mortar outlets. McFarlin quit his day job in September 2016 to devote all his time to Kalamazoo Candle Company, and he moved his business into an 1,800-square-foot studio in the Park Trades Center. Today, McFarlin said his products are in 105 stores; he hopes to be in 150 by Thanksgiving—right after his company’s five-year anniversary.

As a start-up entrepreneur, McFarlin is among a vital segment of the regional and state economies. Successful startups grow into second-stage companies, some of which evolve into industrial juggernauts like Kellogg’s, Stryker, and Whirlpool.

“Don’t get so tied to goals that you miss opportunities. It’s easy to get lost in the weeds of running a business.”



Long before they reach the commercial stratosphere, however, many challenges and hurdles confront startup entrepreneurs: capital, location, talent, and community support. In fact, according to Business Employment Dynamics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, somewhere between half and 90 percent of all startup companies fail within the first five years.

start-ups are one way to measure entrepreneurship, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of jobs created by establishments less than one year old is about where it was in 2005 (679,000) after dropping to 560,000 in 2010.

Michigan hasn't quite recovered after the recession. Business startups in the state peaked at 36,409 in 2005 prior to the recession, then fell to a nadir of

“Nationally, Michigan ranks 16th in entrepreneurial climate, 32nd in vitality, and 46th in change.”

Statistically, entrepreneurship nationwide and in Michigan is in a state of flux, mostly rebounding after the recession of the late 2000s. As

22,283 in 2011. Since then, the number of opening establishments in Michigan has grown again to 28,868 in 2016—not quite prerecession numbers.

A STATE OF ENTREPRENEURS

Small companies remain vital to the state's economy. According to a 2015 report by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), there were 856,352 small businesses operating in Michigan, representing 98 percent of all Michigan companies and 50 percent of all Michigan's employees. Small businesses also account for 39 percent of the state's exports—or 21 percent of Michigan's total known export value.

The Small Business Association of Michigan (SBAM) represents and advocates for 25,000 small companies across the state with fewer than 500 employees. “Fifteen years ago, we were sitting around and asking ourselves, ‘What should be the high-level, Big Hairy Audacious Goal?’” recalls Rob Fowler, SBAM president and CEO. “We decided that Michigan would become one of the top five states nationally

in entrepreneurship. A hundred years ago, Michigan was a leader in entrepreneurship during the era of Ford, Kellogg, and Dow. We asked, ‘What would it take to get back to that spot?’”

To measure progress, SBAM and its affiliate organization, MiQuest, developed a scorecard that rated Michigan's entrepreneurial ecosystem against the other states. On April 11, 2017, MiQuest released its 13th annual Michigan Entrepreneurial Score Card.

As a state, Michigan performs well in some areas but falls short in others. “We have long held a leadership position in research and development conducted in our state,” Fowler said. “We're No. 4 in the country in industry R&D, and No. 5 in university R&D. In patents per worker, we rank No. 8 in the country, and we're No. 2 in the number of physical and engineering workers.”

The Score Card emphasizes three areas of entrepreneurship:

Climate: The factors that support the entrepreneurial economy.

Change: The direction and momentum of growth in the entrepreneurial economy.

Vitality: The level of entrepreneurial activity relative to that in other states. Nationally, Michigan ranks 16th in entrepreneurial climate, 32nd in vitality, and 46th in change.

Fowler thinks these numbers tell a more positive story than they seem to. “This year we’re 46th in entrepreneurial change, but even this is not a bad sign,” he said. “It’s happening in Michigan and across the Midwest, a real slowdown of new business starts.” In addition, “This year we’re ranked 16th in entrepreneurial climate; when we first started we were 48th. The growth of our existing companies is pretty phenomenal. When it comes to the

increase in high-performance firms, growing firms—we rank 19th, but in 2005 we were 15 points lower, 34th.”

Maybe those rankings are cause for optimism, but everyone agrees much work remains to be done.

A SIGNATURE INDUSTRY

To move the dials, some speculate that perhaps West and Southwest Michigan could benefit from establishing a “tagline” or signature industry for startups.

Michael Jandernoa, retired CEO of Perrigo Company, muses about the prospect of developing a “life science corridor” and providing early-stage capital funds for companies in medical technology and science.

“That’s probably our signature industry,” Jandernoa said. “They’ve raised the most money in the life science area at places like Metabolic Solutions (Development Company), ProNAi (now known as Sierra Technology), Tetra (Discovery

Partners), and Octeta (now named Cirius Therapeutics)—companies like that have probably the biggest dollars raised in the community. There are more opportunities along the medical

many people come to me asking for help to fund their businesses. There was just not enough time to do due diligence for all the people knocking on my door. We didn’t have an ecosystem for capital,

“For technology entrepreneurs, the world we live in is squishy. It’s kind of hypothetical. We’re betting on ideas.”

device area as well as participating with companies like Stryker, and we have a number of medical device manufacturers in the community.”

A couple of years before SBAM and MiQuest devised the Entrepreneurial Score Card, Jandernoa stepped down after 22 years as CEO of Perrigo. He turned his attention to the region’s entrepreneurial needs, founding Grand Angels, a Michigan and Midwest investment organization. “I had so

let alone for mentoring or coaching or trying to help develop that.”

Other areas of economic strength in the region include agriculture and automotive technology. “Those are other segments we can plug into and I think have potential to take entrepreneurship to another level,” Jandernoa said. “We’re making progress in West Michigan, but we have a long way to go.”

Jandernoa also now leads 42 North Partners, a Grand Rapids-based



ADVICE FROM THE ENTREPRENEURIAL FRONT LINE

LESSONS FROM A STARTUP

Adam McFarlin, founder and owner of Kalamazoo Candle Company, offers advice for business success based on his experience.

- *“From day one, track as much data as you can. If you don’t track it, you don’t know.”* Some candles just don’t sell anymore, and that makes them less than cost-effective. McFarlin knows how much revenue each candle generates and how much each candle costs. He even tracks the weather during each Art Hop so he knows what size crowd to expect at the next event.
- *“Keep it simple.”* Do one thing, and do it well. You can diversify later. McFarlin recently relaunched his line of melt tins, which he had previously eliminated to focus on candles.
- *“Don’t get so tied to goals that you miss opportunities. It’s easy to get lost in the weeds of running a business.”* As an example, McFarlin cites his company’s wild success with a limited-edition candle he made

during Western Michigan University’s 2016 undefeated regular football season. He created 200 “13-r0w” candles; they sold out in hours, raising \$1,600 for charity.

- *“Do what you’re good at. Find other people to do the rest.”* Even though it’s a business, sometimes you have to do things you dislike. During his first year, McFarlin made 5,000 candles by hand. By himself. Today, he has four employees to help craft candles, allowing him to excel at his greatest strength—focusing on process improvement.
- *“There are no sacred cows. When it comes to the product, everything can go, and anything can come.”* Some entrepreneurs get too attached to what they make. Be passionate about what you make, but if you get too attached, it can get you into some problems.
- *“Listen more than you talk. It’s amazing what you can learn from others.”*

investment group supporting the entrepreneurial community, and Jandernoa Entrepreneurial Mentoring with services targeted toward developing effective business leadership in West Michigan.

HELP FOR ENTREPRENEURS

McFarlin launched Kalamazoo Candle Company with \$3,000 of his own money and built his product exclusively using his own knowledge and instinct. Four years into his growing business, he asked for help. He made an appointment with the Southwest Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Western Michigan University (WMU).

“We provide the whole gamut (starting with questions like) is the idea a feasible business plan, (is) capital (needed), and what legal entity should I be?” said Tamara Davis, regional director of SBDC. “Today, a lady sent me a whole list of needs (that we can help with)—accounting, QuickBooks, marketing plan, as well as a policies and procedures manual.”

The SBDC at WMU is a primary resource for small businesses and entrepreneurial startups. Every year,

the office works with more than 500 small-business clients like McFarlin to offer business advice and make connections with other services.

Davis’s SBDC office is one of 11 regional centers throughout the state, funded primarily by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), a nonprofit organization that devotes its support to technology businesses, but also by the SBA. In 2013, the Southwest Michigan office helped clients access more than \$30 million in capital and start 41 new business ventures that created 150 new jobs and increased sales by more than \$7 million.

“Our job is to help anybody that’s interested in either starting or growing their existing business to make good decisions,” Davis said. “That can be a student at WMU or a person in the community. We don’t differentiate. About 65 percent of the businesses we work with are already in business.”

ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVOCATES

For startups, entrepreneurs, and second-stage companies, support comes from public and private organizations, starting with the MEDC.

“Our area is entrepreneurship and innovation, from an (initial) idea to when a company starts selling product,” said Fredrick Molner, vice president of entrepreneurship and innovation at the MEDC. After a company starts generating more than about \$1 million in sales, “it goes to our Business Development Group, which helps second-stage companies find a new building, or new talent, or whatever. Where we focus is completely on high tech. Anything

location,’ ‘Now, it’s time to hire 50 new employees,’ or ‘Here’s where you should invest \$500 million to build on this location.’ It’s kind of hypothetical. We’re betting on ideas.”

Karen Smoots is a serial entrepreneur. She graduated in 1999 from the Haworth College of Business at WMU and today runs the Green Glove Dryer, a company she built around a product she designed that uses preexisting heat sources—residential furnace vents,

We all know talent is the lifeblood of companies; if you can’t get the right people, you’re dead in the water.

outside of that, like lifestyle stuff—a gas station or a barber shop—we don’t deal with that at all.

“For technology entrepreneurs, the world we live in is squishy,” Molner explained. “It’s not like there’s a concrete plan that says, ‘Here’s when you need a brick-and-mortar

for example—to dry wet outdoor gear such as ski gloves, mittens, and hats.

“As far as government support, I think there is room for improvement for startup funds and programs,” Smoots said. “There are not a lot of monies to go around as in other states. Startup businesses don’t have any money.



Susan Fogleson, President, Impact Label Corporation

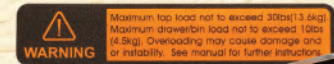
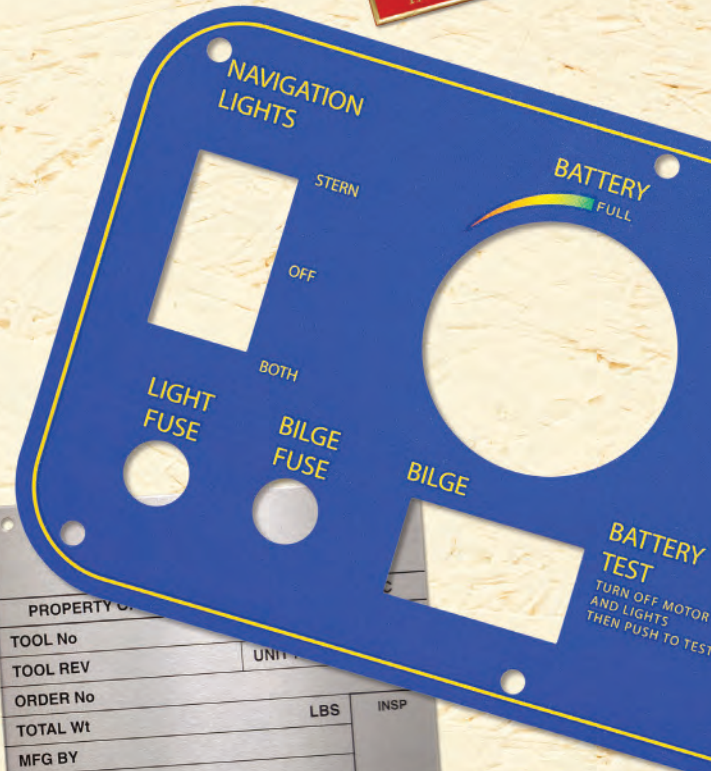
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We don't look at entrepreneurial ideas as crazy or think about ideas as half-cocked. Innovation is what we lead with here.

The MEDC is starting to realize that. They're slowly getting on board. But there's other states I look at that are running business competitions that allow startups and small companies to gain that traction."

And that traction leads to the next stage in a company's development.

SECOND-STAGE COMPANIES ARE CRUCIAL

"You don't have second-stage companies if you don't have startups," said Colleen Killen-Roberts, director of entrepreneurship at the Edward Lowe Foundation in Cassopolis. The foundation works with "second-stage" entrepreneurial clients across the nation—companies that

have grown from \$1 million to \$50 million in revenue and with 10 to 99 employees. For more than 20 years, Killen-Roberts worked for small and midsize companies as director of operations, chief financial officer, and chief of staff.

Killen-Roberts explained that a more substantial economic indicator for a community is when a startup business survives and attains the next level of success. These so-called second-stage entrepreneurialships typically employ 10 to 100 workers and generate annual revenues of \$750,000 to \$50 million.

"The effects of second-stage businesses are monumental," Killen-Roberts said. "Second-stage companies typically represent 17 percent of the businesses in the U.S., yet they produce 37 to 38 percent of sales and revenue." They also employ a disproportionate 37 percent of workers nationally.

The Edward Lowe Foundation is known

for its identification of and support for economic "gardening," as opposed to hunting. Rather than exhausting resources on recruiting businesses from elsewhere to a particular community, economic gardening means "believing in the businesses already there, the businesses already quietly paying taxes, doing what they need to do to support their area by giving back, and raising their kids (there)," said Killen-Roberts. "Those companies have the greatest impact on the economy. Communities should go out of their way to engage those businesses and their employees and families, to create a great place to be.

So why is a nationally recognized entrepreneurial support organization based in Michigan?

Killen-Roberts suggested, "I've worked here my whole life, and the people (here) are open to the possibilities. We don't look at entrepreneurial ideas as crazy or think about ideas as half-cocked. Innovation is what we lead with here. Michigan is a really amazing place to live because the people aren't close-minded. (Entrepreneurs) want to be supported. They want to be understood. They want you to believe in them. If you have those things, you create an ecosystem of support and understanding that creates relationships and a sense of trust, just the way you—as a community—build

a relationship with that company. That company becomes loyal."

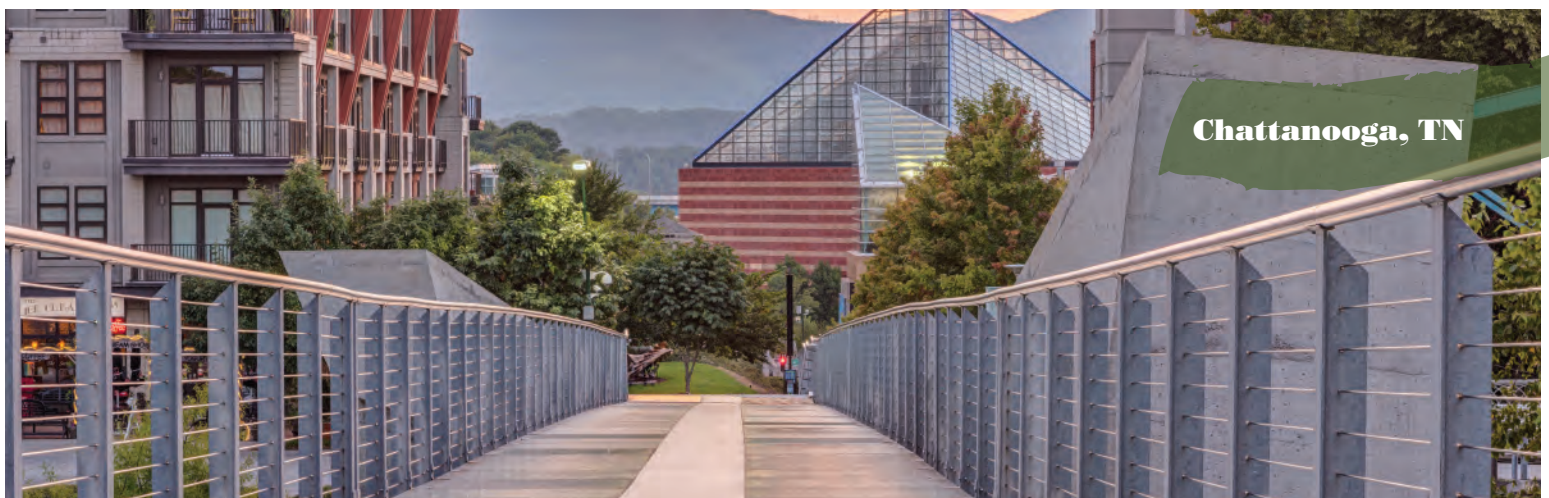
GROWING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECONOMY

If Southwest Michigan wants to accelerate its economic growth through entrepreneurship, there are many paths that cities around the U.S. have taken.

Sheldon Grizzle, a serial entrepreneur based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, explains why that city's entrepreneurial ecosystem has flourished. Grizzle said that beyond the jolt of energy the business climate received in 2011 when the city became the first in the Western Hemisphere to offer 10-gigabit-per-second fiber internet service, "There's this unique environment here in Chattanooga where I feel like everybody's rooting for you, this hometown feel. If you're an entrepreneur and you're struggling with something and you don't know how to go about doing that or what resources are best to use, there's an unbelievable willingness from the community at large to sit down with you and help you figure that out.

"I have yet to ask somebody to have a meeting and not get it. People are very willing to help you because somebody previously invested in them. There's this culture that's been

CONTINUED ON PAGE 55



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COVER STORY VIEWPOINT

Jess Ekstrom

FOUNDER AND CEO,
HEADBANDS OF HOPE
RALEIGH, NC

An entrepreneur is a creative problem solver. I like summarizing the role of an entrepreneur as “an individual who creates what they wish existed.” Entrepreneurs look for areas of need, or things that could run more efficiently or better. Then they create solutions.

As for where an entrepreneur’s ideas come from, it’s not about where to look, it’s just about accepting to look. It might not be a problem that’s in front of you every day. It might be something you see when you travel or try something new. It might be something you discover through talking to people. I think that the only way to discover these opportunities and areas of need is by looking at the world through a lens that you can fix it. In order to start looking, you have to accept that some of the world’s problems and areas of need are your responsibility. An entrepreneur is up to the challenge.

One of the biggest turning points for me, the moment when I would argue that I officially became an entrepreneur, was when my dad started his own company when I was younger. I didn’t quite understand it. I was around seven or eight years old. I didn’t understand what entrepreneurship was, actually, until we were on our family camping trip. I took out my headphones so I could jam out on my Sony Walkman—that’s how long ago it was—and my headphone cords were tangled in a knot. Frustrated, I said to my dad, “I’m going to invent headphone cords that roll up like a slinky so they never get tangled again.” He sat me down and broke the news: “They’ve already been invented.” He then looked me in the eye and said encouragingly, “I want you to really keep thinking that way. Keep thinking like that.” For me, that was the moment when I became an entrepreneur, because I realized I could inspire and create solutions.

Entrepreneurs also don’t let naysayers get in their way. Maybe there have been times when I have been judged or not treated as fairly because of my gender, or even because of my age, but I’ve made an active decision to not let those judgments influence what I do. The people who put barriers in my path aren’t worth my time to continue to work with. No matter your gender, age, where you come from, or whatever it is, do the best that you can. People who don’t give you equal opportunity are just going to end up falling behind, and you’re the one who is going to get ahead.

Once you find yourself on the entrepreneurial path, find people who have done it and who have been on that path before. Surrounding yourself with a community of like-minded people is always helpful. When I look back on some of the biggest turning points for my career and company, Headbands of Hope, they

have usually happened because of the people I’ve met.

When you have that initial idea and you’re ready to go, do not focus on what you don’t have; focus on what you do have. My idea for Headbands of Hope came to me when I was 19 and a sophomore in college. Immediately, I took advantage of the resources available to me. I met with different areas of the university to help me create a business plan, to show me how to manufacture a product, to help me create a website, and more. Even though I didn’t have any money at that time, I did have access to those resources as a college student. Instead of focusing on lack of funding, I focused on what I did have and got creative with it.

If you find yourself with the entrepreneurial spirit, surround yourself with like-minded people and look at what’s right in front of you, instead of focusing on what you don’t have. If that sounds simple, it is.

Jess Ekstrom grew up in Cornelius, North Carolina, and currently lives in Raleigh. A 2013 graduate of North Carolina State University in Communications/Public Relations, she is the founder and CEO of Headbands of Hope (headbandsofhope.com). Jess is a speaker at CAMPUSPEAK, author of *The Freshman Fabulous: The Girl’s Guide to College*, and a contributor at *Entrepreneur* and *The Huffington Post*. She will appear at Catalyst University on January 25, 2018, in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

If you find yourself with the entrepreneurial spirit, surround yourself with like-minded people and look at what’s right in front of you, instead of focusing on what you don’t have. If that sounds simple, it is.

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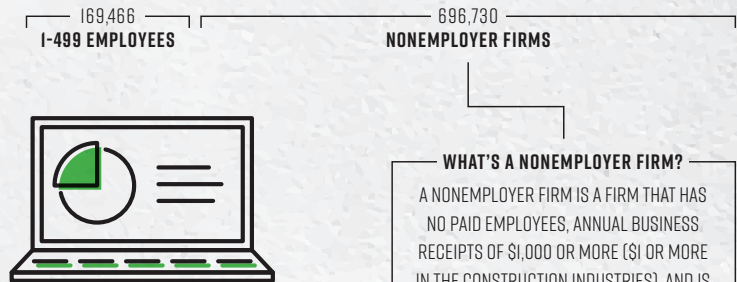


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INCOME LEVELS

MEDIAN INCOME FOR SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS AT THEIR OWN BUSINESS:

\$44,721
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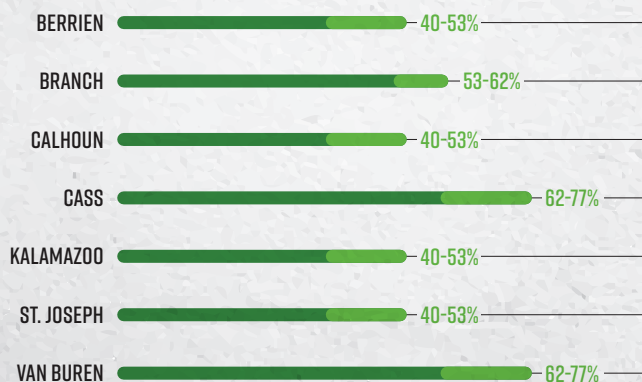
\$19,911
(UNINCORPORATED)

SMALL BUSINESS
IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN



MICHIGAN EXPERIENCED A **2.9%** INCREASE IN SMALL-BUSINESS PROPRIETORS FROM 2014 TO 2015.

SMALL BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT BY COUNTY



SMALL BUSINESSES EMPLOY

49.8%
OF THE MICHIGAN WORKFORCE.

SOURCES: STATISTICS OF U.S. BUSINESSES, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2014 \\
NONEMPLOYER STATISTICS, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2014 \\
INTERNATIONAL TRADE ADMINISTRATION, 2014 \\
FEDERAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS EXAMINATION COUNCIL, 2014 \\
AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, FIVE-YEAR ESTIMATES, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, 2015



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SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

Sure, starting and growing a small business is hard, but you don't have to do it alone.

While not comprehensive, this list of national, state, and regional resources will help you start solving those pesky issues that only small business owners face. Be sure and investigate individual agencies for their specific service offerings.

Those seeking capital also have the option of approaching lenders directly to submit an application. Regional SBA participating lenders include:

IST SOURCE BANK
ISTSOURCE.COM

FIFTH THIRD BANK
53.COM

JPMORGAN CHASE BANK
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ARBOR FINANCIAL CREDIT UNION
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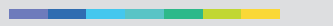
CAPITAL GAINS:

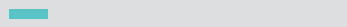
FINANCING TO GROW OR START YOUR BUSINESS

Entrepreneurs and small businesses often need access to funding to jump-start or accelerate their business enterprise. Sources of capital may come from personal savings, family, friends, venture capital, or business loans.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) supports growing companies with its business loan and equity financing programs. SBA financing tools include the 7(a) Loan Program, Certified Development Company or 504 Loan Program, Microloan Program, and the Small Business Investment Company Program. Each is distinguished by the type of lender providing the loan, how loan proceeds can be used, total dollar amounts that can be borrowed, and the terms placed on the borrower. Lenders can be a regulated bank, credit union, or a community-based lending institution. The SBA offers an online tool called LINC to match small businesses with partnering lenders accessible through sba.gov/tools/linc.

National


U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
 sba.gov
 Grand Rapids | (616) 456-5512


U.S. PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
 uspto.gov
 Washington, D.C. | (800) 786-9199

State


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 Lansing | (800) 292-3939

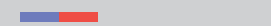

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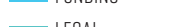

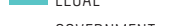


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 Kalamazoo | (269) 387-6004


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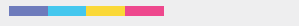

MIQUEST
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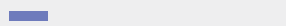
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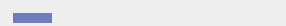

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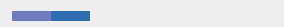

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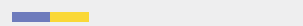

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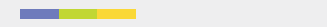

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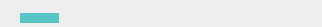

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MNO-BMADSEN AND ACCU-MOLD GIVE BACK BY
GROWING BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

STORY BY EVA DEAN FOLKERT PHOTOS BY STEVE HERPPICH

It has been said that when a major change occurs within a business's world—like a change in ownership, leadership, or both—a good three to four years is needed for that change to settle in, settle down, and the company to evolve and thrive.

It has been four years since Mno-Bmadsen of Dowagiac acquired Accu-Mold, LLC of Portage, and in that time, both organizations have navigated their sea change the way a small ship tackles oncoming waves. They formulated a plan, sailed confidently forward, and overtook each new swell with all hands on deck. Now the two entities see themselves as family as much as business partners.

The investment enterprise of the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indian tribe, Mno-Bmadsen (meh no-buh MOD sen) saw Accu-Mold—a plastic engineering, tooling, and manufacturing company—as a safe but potentially transformative

acquisition in 2013. It was the first company that Mno-Bmadsen would purchase with President and CEO Troy Clay at the helm. A careful scan of the Southwest Michigan business landscape told Clay and other Mno-Bmadsen advisors that there were solid trends upward in manufacturing investments. In Accu-Mold, founded in 1975 and purchased from then-owner Dave Martin, the tribal group saw an opportunity to begin to advance the economic self-sufficiency of the Pokagon Band. “Our mission (at Mno-Bmadsen) is to create strong businesses for future generations,” says Clay. “We’re really focused on developing wealth and business

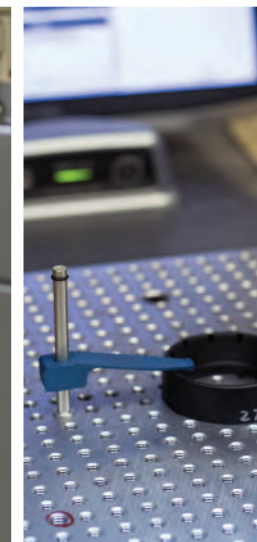
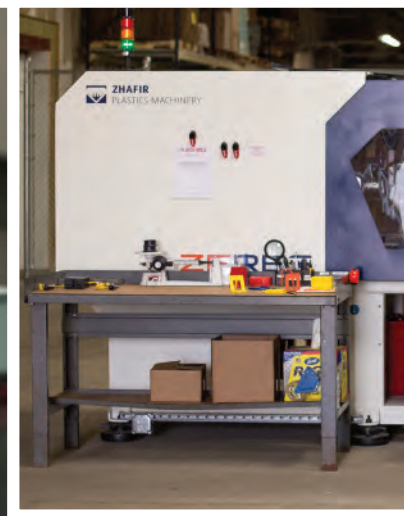
opportunities that will continue to grow, and provide a diverse economy and employment for our people well into the future. To be successful, our first priority is to have successful businesses and run those well. That then generates opportunities not only for our people but also for our neighbors and, frankly, anybody in the Southwest Michigan area, because growth is not only for Accu-Mold and Mno-Bmadsen. When you're growing, you have to pull in partners and work with other shops as part of that growth. The impact is not just on us; it can have a big impact on other shops in the region as well."

Mno-Bmadsen found three of its investment criteria favorably and clearly evident in Accu-Mold when it considered making the full-service, plastic injection mold firm the first of the five diverse companies it now owns: Accu-Mold had been well-managed, it was fairly priced, and more value could be added once the tribal entity owned it.

In the first two years after the acquisition, change management was the focus as sales growth for the 20-employee company hovered between only two and three percent annually. The increase in sales was slower than desired, but it was growth nonetheless. And Accu-Mold depended most on the automotive industry.

"In Michigan, you're naturally going to do automotive work," Clay reasons. "It's at the baseline of what I call low-hanging fruit, where we have good relationships with companies out of the automotive sector. But we needed to diversify at Accu-Mold."

In 2015, an uptick toward double-digit sales growth occurred at the intersection of a new diversified business strategy and the hiring of a new president to make that strategy go. Dave Felicijan was brought in to lead Accu-Mold due to his experience with another minority-owned company that he helped grow



from zero to over \$50 million in sales. It, too, was a full-service injection plastic molding enterprise, not just

“A LOT OF TIMES WE CAN GET CAUGHT UP IN THE ‘WHAT’ AND THE ‘HOW,’ BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO KNOW THE ‘WHY.’ WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO?”

a toolmaker and not just a molder, quite like Accu-Mold. Felicijan also knew how to utilize the Michigan Minority Business Development

Council as well as the National Minority Business Development Council, especially when networking and securing new business.

"Our growth is going to come from diversifying into medical and defense sectors," Clay clarifies. "The medical sector is huge, especially for throwaway plastic products, which are extensively used in the medical industry. On the defense side, as a tribal-owned firm, we are minority-designated, and it gives us some unique opportunities."

When asked how much of Accu-Mold's \$5 million in annual sales comes from the automotive sector, Felicijan is quick to reply, "too much," and then he specifies that it is about 80 percent reliant on automotive sales. The remaining 20 percent currently

comes from the electronics, medical, and consumer goods realms. Felicijan sees nonautomotive companies as the areas for the most growth for Accu-Mold, and his sales force has reached as far south as Georgia and South Carolina, as well as beyond national borders to Germany and Mexico, to garner new sales.

Right now, Accu-Mold's two main facilities in Portage—an 8,000-square-foot engineering and tool-building center on Sprinkle Road and a 3,000-square-foot research and development building located nearby—can accommodate the business's current growth. Clay, though, sees a future where expansion is not only projected but also inevitable.

"Based on feedback and the initial traction from our business development



and sales efforts, we have some potential for real growth soon,” declares Clay who meets with Felicijan about four to five times per month to talk strategy and receive updates. “We’re spending a lot of time right now on how we finance that growth, whether that be in a larger facility or acquiring more (manufacturing) equipment. We know substantial growth means making the investment to meet that growth.”

Sales growth obviously means workforce growth. You can’t have one without the other. Business does well by “going good,” in terms of business reports, yes, but mostly in terms of the way “it treats its employees and creates a culture of mutual respect, co-dependency, and trust.” That’s the way Felicijan sees it, anyway.

“A lot of times we can, any company can, get caught up in the ‘what’ and the ‘how,’ but the most important thing is to know the ‘why.’ Why do we do what we do?” Felicijan somewhat rhetorically asks. “That question is something we spend a lot of time concentrating on. Why are we here, and why are we doing this? Obviously, it’s to make money, but we’re also here to employ people, most importantly tribal members, and start to retain our workforce instead of seeing some of these kids leave the area. We want to expand our technologies to be the best we can be for that workforce.”

To that end, Mno-Bmadsen started the Pathways Program, the human resource arm of the tribal enterprise that looks to employ and train any

of its citizens wanting to establish a meaningful career, not only at Accu-Mold but also at one of four other diverse

THE TRIBE’S DESIRE TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY THROUGH BOTH GROWTH OF BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT IS A TOP, TOP PRIORITY.

DAVE FELICIJAN

Mno-Bmadsen companies affecting local economies in three states. Its holdings include architecture and

engineering with Seven Generations Architecture and Engineering located in Kalamazoo; civil engineering, land-use planning, environmental mitigation, and restoration services with WBK Engineering working out of Battle Creek; construction and mechanical contracting with D.A. Dodd headquartered in Rolling Prairie, Indiana, and with an office in Benton Harbor; a C-store with Bent Tree Market in Dowagiac; and plastic molding with Accu-Mold. Each Mno-Bmadsen-owned company is committed to providing a stable, present, and promising future for those in the Pokagon Band, as well as others affected by these dynamic businesses in all of Southwest Michigan.

“I refer to our family of companies as a family for a reason,” explains Clay, whose leadership principles are biblically based. “Our businesses are like children, and I mean this in a respectful way. Each one is part of the Mno family because each one has unique attributes and characteristics that they bring to the table, both in terms of company leadership and what the company does. Accu-Mold affectionately has a real place in our hearts because it was our first acquisition.”

Since Mno-Bmadsen means “walking the good path,” Clay and Felicijan see no better way forward than when good people come together for the good of clan, culture, and community. Both men are extremely active in Southwest Michigan business and community groups. They don’t see it as a way of doing business as much as a way of living life.

“A successful company is only as successful as the community around it,” insists Felicijan. “We want manufacturing to be important in Southwest Michigan and Michigan as a whole. The tribe’s desire to give back to the community through both growth of business and employment is a top, top priority.”



Where the Temperature is Just Right

DENSO MANUFACTURING MICHIGAN IN BATTLE CREEK MAKES CARS HEAT UP (OR COOL DOWN) EFFICIENTLY

STORY BY HEATHER BAKER | PHOTOS BY HANNAH ZIEGLER

THE COMPANY DENSO Manufacturing Michigan, Inc. (DMMI)

REGIONAL LOCATION DMMI occupies 1.38 million square feet of manufacturing, warehouse, and administrative floor space on more than 100 acres of land at 1 Denso Road in Battle Creek. Operations began locally in 1986.

THE BIG PICTURE DENSO Global represents more than 140,000 employees at 200 companies in 38 countries and regions around the world. Founded in 1949, its global headquarters is in Kariya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan. North American headquarters is in Southfield, Michigan.

WEBSITE densocorp-na.com

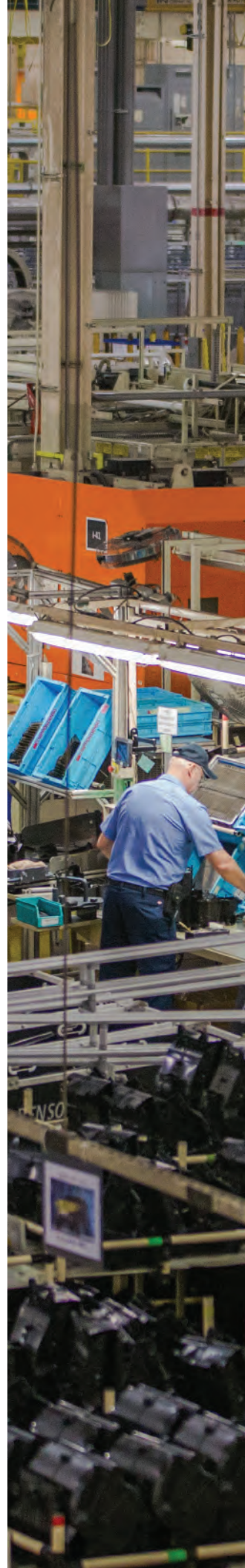
KEY EXECUTIVES ON-SITE Andres Staltmanis (President) and Stephen Milam (CEO of North American Thermal Group)

CULTURE DENSO is committed to associate development and growth, with many career paths,

on-site training, and tuition reimbursement. On-site services benefit associates, including a fitness center with tennis and basketball courts, a full-service medical center for employees and their family members, including a pharmacy, an on-site OMNI Community Credit Union branch, and a full-service cafeteria.

MAKING IT IN MICHIGAN DENSO invested \$300 million and created 1,670 new jobs in Michigan from 2012 to 2015.

ITS WHY DENSO's vision for 2020 is "protecting lives, preserving the planet, and providing a bright future for generations to come." One of the largest global automotive suppliers of advanced technology, systems, and components, the company is pushing the automotive society toward a future where cars put less drag on the environment and drivers have fewer worries about traffic accidents.





DENSO Global represents more than 140,000 employees at 200 companies in 38 countries and regions around the world.

BY THE NUMBERS

WHAT THEY MAKE HERE More than 134 truckloads of finished goods leave DMMI each day. Inside containers are automotive air conditioning and engine cooling components and systems, including:

- Condensers
- Radiators
- Engine Control Modules (ECMs)
- Heater Cores
- Evaporators
- Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Units

WHO WORKS HERE Production management, production associates, machine technicians, and skilled tradespeople. Engineers, quality engineers, and production control operators. Logistics specialists such as supply chain, distribution, transportation, and inventory management. Corporate functions like accounting, purchasing, business planning, and human resources.

NOW HIRING The facility has expanded 11 times since DMMI started operations

in Battle Creek. Most recently, DMMI announced a \$37 million investment in machinery and equipment to expand automation for next-generation products. Part of this July 2016 investment was the creation of 300 lead associate positions, predominantly filled by existing employees, and the hiring of 125 new employees.

SEEKING SPIRIT Because DMMI serves as the hub for North American thermal product manufacturing, there is a wide variety of functional opportunities available locally. Production needs call for skilled trades journeymen, machine repair technicians, electricians, team leaders, and assembly/machining roles. In addition, there are professional openings in production engineering, quality engineering, profit planning, purchasing, and occupational health.

DENSO looks for skilled candidates who exhibit the DENSO Spirit—its values of foresight, credibility, and collaboration. Apply at densocareers.com.

PRODUCTS MADE IN BATTLE CREEK ARE SHIPPED TO 11 MAJOR CUSTOMERS AT 46 LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE U.S., CANADA, AND MEXICO.

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BORGESS

a conversation with

SARA DUNN

FOUNDER/PROJECT LEAD AT IIWEB

BY REGAN DEWAAL | PHOTOS BY MITCH CONRAD

WHAT DOES A WEB DESIGNER DO?

(A web designer) translates what a business or individual does into an interactive format that provides more information for a potential customer.

WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE?

My company is entirely remote; I might be in my home office in Battle Creek, or I might be traveling. So a typical day is never typical. I might be spending a lot of time answering email, I might be on video calls with my team or my clients, or I might be in fully focused work time: head down, email paused, doing work and strategy, managing social media, doing competitive research, writing content, any of those things.

YOU MENTIONED YOUR TEAM WORKS REMOTELY. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT?

My graphic designer just moved from Hawaii to Colorado. Our “happiness specialist” lives in Michigan but is spending several months a year in Arkansas. And we have one more team member who works from Florida. So we’re really good at video conferencing.

“You need to communicate really clearly when you’re creating something for someone else.”

HOW DID YOU BECOME A WEB DESIGNER?

I didn’t actually go to college for a design degree. I was an international business major, and website design and build was something that I did as a hobby. I taught myself to code in junior high for a Girl Scout troop project; when a friend said they needed a website, I told them I would figure it out.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING A WEB DESIGNER?

Definitely working with the clients, and getting to learn about their businesses.

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN WEB DESIGN?

On the design level, it’s really important to understand web typography and color theory,

designing for web, and how to call attention to certain elements to incite different actions. It’s a lot more than just design, like, “I think this will look really pretty,” or, “someone else is using this flashy animation thing or this video background, so I want to do that because it’s trendy.” It’s a lot more than that, making sure that what’s really going on will serve the purpose of the site.

WHAT’S THE BIGGEST LESSON THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED SINCE YOU BEGAN YOUR CAREER?

You need to communicate really clearly when you’re creating something for someone else. What’s it going to look like? What is their role in the project? What are they going to get out of it at the end? If you don’t have those conversations to start with, there can be some different expectations, and that can be a big challenge.

WHAT WOULD BE YOUR DREAM PROJECT?

I love projects that go from branding to website. Dream projects are always growing businesses that want to make a big shift. If they want to redesign their entire brand identity, we can be a part of that by helping them define their target customer, creating a logo and brand that speaks to that person, and (working) all the way down to their website design.

HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR CREATIVITY SHARP?

It’s important to be inspired by other industries, such as really innovative product design or really cool packaging design.

IF YOU COULD BE CREATIVE IN ANOTHER SPACE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Travel vlogging—creating videos about traveling to really obscure places and making people feel like they were immersed in that experience.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN ASPIRING WEB DESIGNER?

If someone wants to specifically design for web, they should make sure that their experience is really broad—not just how to put elements onto a web page, but also how to ask great questions of someone you’re designing for.

WHAT HAS BEEN MOST SURPRISING TO YOU ABOUT BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE CREATIVE WORLD?

I’ve been most surprised by the amount of support within the web design space. You would think that everybody’s competing, but there are a lot of people,



“You always have first clients and never forget those people.”

especially within WordPress, which is the software solution that I use, who are willing to give advice about how to grow a business.

I really appreciated (Southwest Michigan’s) community support around wanting to help someone who’s starting something new. You always have first clients and never forget those people.

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST EXCITING ABOUT BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR?

The ability to create a business that shares the values you share is one of the greatest things about being an entrepreneur. It’s something we can’t lose sight of when decisions have to be made and, even with a tiny organization of four, is why we have core values written down to help guide decisions.

FOR THE FULL INTERVIEW, PLEASE VISIT 269MAG.COM.

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1876

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1920



B.C.E.

C.E.

How the Evolution of Communication Tools Drives CSM Group's Engagement

BY HEATHER BAKER
INFOGRAPHIC ADAM ROSSI
PHOTOS COURTESY OF CSM GROUP



WITH
LORI GREEN
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN COMMUNICATING SINCE THEIR APPEARANCE ON EARTH. THE ACT OF COMMUNICATING STARTED WITH SETS OF DISORGANIZED SIGNS AND SOUNDS TO TRANSFER MESSAGES FROM ONE HUMAN TO ANOTHER—MOST LIKELY TO WARN OF DANGER OR PINPOINT THE LOCATION OF FOOD.

As sounds developed into words and then word patterns, the art of storytelling evolved to pass on information in tribal communities or villages from one generation to the next. Cave paintings entered the picture 40,000 years ago as juices from fruits or animal blood were used to paint tales of primitive life.

Communications changed as ancient civilizations developed writing systems. The Egyptians used hieroglyphics around 3400 BC on stone monuments and papyrus, the Chinese formed characters on oracle bones around 1250 BC, and the Phoenicians developed an alphabet in 1100 BC.

Handwritten books, mostly religious in nature, appeared 1,000 years before the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1439. This invention forever revolutionized communication as the mass production of books now meant that information could reach, well, the masses.

Improvements in efficiency and regularity were the next communication upgrades. Used



to communicate for centuries, handwritten letters from a sender depended upon a traveler's goodwill and successful conclusion of a journey to reach their recipient. It wasn't until the Thirteen Colonies appointed Benjamin Franklin to be the first postmaster general in 1775 that organized systems for communication were formed.

Speed was the next process improvement. The telegraph came in the early 1830s and photography in 1839. The Pony Express was coming, and it did officially in 1860 getting those above-mentioned letters where they needed to be faster. Alexander Bell's invention of the telephone transmitting sound through air followed in 1876. Radio was the hottest technology trend in the early 1890s, bringing music, commercials, and news directly into homes. Progressing rapidly in the 1920s, television sets officially started to replace those radios in 1947. In 1973, Motorola's handheld phone freed people from the telephone wall cord. Then came the internet and with it social media and blogging.

Communication is something that people inherently do. Improved throughout mankind's history, it might seem easy

COMMUNICATION
 IS KEY TO
 ENGAGING
 A REMOTE
 WORKFORCE. WE
 WANT ENGAGED
 TEAMMATES
 WHO LOVE WHAT
 THEY DO AND
 WANT TO SERVE
 OUR CLIENTS.

today, but it is not always done correctly. No matter how technologically advanced we are, miscommunication happens. A failure to communicate accurately in the workplace can lead to employee arguments, reduction in productivity, and lack of motivation. On the other hand, strong communication strategies lead to real-time improvements in engagement, profitability, and output.

As communications advance, how is your business staying ahead of the game?

CSM Group, a construction management services company headquartered in Kalamazoo, Michigan, uses today's innovations in communication technology to help its clients, project partners, and others find communication solutions using technology to make their businesses more efficient. Recently, CSM Group created a division called SPARK Business Works to enhance its communications. Lori Green, the company's director of business development and marketing, met up with the *269 MAGAZINE* team to share how it works.

WHY IS COMMUNICATION CRITICAL TO YOUR SUCCESS?

Communication is key to engaging a remote workforce. With over 55 percent of CSM's work now taking place outside of the state of Michigan, ensuring our team members are engaged is fundamentally important to our culture. We have over 100 employees who work across 28 states. Our teammates, who need critical information in a timely manner, can be in Illinois this week and California the next. We want engaged teammates who love what they do and want to serve our clients.

HOW HAS YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY EVOLVED OVER TIME?

We previously used emails and weekly huddles as our main methods of communication. Unfortunately, there was no way to disseminate what emails pertained to business development, corporate key performance indicators (KPIs), strategic planning, recognition, and so on. And the huddles were poorly attended due to scheduling conflicts.

We needed another solution. We felt like we weren't really communicating like we wanted to with our teammates. Information was falling through the cracks, and we needed a way to increase the impact of messaging coming from the company versus all of the other messages received. Employees were generally feeling disengaged.

After hiring a new technology group lead, we realized through our internal company survey that we needed something different through which to communicate. In response, our technology group created our own company app as the new communication tool. The app allows us to segregate information into logical themes for employees to receive and consume on their schedule and to reference back to as needed. Simplifying what information employees wanted at their fingertips streamlined the communication process and created a more engaged workforce.

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU LEVERAGE YOUR APP TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGY AND DRIVE COMPANY PERFORMANCE?

The app provides a central location for many employee-facing applications and real-time business intelligence to our users through our KPIs. It is a corporate news hub, a place to track project status through interactive photos and comments, a method of requesting information through forms and surveys, an entry log for tracking project time, a portal for strategic documents, and a source for corporate news across the organization and its divisions.



SIMPLIFYING WHAT
INFORMATION
EMPLOYEES
WANTED AT THEIR
FINGERTIPS
STREAMLINED THE
COMMUNICATION
PROCESS AND
CREATED A
MORE ENGAGED
WORKFORCE.

It serves our human resources needs too. We push out employee information such as birthdays, anniversaries, and recognition through our Builder Awards. We do a monthly spotlight on an employee about his or her work and personal interests. We also house all of our corporate communications and key resources, such as our medical benefits, on the app.

Our team appreciates fewer emails and that we can deliver or request information from them no matter where they are.

THROUGH THE USE OF THE APP, HAS YOUR NEW COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IMPROVED ENGAGEMENT?

CSM measures engagement through our culture surveys. Past feedback told us that we needed a better communication tool with our workforce spread across the U.S. The app has been a perfect solution for us. Our current survey response rates consistently receive a 99 to 100 percent response rate, and our culture survey score is at an all-time high of 4.17 out of 5.0. The app's success so far has us excited for what comes next in our communication journey.

CAN OTHERS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT YOU HAVE DEVELOPED?

While problem-solving for our own internal needs, we saw a need within the industry. We started a division of CSM Group called SPARK Business Works and hired a team of people to work with clients, trade contractors, and other businesses to solve their software and technology issues. The division creates custom internal apps and business software, migrates systems to the cloud, and consults on facility technology needs. We invite those seeking enhanced communication tools and services to learn more about CSM's SPARK Business Works division at engagedappsolutions.com.



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-Lao Tzu

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A Q+A ABOUT LEADERSHIP WITH LOCAL LEADERS



DAN JAQUA

OWNER AND PRESIDENT
AT JAQUA REALTORS

&

LAURYN KING

TEAM LEADER, TEST LAB
AT EATON'S CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



DEFINE LEADERSHIP.

LAURYN KING: Leadership is being a developer, raising up your team, and empowering them to learn new things and develop themselves.

DAN JAQUA: Observation brings understanding. Understanding brings tolerance. Tolerance brings direction. Direction brings followers.

WHO HAS HAD A TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON YOU AS A LEADER?

LAURYN: One person is a guy who works here. His name is Andy Short. He's made an impact on me as a leader because he's so trustworthy. He's so transparent and, you know, with anything that comes out of his mouth, you know there's no smoke and mirrors behind it and he's totally committed to his team.

DAN: In our family-owned business, it's my dad. If I was fair, and I am fair, my mom, too, had a very interesting impact on my leadership. My dad developed in me this concept of tolerance or understanding and, through understanding,

you can get people to better their lives. My mom brought a different perspective that you don't typically think about in leadership. She was an art major. She's a very creative person. Creativity is so critical in leadership.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS YOU MAKE AS A LEADER OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

LAURYN: For me, since I'm a supervisor of technicians, a lot of the decisions I need to make are when to panic and when to pick battles.

DAN: What I would term our "family-oriented decisions," which lend themselves to culture decisions—those are the most important things. Once the culture gets on track or gets off track, it's either very hard to get back on track or you won't have to worry about getting off track.

WHAT IS ONE CHARACTERISTIC THAT YOU BELIEVE EVERY LEADER SHOULD POSSESS?

LAURYN: Be yourself and be passionate—other people will pick up on that.

DAN: Understanding or perspective. If you really analyze some of the best leaders out there, the best leaders from a business perspective have, in many cases, started at the very bottom. One of the greatest things that they have acquired through their journey is perspective.

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

LAURYN: I love to move. I like being active. I'll go to the gym and do fitness classes just to change it up, but I like to be moving. In the summer, I jet ski on Austin Lake or West Lake.

DAN: I absolutely love to eat. I love to shop, which is nontraditional. I like to play golf. I like skiing. I like going out. My favorite activity is to cook. If I stopped doing real estate, I would become a chef.

WHAT'S YOUR "GO-TO" LUNCH SPOT IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

LAURYN: Bowman's BBQ & Meat Market in Climax.

DAN: Bravo. I love everything about it.

IF YOU COULD GO TO DINNER WITH THREE PEOPLE, WHO WOULD THEY BE?

LAURYN: Bill Nye the Science Guy, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and Patrick Stewart.

DAN: Mike Krzyzewski from Duke. He clearly has created a culture that is incredible. I probably would say Sue, who's with my office. When we sit down at lunch, we think about all the great things that could be. The last, I would probably say, is one of our corporate citizens. I consider myself a community ambassador, so living, feeling, and touching the people in the community are the important parts for me.

WHAT ARE THREE THINGS THAT YOU CANNOT TRAVEL ON BUSINESS WITHOUT?

LAURYN: My tennis shoes, comfy clothes that I can change into, and my own supply of caffeine—Coke Zero.

DAN: My Beats. My iWatch. And then probably my tablet.

“IF YOU REALLY ANALYZE SOME OF THE BEST LEADERS OUT THERE, THE BEST LEADERS FROM A BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE HAVE, IN MANY CASES, STARTED AT THE VERY BOTTOM. ONE OF THE GREATEST THINGS THEY HAVE ACQUIRED THROUGH THEIR JOURNEY IS PERSPECTIVE.”

WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

LAURYN: Right now, I would most like to meet President Obama because he's so classy, yet he has a good sense of humor. He's a down-to-earth guy, and I would like to get his perspective on everything.

DAN: I would like to meet Oprah Winfrey. It would be interesting to really get to know her and see who she really is. I wonder about her persona and where things got picked up.

HOW DO YOU GET YOUR MOST CREATIVE IDEAS?

LAURYN: (Watching) sunrise on Saturdays. If

I'm up for it, it makes me excited and it's like anything is possible. The sun's just coming up. It's a Saturday. I've got so much ahead of me. I work in the lab as a test engineer, but I'm also the supervisor of half of the technicians. Mondays and Fridays are our busiest days. By Saturday, you've had a good night's sleep and it's a blank slate.

DAN: Through observation. For anything that comes with business, I analyze how the consumer is consuming it and then think about how it could be consumed, or how it would be more desirable to be consumed, if it was different.

WHAT ARE YOUR DAILY ROUTINES THAT KEEP YOU DEVELOPING AS A LEADER?

LAURYN: Picking up positive habits from my team. If you talk to them, they'll tell you a neat trick that they learned. It's not just lab stuff; it could be about being more organized. A lot of them have way more experience than I do. They've been around the block. They know what's going on.

DAN: Have a routine. We're a time-deprived society. Leaders don't maximize hours, they maximize minutes. That's what separates very successful people from marginally successful.

WHAT'S THE APP ON YOUR PHONE THAT YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT?

LAURYN: The Notes app because you always have spur-of-the-second ideas.

DAN: I'm an app junkie. Probably Facebook. It is the purest form of being able to stay connected with people in a way better format than what used to be.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN YOUR AND YOUR TEAM'S DAILY MOTIVATION?

LAURYN: For my team, especially, recognition is really important. Honestly, people will tell me, "I like working for this person because he will actually thank me in person for doing something." The in-person (recognition) especially makes such a huge difference.

DAN: Don't give up on the values. In my world, values, principles, and philosophies are what motivate people. I tell people: "Stick to your values, your principles, and who you are. Your customers will identify with that. When they identify with that and respect that, they'll want to work with you."

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ENSURE YOUR CONTINUED GROWTH AS A LEADER?

LAURYN: Getting out of my comfort zone. Here

at work, (it's) volunteering for something I have no idea how to do.

DAN: Top one, absolute top one, is that I have to practice. If you talk about any sort of growth in your life, it requires discipline. If you do not practice discipline in all aspects of your life, you will have difficulties getting to that next level.

“DON'T GIVE UP ON THE VALUES. IN MY WORLD, VALUES, PRINCIPLES, AND PHILOSOPHIES ARE WHAT MOTIVATE PEOPLE.”

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

LAURYN: When I moved here, I noticed that people really are passionate about (living here). You often hear: "Yeah, I live in Southwest Michigan!" They're really proud of it. I've never seen that in any other place that I've lived, and I can tell people really care about the community.

DAN: What gives me the most excitement is that I feel like Southwest Michigan is on a path for something to prove. That's exciting for me because when we have something to prove, people are competitively working at being the best.

WHAT WAS THE LAST BOOK YOU READ THAT HAD AN IMPACT ON YOU?

LAURYN: *Do Over* by Jon Acuff. You can't put it down.

DAN: *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor. It is a great perspective on what drives you or what should drive you.

WHAT IS YOUR "LIFE QUOTE"?

LAURYN: "If you have to make an apple pie from scratch, you first must invent the universe."
—Carl Sagan

DAN: Always think about the big picture. If you look at what causes stress, what causes anxiety, what causes depression, it's that we've lost sight of the big picture.

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the Life List



Wise Words

PEOPLE WHO THINK TOO MUCH BEFORE THEY ACT DON'T ACT TOO MUCH.

JIMMY BUFFETT

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RON KITCHENS
ALWAYS FORWARD

1972 | BORN IN PONTIAC, MICHIGAN

I was an only child. My dad worked for General Motors. My mom was a school teacher. I grew up shooting a gun and a bow and arrow with my dad. I was a total tomboy. I didn't hang out with the girls and play jump rope. I kind of grew up playing dodgeball and kickball with boys, which didn't really seem unusual to me. That helped me deal with men in business. It doesn't seem odd to me that I'm the only woman on a leadership team. I don't walk in a room and do an inventory of how many men or women are in the room.

1990 | GRADUATED FROM WATERFORD MOTT HIGH SCHOOL

I was definitely not one of the cool kids in high school. I was a pretty nerdy kid and had a small group of friends. I was in the band. Our football team was horrible, so the homecoming court was all band people. The cool kids were actually more in band than in sports because our school wasn't very good at sports. But I just happened to be in the band with the cool people. For me, high school was pretty generic and nondescript.

I would say the same thing for college and law school too—all very nondescript. I took the cheap route, the fast route, and the practical route. Cheap. Fast. And practical. Those (are my path's) themes.

1994 | PURSUED A DOUBLE MAJOR IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ENGLISH AT OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

I went to college to be pre-med, actually. I was going to be a forensic scientist, before (the TV show) CSI was cool, because I'm a problem-solver. That's really what I do. When I think about all the jobs I've taken, they were to solve problems.

Then two things happened. One, I realized what forensic scientists make, and that I would have to pay for medical school. So, back to my practicality, I was going to have to pay for seven to 10 years of medical school to come out and (not make much). The math didn't necessarily work well because my parents weren't paying for school, and I didn't want to be a doctor. Two, I took a required political science class taught by an ex-law school professor. The whole class was problem-solving: Here is the case, take the facts, solve the problem, and give an answer. I said to myself, "This is the best class I've ever taken in my life!" I switched from pre-med to pre-law about halfway through college.

Anne Mullally

VICE PRESIDENT OF CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE, STRYKER

STORY BY HEATHER BAKER PHOTOS BY HANNAH ZIEGLER

1997 | EARNED A LAW DEGREE FROM WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY AND WORKED AS A LITIGATOR

I got into Northwestern, Michigan, and a couple of other law schools. But, remember, I was cheap and practical. Wayne State University, if you wanted to stay in the Midwest, offered the same bar exam passage rate, and its tuition was like 50 percent less. I was not leaving Michigan, could afford 50 percent less (tuition), and get the same result. So I went to Wayne.

After graduation, I had a choice: At firms in Detroit, I would have to sit in a library for three years writing briefs, or move to Grand Rapids and work at a firm where I could go to court and start trying cases as soon as I passed the bar. I moved to Grand Rapids and worked at Law, Weathers & Richardson. Because they represented municipalities, they took young litigators and gave them any case that had potential felony convictions of two years or less. So, you really couldn't screw it up that bad. And I got to do what I wanted faster.

2000 | STARTED IN THE LEGAL DEPARTMENT AT STRYKER CORPORATION

I was engaged at the time and my fiancé, now husband, saw an ad in the *Michigan Bar Journal* for Stryker. At the time, we were going to move to either Chicago or Washington, D.C., because he is an investment banker. He saw the ad and said, "If you can get into Stryker, we're going to move to Kalamazoo. And we're going to stay there." I (got in, and) started in the legal department as assistant counsel and represented several of the divisions in whatever legal work they had. I was a "Jill" of all trades.

2005 | BECAME SENIOR DIRECTOR OF REGULATORY AFFAIRS QUALITY ASSURANCE (RAQA) FOR MEDICAL DIVISION

The head of human resources and the person who was running regulatory and quality for the corporation at the time approached me about the position. They really liked the way I worked for the business and how I tried to solve business problems—not just as a lawyer saying, "Hey, you can or can't do this," but rather asking, "What are you trying to do? I will help you try to figure it out."

I was the first person that left legal. It was a huge career gamble. It's a very different interaction with the business. Up to this point, I had functioned more as a consultant than an actual driver of business outcomes. Now, I was being integrated into the business.

2007 | ACCEPTED ROLE AS VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Two things happened in 2007. Our first daughter was born. Ironically, it was right at the time when we were switching presidents, and Brad Saar became president of the medical division. Second, the global meltdown was starting. The globe

2013 | TRANSITIONED TO MEDICAL DIVISION AS VICE PRESIDENT, CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE

In early 2013, at age 41, I found out that I was pregnant with our bonus baby. My husband and I had been trying for years to have more kids. On a visit, the doctor said, "Are you sitting down?" and informed us that we were expecting number two. I thought, "This



stopped spinning on its axis, and everybody went on a capital freeze. All we sell are capital products, so, if our customers didn't have a capital budget, they weren't going to buy our products. I put that as one of my big career learning moments: A true company's value of their people comes out when the going gets tough. The easiest thing would've been to just fire 50 or 75 people. No one would've blinked an eye because every company was laying people off left and right. Brad and I hunkered down and figured out really quickly how to not lay people off, keep our business afloat, and ride out the major downturn. We did everything we could creatively to not have to lay everybody off. We managed to ride out the storm, together.

2010 | RETURNED TO LEGAL GROUP AS VICE PRESIDENT, CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER

In 2010, I got a phone call from corporate. They were looking for a chief compliance officer for the whole corporation back in the legal group. I would serve as an officer of the corporation, travel all the time, and report to the board. It was a significant position within the company. I had about 100 compliance team members around the globe who all reported to me. I lived on a plane whenever an investigation was going on.

is the baby that I was never supposed to have." So, I walked into the head of human resources for the corporation and requested, "I want another job. I don't have to be an officer of the company. I just need to meaningfully contribute somehow so I can travel less and be home." When I left for maternity leave in September 2013, I received an offer letter from Brad, my old boss. It said something like, "We have a job for you. We'll figure it out when you get back."

TODAY | WHAT IT'S LIKE TO WORK FOR STRYKER

If you're a fit in this company and you're willing to work hard no matter where you are, this is the best place to ever be. Here, you'll have jobs you didn't know you wanted. You'll have people call you for a job description you didn't even know existed for which they think you'd be great. Most companies are way too traditional in their career tracks: There, if you're a lawyer, you'll be a lawyer and you'll be a lawyer forever; you might be a great lawyer, and that's good too. But there are not a lot of companies like Stryker, that will pick a lawyer and just send them off into business. That's a little bit of our secret sauce: If you can get in and you perform, you don't need to go work anywhere else. You can have all sorts of interesting jobs here.

ATMOSPHERE MATTERS

STORY KEITH KEHLBECK PHOTO COURTESY OF STATE THEATRE

It may come as a surprise to some that Kalamazoo is home to a vanishing breed—the atmospheric theater. The State Theatre has been a downtown Kalamazoo mainstay since 1927, and is an example of the type of movie palace, popular in the 1920s, that placed its patrons in atypical, fantasy-like surroundings. As theater historian Scott L. Hoffman notes, “Rather than seating the theater patrons in a boxlike, formal setting as passive observers of stage entertainment, the atmospheric design transported them to an exotic European courtyard or garden. A plain cerulean sky replaced the ornate dome of traditional theater design.” The most successful promoter of the style was John Ebersson, who designed the State Theatre. Cinema Treasures, an online guide celebrating the movie theater experiences, points to the rarity of this theater breed: Of the 168 theaters designed by Ebersson, only 46 remain open, among them the State.

Acts that frequented the State Theatre in its early days included opera, dramas, big bands, ballet, dance reviews, stage shows, and movies. The theater was renovated in 1964, and some of its interior decorations were removed. Amid declining revenues

and attendance, the original owner closed the theater in 1982. The closing of such a historic part of Kalamazoo mobilized community members. Local arts groups and city officials formed the “Save the State” committee in an effort to preserve the theater’s legacy along with the building. In 1985, to save it from being demolished, the Hinman Company, a real estate and property management firm, took over the building. Under the Hinman Company’s management, the interior has been restored to its original condition, with help along the way from Western Michigan University students who repainted parts of the décor. The result is an architectural gem for performing arts and live concerts.

The venue hosts approximately 60 events per year, with the goal being to provide a good variety of acts while developing the audience. “Classic rock, blues, jazz, country is huge; bluegrass is huge; alternative is pretty big,” says Executive Director Stephanie Hinman, who has been at the helm since 2014.

The theater has seen the level of community engagement grow in recent years. “It’s all about community. The more the community participates in what we’re doing, the more we’re able to do things,” adds Hinman. “This place gets in your skin; it’s your life.”



People can buy tickets in person at the box office, open on Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and on event days.

Our website—kazoostate.com—and social media are great ways to keep up with the shows. We're on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as @kazoostate.

STEPHANIE HINMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

David Brown, Executive Vice President and Chief Preservation Officer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, says, "Attachment to a place is an important indicator of how economically successful a community will be."

Hinman's hopes and dreams? "We hope to continue to build our audiences, and I would hope this is the place that will be open to do a variety of things with the community, including educational programs. We want it to be a place where people come together to be inspired and to have an impact, as well as a good time. I'm partial to historic theaters. They bring a vitality to the area and, when operating, they offer an economic boost to the community."

Hinman says the most important thing is to make lasting memories. "It's our mission that everybody has a good time, so we work really hard to have an awesome product and provide the opportunity for a great experience."

When conceiving his vision of an "atmospheric theater," John Eberson couldn't have put it any better!

TIPS FOR THEATERGOERS:

Keep an eye on the schedule. The State uses billboards, radio, flyers, social media, and its website to keep patrons up to speed on events. And, of course, there's word of mouth!

Invite your friends on Facebook. The theater creates a Facebook event for every show. If you're interested, it will pop up in your news feed, allowing you to share the information. When you RSVP to an event on Facebook, you'll be notified with the preshow newsletter containing all of the event information.

Subscribe for event notifications through Ticketmaster or through the State Theatre's email program which can be done on the State's website, kazoostate.com.

Watch for presale passwords. They will allow you to be the first to purchase tickets.

Don't trust a third-party ticket seller—unless it's Ticketmaster or an official fan club.

To bag or not to bag? What you can bring into the building and event photo policies may vary from show to show, so "stay in the loop."

Working together to create talent solutions for your business.



To compete in today's economy, Michigan businesses must find and keep skilled talent. Michigan Works! Southwest can help identify the skilled workers your business needs to thrive and grow. For more than 40 years, we have combined hands-on experience finding, training and retaining talent with the world-class research capabilities of the W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

The roots of this relationship trace back to the Great Depression, when Dr. W.E. Upjohn began a grand experiment to help displaced workers in his community. Today, nearly 85 years later, Michigan Works! Southwest continues this commitment by leading innovative talent investment solutions that meet the current and emerging needs of your business.

MICHIGAN
WORKS!
Southwest
Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo & St. Joseph Counties
michiganworkssouthwest.org



The Jump from Startup to Growth Stage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

built over the last seven or eight years where we all help each other because, one, it's the right thing to do, but it's also in our own self-interest. If we can have more companies growing rapidly at the same time, it makes it easier to recruit people to come to work for those companies or to get them to stay in Chattanooga and work for those companies. We all know talent is the lifeblood of companies; if you can't get the right people, you're dead in the water."

In Richardson, Texas, its population of 110,000 that sleeps there every night soars to 150,000 during the day as workers pour in from all over to work in one of its telecommunications businesses.

One of the keys to this city's success is the infrastructure that allows employees to commute into and out of it. Two major Dallas highways traverse Richardson's northern and southern

borders, allowing a steady flow of east-west traffic. Central expressway U.S. 75 bisects Richardson north to south. And Richardson was an early adaptor of rapid transit with four commuter rail stations along the north-south rail line transporting workers from Dallas to Richardson and on to Plano.

"Our ability to move people to Richardson is considerable," explained John Jacobs, vice president for the Richardson Economic Development Partnership, an arm of the Richardson Chamber of Commerce. "There's a very wide circle of folks that can get to Richardson because of the highway and rail linkages. For talent in general in the 7-million-population metro area, easy transportation is so important."

Quality education plays a role, too, as Richardson is home to the main campus of the University of Texas at Dallas, a public research university and one of 13 universities in Texas' university system with an enrollment of 27,000 students. "We are blessed in that we have the foremost engineering and business management university in Dallas-Fort Worth," said Jacobs. "The university pumps out a lot of engineering and science graduates, and that creates a talent pool to feed our tech companies."

Offering yet another perspective

that showcases the importance of lifestyle is Tim Cowden, president and CEO of the Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC), a private, nonprofit organization that represents the economic interests of the entire two-state, 18-county Greater Kansas City region with a population of 2.5 million.

Cowden said the city's success goes beyond business models and research and development. "There's a real sense of community here, the sense that we've got to do this ourselves," Cowden said. He pointed to companies such as Marion Laboratories, H&R Block, and Hallmark Corporate as evidence of local entrepreneurs creating spectacular success. "Ewing Marion Kauffman, Henry Block, Don Hall—they started with literally nothing and created companies with a global reach and such an impact within the region," Cowden said.

The matter of attracting and retaining top-tier talent is hugely important, Cowden said. "If your community is a company, you've got to make your region attractive to talent," he said. "Nothing else matters unless this metro area is attractive to talent from a lifestyle perspective. We have put a lot of effort into creating a very vibrant place for individuals to create a life here, to build a career. Individuals' interests are so different, a kaleidoscope really,

so we have to provide arts, major league sports, great dining. There's a vibrancy in Kansas City that has really taken off in the last five to seven years. Kansas City as a region has found its stride."

Open doors in Chattanooga, the intersection of education and buzzing highway and transit connections in Richardson, and a pulsating metro area in Kansas City are just a few ways to jump-start an entrepreneurial economy. Here in West and Southwest Michigan, Jandernoa said it all starts with the need for entrepreneurs and government agencies to work together—and they need to include the academic community, as well.

"It needs to be both public and private. You can't do it without both, in my opinion," he concluded. "I look at it as a three-legged stool: the government, the academic community, and the private sector. Entrepreneurs need feedback on things like pricing. They need to learn. Some ideas are great, but (for example) if you can't get to a price the market will support (it will not succeed)." By connecting with the available national, state, and local advocates, Southwest Michigan's entrepreneurial ventures like McFarlin's Kalamazoo Candle Company can increase the success rate of startup companies well beyond the halfway mark during their first five years in business.

Read more about the entrepreneurial climate in Chattanooga, Richardson, and Kansas City at 269Mag.com.

CHATTANOOGA, TN


“IT'S JUST LIKE BUILDING A PYRAMID—YOU'VE GOT TO BUILD A BASE TO GET TO THE TOP. THAT'S STARTING TO HAPPEN HERE.”

RICHARDSON, TX

“THE POPULATION OF 110,000 IS ONLY THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO SLEEP IN RICHARDSON; DURING THE DAY, THE CITY'S HEAD COUNT SOARS TO 150,000.”

KANSAS CITY, MO

“IF YOUR COMMUNITY IS A COMPANY, YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE YOUR REGION ATTRACTIVE TO TALENT. KANSAS CITY AS A REGION HAS FOUND IT'S STRIDE.”



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Where the New Jobs Are

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Are you a growing business in Southwest Michigan? Let us know @269Mag / 269Mag.com.

JR Automation Technologies

STEVENSVILLE, MI
BERRIEN COUNTY

jrauto.com

NEW JOBS: **60**

Modineer Coatings Division

BENTON HARBOR, MI
BERRIEN COUNTY

modineer.com

NEW JOBS: **21**

Special-Lite, Inc.

BENTON HARBOR, MI
BERRIEN COUNTY

special-lite.com

NEW JOBS: **6**

East Jordan Plastics

COLOMA, MI
BERRIEN COUNTY

eastjordanplastics.com

NEW JOBS: **3**

Haymarket Brewery & Taproom

BRIDGMAN, MI
BERRIEN COUNTY

haymarketbrewing.com

NEW JOBS: **39**

LECO Corporation

ST. JOSEPH, MI
BERRIEN COUNTY

leco.com

NEW JOBS: **6**

Verified Design

KALAMAZOO, MI
KALAMAZOO COUNTY

verifieddesign.com

NEW JOBS: **5**



BY
RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO
COURTESY OF RON KITCHENS



From Peddling Bubble Gum to Refilling Gas Tanks

THE LIFE CYCLE OF SMALL BUSINESSES IS ALWAYS EVOLVING

SPRING CLEANING IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS TO DO.

I know, weird, right? It is not just about getting things into some semblance of order; it is also about looking back on the past.

One of my spring cleaning projects this year is to have all of our photographs scanned and organized into digital files. During this process, I ran headlong into this picture of my first business, The Gas Shack, where our slogan was “Pumping to Please.” Located in Ozark, Missouri, The Gas Shack was my first real business. I say real because, before I had ever heard of the word “entrepreneur,” I was one. Whether I was buying gum on my walk to school to resell to my classmates, raising rabbits for “Easter bunnies,” or selling organic fertilizer that I harvested from horse barns, I have always been a small-business person.

The Gas Shack was a great place for me to learn what it means to be in business—from payroll and

people, to inventory management and creative marketing (hence, the catchy slogan). I have carried these lessons forward through my entire career. But one of the most recent lessons The Gas Shack taught me occurred a few years ago.

My daughter, Kelsey, and I set out on a pilgrimage to see the mythical place known as The Gas Shack. First, I should say that I have not owned it for decades. I knew that it had long been converted into another use. So I did not expect to buy gas for the \$1.25 that was advertised on the sign in the picture. But I was completely unprepared when I learned that the building had been wiped from the face of the earth. (Okay, I am a little bitter.) I would like to tell you that Kelsey and I had a great discussion about market forces or the changing demographics in America or even life cycle analysis of poorly constructed buildings. Nope. I whined to her about somebody stealing my youth and not having an appreciation for my legacy.

Today, with a little distance between that day and today, I realize that life and business change. That is how it

is supposed to be. Gary Vaynerchuk, the serial entrepreneur, says the great businesspeople know that their job is to “wake up every morning and put (themselves) out of business.” This idea seems to be all around us today. While it is easy to spot the yellow and black “Going Out of Business” signs, we are also seeing the continued change of customers’ needs, wants, and desires, and the speed at which they want them.

Much like the way we are seeing many traditional retailers fail to compete with Amazon and internet shopping websites, The Gas Shack, with its full-service pumps and lack of floor space, could not compete in today’s retail environment. There is hope and opportunity: As more products and services become commodities, consumers are becoming hungry for authenticity and experiences that cannot be replicated or shipped free overnight. This gives me great hope for that next kid who stops to buy gum to sell at recess.

She has never had a better time to be in business with unfettered access to customers and suppliers. Serving customers is her legacy, not a lot where a building once stood.

Politicians and community boosters talk a lot about small businesses. American Express even branded a shopping day as Small Business Saturday. But the reality is that we have to do more than just talk about small businesses as if they are all the same. For us to be successful as a region and its individual communities, our small businesses must become points of pride for their unique offerings and experiences. We, as consumers, no longer just shop; we award our dollars and loyalty to businesses that go beyond those that just offer the lowest cost. If we are truly going to be a great region, we must become a region of remarkable retail establishments and restaurants. As consumers, we must then reward them with our money, loyalty, and commitment.

ALWAYS FORWARD,

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