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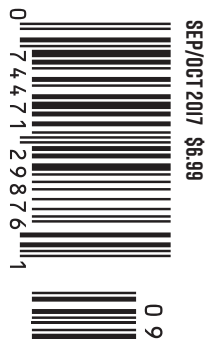
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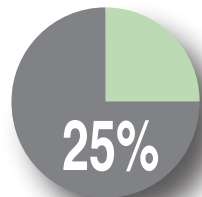
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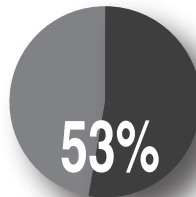
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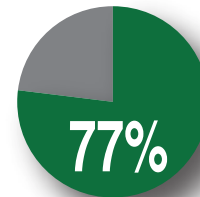
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STAFF

PUBLISHER RON KITCHENS

EDITOR IN CHIEF HEATHER BAKER

CREATIVE DIRECTORS SCOTT MILLEN

MARTIN SCHOENBORN

DESIGN/COVER ILLUSTRATION ADAM ROSSI

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS MITCH CONRAD

MIRANDA GARSIDE

STEVE HERPPICH

JOHNNY QUIRIN

DAN VAN DUINEN

HANNAH ZIEGELER

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR MICHELLE MILLEN

ADVERTISING NICK RIASHI

— NICK@269MAG.COM

PETEY STEPHANAK

— PETEY@269MAG.COM

RESEARCH ISABEL PAVONE

JOBS REPORT JILL BLAND

PRINTER RIVER RUN PRESS

SUBSCRIPTIONS 269MAG.COM/SUBSCRIBE

CONTRIBUTORS

HEATHER BAKER

REGAN DEWAAL

MIKE ODAR

BRIANNA PATE

ANDREA PRATT

RICK VAN GROUW

WHAT LIES AHEAD

My legacy will be...

The women and men whom I have worked with who go on to be great point leaders.

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BY HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR IN CHIEF

PHOTOS JOHNNY QUIRIN

Leave Your Mark

FROM JOBS TO ART, THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN



THIS ISSUE OF 269 MAGAZINE INTRODUCES YOU TO SOME INSTANCES OF LEGACY LEADERSHIP IN OUR COMMUNITY. OUR HOPE IS TO INSPIRE YOU TO DETERMINE YOURS.

Some of our examples come from families with deep roots here in Southwest Michigan. Many founded businesses that residents once patronized or continue to patronize. They choose to give back to the community, which has in turn been good to them.

For example, there's the story of two brothers whom you'll meet in a bit, Bob Jr. and Fritz Brown, who grew up in Kalamazoo. After graduation, they pursued careers outside of our borders, yet ultimately returned to lead businesses here which provide jobs for our residents. You may know their companies—Treystar Holdings and Access Medical. But, you may not know about their work with the Monroe-Brown Foundation and one of its programs—the Monroe-Brown Internship Program.

Each year the foundation offers approximately 40 scholarships to local public university attendees or those who graduated from Greater Kalamazoo area high schools and now attend approved Michigan private universities. The catch is that the full-time college students must complete internships at area employers to earn the scholarship. At the end of the internship, the student receives not only applied career experience in the Southwest Michigan business community but also \$3,500 in scholarship funds. What's in it for the foundation? Students experience Southwest Michigan. And local companies benefit from trying

out talent firsthand. Oftentimes as many as 70 percent of program participants continue working for the employer. Roots get planted for legacies yet to come.

We are blessed to have many committed family foundations in our community, but you don't need access to one to leave a legacy.

If you happened to visit Kalamazoo's Edison neighborhood during July and early August, you probably noticed large-scale portraits going up in the vicinity, including those on the former Kalamazoo Color Lab building at 1324 Portage Road. Who appears in these portraits captured by professional photographer and longtime Edison resident Fran Dwight? Edison residents living in Washington Square Senior Co-Op Apartments, visitors to the Día del Niño celebration at the Hispanic American Council, and attendees at May's Art Hop in Washington Square.

The purpose of this installation is twofold. The "We Are Edison" installation is part of Inside Out, an international public art project begun by French street artist JR in 2011. Inside Out gives participants the chance to share their portraits, untold stories, and transformational

There's the story of two brothers whom you'll meet in a bit, Bob Jr. and Fritz Brown, who grew up in Kalamazoo. After graduation, they pursued careers outside of our borders, yet ultimately returned to lead businesses here which provide jobs for our residents.

INTERESTED IN OPENING A RETAIL OR RESTAURANT BUSINESS IN KALAMAZOO'S EDISON NEIGHBORHOOD?

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If you happened to visit Kalamazoo’s Edison neighborhood during July and early August, you probably noticed large-scale portraits going up in the vicinity.

messages of personal identity. The result: viewers are enraptured with community connectedness.

Second, the project, coordinated by LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation) Americorps representative Anna Roeder, serving with the Kalamazoo County Land Bank, hopes to show off vacant spaces actively being revitalized by neighborhood residents and partners. The Kalamazoo Color Lab is the

seventh and final commercial suite available for sales or lease through the Land Bank’s retail and commercial acceleration program. Most recently in late spring, the restaurant Pho on the Block (POTB) opened its doors to those looking to enjoy blended Asian cuisine.

Within a community, there are many legacies. Some become well-known. Others make a quiet impact. Both are vital to a community’s vibrancy and continuance. I encourage you to visit the “We Are Edison” project, think

on how those featured in this issue continue the legacy of those who came before them, or simply say “thank you” to those who have affected you positively.

Let their legacy live on. Through you.

READ ON,

Heather

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I HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY FORTUNATE TO HAVE NUMEROUS MENTORS THROUGHOUT MY CAREER AND MY LIFE. WHILE MANY OF THEM COME FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS, I HAVE ALWAYS SEEN TWO COMMON THEMES.

First, there are no shortcuts to success. We have a saying at Schupan that I have seen proven countless times over the years: “Effort beats ability more times than not.” Many times, people see only the glitz and glitter of success. It is easy to forget the enormous investments in time, resources, and most importantly, failures along the way that served as the foundation for success. I am a firm believer that people need to fail faster to succeed sooner.

Second, there is nothing more clever than honesty and sincerity. At the end of the day, people want to follow a leader they can trust and whom they know will stand behind them. People sense when someone is sincere, and that allows for real relationships and better problem solving. This lesson also serves well in times of adversity. In life and in business, mistakes and misfortune will always be present. Admitting your shortcomings and surrounding yourself with people who fill in your gaps are imperative to building a successful team.

MY MENTOR, MY FATHER, SETS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF LOOKING FORWARD, SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES, AND FINE-TUNING THEM AS THEY PROGRESS.

As a leader, it is easy to get bogged down with management tasks, but he has encouraged me to keep the big picture in mind. His leadership has shaped my ability to lead.

YOU CAN'T EVER UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSTANTLY WORKING AT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS—BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THAT GO BENEATH THE SURFACE—AND UNDERSTANDING WHO YOUR TEAMMATES ARE, WHERE THEY'VE BEEN, AND WHERE THEY HOPE TO GO.

When I first joined the team, my mentor and leader quoted her mentor to me, who said, “We are all going to disappoint each other at some point, and it is much tougher to forgive one another if we don't have a solid relationship built. If we truly know and value one another as human, then we can more easily forgive and come out stronger because of it.” The foundation we have built has given her the ability to allow me room to take risks on my own and grow immensely, while also showing me what it looks and feels like to have trust in and feel supported by your leader.



BRENT LALOMIA

VICE PRESIDENT, QUALITY & FACILITIES
STRYKER CORPORATION



ALEX WEISHAAR

CONTROLLER
STURGIS MOLDED PRODUCTS



THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND IS LEADING WITH AUTHENTICITY.

Authentic leaders build trust, but being authentic doesn't always come naturally. It takes work. It requires awareness of your strengths and your weaknesses as an individual. It requires being comfortable with and knowing yourself. Secondly, a leader must look at the team collectively and appreciate the diversity of talents. But more than just appreciating talents, it is imperative to leverage the talents of the team to achieve a greater purpose—to propel the business forward. Finally, a leader must remember that there is life beyond work. A leader must support a healthy work-life balance, and be a living example of that, encouraging others to be involved in their families and their communities.

MY MENTORS HAVE INSTILLED IN ME THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT ASSET OF ANY ORGANIZATION IS PEOPLE—THEY FOCUSED ON THE PEOPLE ON THEIR TEAMS FIRST.

Understanding an individual's strengths and weaknesses not only provides an environment for a person to succeed, but it also allows leaders to identify what motivates their team, creating a more efficient and effective workforce. People-focused teams give an organization the best opportunity to innovate, solve problems, and exceed the needs of its employees and customers. By putting people first, organizations and leaders can perform at the top.



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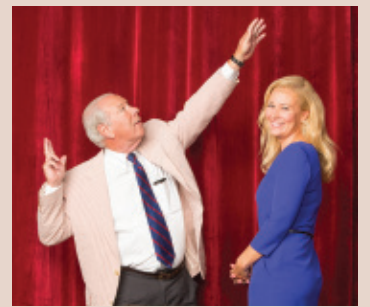


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LOOKING



TO THE



FUTURE

SOMETIMES SUCCESSION IS A FAMILY AFFAIR; SOMETIMES IT'S A WELL-PLAYED GAME OF STRATEGY **BY RICK VAN GROUW**

PHOTOS DAN VAN DUINEN



In 1966, Paul Clark founded Sturgis Molded Products Co. The company quickly grew to become one of the largest employers in town—and remains so. Clark ran a solid and profitable business, but planning for the future wasn't top of mind. Shortly before he died on December 31, 1991, Clark named Ronald Leist to succeed him as company president, but Leist died in 1994, leaving the company without strong leadership.

"We weren't appropriately prepared, although it worked out fine," says Mark Weishaar, current president of Sturgis Molded Products.

Today, "we feel strongly that we want to have an independent small business that isn't bought by conglomerations or equity guys. We want this to be family-owned forever." The missing element was a sound plan for the company's future leadership and growth.

Succession planning involves figuring out who will move a company forward after current leadership is gone, but it often also includes business and estate planning—especially when a company is family owned.

According to attorney David Thoms, senior counsel at Warner, Norcross & Judd in Kalamazoo, succession planning at its core

SOMETIMES
MY DAD TAKES
A DIFFERENT
PATH THAN
I DO, BUT
FREQUENTLY
WE END UP
AT THE SAME
CONCLUSION.

NATALIE VALENTINE

involves identifying goals and mapping ways to attain them.

“If we were drawing a flow chart, on the top you have succession planning—which is largely an undefined term—and then you can go in one of two directions,” said Thoms, a 37-year veteran attorney. “One would be the instance of a publicly traded company and would involve the succession of officers and leadership. The other direction would be a closely held business



owner and how he or she moves the ownership and officership and leadership on to successive generations or maybe third parties. They are the same in that both are trying to anticipate the future and what is best for the company, but when you have a closely held business, it is a total overlap with the estate planning and what is best for the company and the ownership.”

The bottom line, Thoms said, is to identify company and ownership goals based on available facts.

“It’s totally a fact-driven and tax code–assisted experience,” he said. “It is: ‘What are my real goals? I have four kids, one of whom is wonderful in the business, one of whom is mediocre in the business, and oops—the other two have never touched the business. How am I going to treat them fairly with the succession of my company?’ Every fact pattern is going to lead you down a different route, but there’s pretty much a route for every fact pattern. The hard part is to decide, ‘What do I want to achieve?’”

WE WANT THIS TO BE FAMILY-OWNED FOREVER.

MARK WEISHAAR
STURGIS MOLDED PRODUCTS

Succession planning has become a top priority at Sturgis Molded Products since the hard lesson learned. “It’s been a really amazing transition,” Weishaar said. “They were caught with their pants down. Our succession plan is critical. That’s not going to happen to us again.”

The company’s current leadership consists of Weishaar as company president with four vice presidents. Clark descendants remain partners in the company, but very silent, Weishaar said.

“We have a 10-year plan with the requirement that each of our positions will train up appropriate people—someone in place to

carry on our strategy as we go forward,” Weishaar said. “We’re all in our early and late 50s. Within the next decade, we’ll need an entirely new leadership team. It’s pretty obvious that we’re all leaving at some point.”

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Some companies look to third parties for successive leadership; others are wholly a family affair.

Chris Tracy, a partner at Honigman, a leading business law firm, said roughly half his business clients look to the next generation for leadership, and half turn to outside leadership. “If it’s not 50-50, it’s not far off,” Tracy said. “A fair amount of the time, it just doesn’t make sense or the interest isn’t there.” On the other hand, “A fair amount of the time, families want to remain involved, and the family business starts to look more attractive to the second generation.”

Tom Huff, a Kalamazoo native, opened his own law practice in 1975. Later, he opened a Kalamazoo office for Varnum, Riddering, Schmidt, and Howlett.

Huff recalls gazing at the Kalamazoo skyline from his law office in the American Natural Bank building. “I had an affinity for urban real estate,” he says. “I traveled a lot, and I could see what was happening in other cities. People started to relocate to the second floors of these buildings. They had nice architectural features. They were historical buildings.”

He acquired some investment capital and started to buy old buildings in downtown Kalamazoo.

“I decided to develop some of the upper floors of some of these buildings and I was the first to do it, and it worked, so I just kept doing it. It kept getting bigger and bigger,” Huff said.

Today Huff’s real estate portfolio includes 15 mixed-use office and residential buildings, five parking lots, and 74 apartments. Although he continues to practice law on a limited basis, Huff

REGARDING SUCCESSION:

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

START SOONER, NOT LATER

Succession planning can get messy, and experts say the idea is to map the future—not to wait for it.

“They should deal with those issues early on,” suggests Chris Tracy of Honigman. “Not that they won’t fine-tune their plan over time, but they should start the process early-ish in their career. Some people never do it. They work until their 70s or 80s or 90s and it doesn’t get done, but instead gets left to the next generation to sort out.”

CANDOR IS KEY

Start-up business owners often struggle with succession planning. After all, they created a business from scratch, they know the company better than anybody, and sometimes they experience difficulty letting go.

“Entrepreneurs have had a lot of control, and now they may need to give up control or at least the perception of control,” Tracy said. “They have to get over the hump and convince themselves: ‘I have to share more information with my family, with my spouse, with my internal team, and with outsiders. I need to be transparent. I need to feel less controlling of all this. I need them all on my team moving forward.’”



said. In 2010, she “started to get my feet wet doing accounting work, and then I transitioned into working full time, integrating newer technology into the way Peregrine operated.” For example, she implemented new accounting software and property management software.

Valentine said. “Sometimes my dad takes a different path than I do, but frequently we end up at the same conclusion. My dad is a visionary and he thinks out of the box. He comes up with these huge ideas; I’m usually more practical, much more conservative.”

MY DAD IS A VISIONARY AND THINKS OUT OF THE BOX. I’M USUALLY MORE PRACTICAL, MUCH MORE CONSERVATIVE.

NATALIE VALENTINE (WITH TOM HUFF)
PEREGRINE COMPANY

eventually left Varnum to run Peregrine Co., his real estate holding firm, fulltime. But he no longer serves as company president. He passed that torch to his daughter, Natalie Valentine.

“As a little girl, I would come down on Saturday morning to sweep parking lots, get snow off roofs,” Valentine said. “I have always kind of been in the business; I have always watched [my father] manage and maintain his properties.” After college, Valentine worked elsewhere, but in 2000 she earned her real estate license and began to think about going into business with her father.

“I knew I was going to stay in Kalamazoo and, since we had this family company, it was a natural fit for me,” Valentine

Though small—the Peregrine Co. payroll sustains two employees in addition to Huff and Valentine—the company’s succession plan is embedded in its articles of organization. “The fact that I’m here and we have a plan in place lends credibility and consistency to the way Peregrine operates,” Valentine said.

Huff’s elder daughter, Heidi, expressed little interest in working at Peregrine. She lived overseas for several years and worked as a buyer for the Ford Motor Co.; today, she lives on Michigan’s east side.

Valentine and Huff approach the business from across a generational divide, yet they both contribute to the company’s success.

“We have a shared vision of how we want to grow our business and how we want to represent Peregrine to the community,”

Once, Huff decided to cut a hole in the roof of the Peregrine Plaza Building, a 100,000-square-foot structure in Kalamazoo. Valentine pushed back, but Huff insisted. In the end, the project resulted in recessed outdoor courtyards, improved natural lighting, and space for additional apartments.

On that one, “he was right,” Valentine conceded.

“We have two different generations here,” Huff added. “I’m a risk-taker, she’s a lot more averse to risk than I am. I understand that. I’m getting on in years, and I’m looking to her and even her children to identify what’s happening in the market. I defer to her on a lot of that kind of stuff.”

At the same time, because he practiced corporate law and estate planning, Huff is keenly aware of the importance of succession

COMMUNICATE

It’s important to identify goals to start the succession planning process.

“You have to first examine what is it you want to achieve,” says David Thoms of Warner, Norcross & Judd. “It might be that you don’t want to hold onto the business past the first generation anyway, and so you start shopping for an outsider. And that’s a whole new set of considerations.”

ASSEMBLE THE BEST PLANNING TEAM


“Make sure you have a good team of advisors,” Tracy said. “Your team should include some internal company people—a good CFO, maybe a family member. Internal people are important because they know the nuances of your business.”

And, be sure to bring outside experts into the planning process.

“CPAs, attorneys, investment people—they all need to understand the plan,” Tracy said. “They can all help with different parts of the plan.”

Thoms said first-generation business owners who want to keep the business in the family also need to make honest assessments of their children’s skill sets and abilities.

“I went through one case in which the oldest son would have loved to be president of the company, but he wasn’t the right person to be the president. His brother was,” Thoms said. “He’s still with the company, and they have a buy-sell agreement if he leaves, but the truth is he’s better at sales and the other brother is better at administrative detail.”

A photograph of three business professionals in an office setting. In the foreground, a man with glasses and a striped shirt is looking towards the right. Behind him, a woman with blonde hair in a bun and a white blouse is smiling and looking at a laptop. In the background, another woman with dark hair is working on a laptop. The scene is lit with soft, warm light, and a large, semi-transparent white shape is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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planning. “I’m eminently aware of how important it is to the family business,” he said. “I’ve represented so many, and although they’re all so different, I have seen many cases in which the parent is reluctant to relinquish control, and doesn’t recognize the maturity of their kids.”

BEYOND FAMILY BOUNDS

In 1969, Robert M. Brown and a partner established Treystar, a real estate development company. The business has grown over the years, and today Treystar owns several shopping centers in Kalamazoo, and more than half a million square feet of office and retail space.

“We’re a family company, and always have been,” said Fritz Brown, Robert Brown’s son and Treystar partner. “When you have families involved, you want to hand it down to the next generation. We knew Dad wasn’t going to be doing this forever, so you do one of two things—you either sell the company and liquidate, or you pass it down to your children—at least the ones that are interested in the business.”

Although Brown declined to reveal details of the company’s succession plan, he did say his father will pass the company to him and his brother Bob Jr., who recently started to work at Treystar in addition to successfully operating his own durable medical supply company in Kalamazoo. Both felt close ties to the community and the real estate business. Their sister is a nurse practitioner in Connecticut, and a brother owns a boat building company in North Carolina.

“It never hurts to start thinking about it early,” Brown said. “No one really knows how things will turn out in the end. The most important thing is to give employees confidence that there’s still going to be a company to be part of, even if the founder steps down. That’s the most important thing from our standpoint. There’s got to be a sense of continuity, that things will go on no matter what.”

A CENTURY IN ENERGY

Luke Miller is the fourth generation to run the family business, Miller Energy Co. Luke joined the company in 2008 after working for Atlas Energy Company in Pittsburgh; his cousin Drew Martin joined after working in banking and finance, most recently with Fifth Third Bank in Grand Rapids. “One of the prerequisites my dad placed on any family members who expressed an interest in working in the family business was to go out and get experience outside the family business first,” Miller said.

Miller Energy traces its roots back to the early 1920s, when Luke Miller’s and Martin’s great-grandfather Clyde Miller started an oil drilling company in Kentucky with his brother George. Clyde and George Miller moved to Michigan in the 1930s as



ONE OF THE PREREQUISITES MY DAD PLACED ON ANY FAMILY MEMBERS WHO EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN WORKING IN THE FAMILY BUSINESS WAS TO GO OUT AND GET EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY BUSINESS FIRST.

LUKE MILLER (WITH MICHAEL MILLER)
MILLER ENERGY CO.

the Michigan oil and gas industry rose to prominence. The company transitioned to its second generation in the 1950s, when Clyde’s sons, C. John and Gene Miller, founded Miller Brothers in Allegan. Over the years, John and Gene Miller transformed their company from a drilling operation into an exploration and production company.

Luke’s father, Michael J. Miller, joined Miller Brothers in the 1970s after graduating from Western Michigan University with a business degree. He worked in the company’s land department, helping to secure leases for future development opportunities. In 1988, the company sold virtually its entire operation to Conoco, and John and Mike Miller created Miller Energy.

Today, Luke and Drew are focused on building the fourth generation of the business by moving back into operations with a concentration on Michigan. “Drew and I came back specifically

to focus on Michigan,” Miller said. “We came with an eagerness to get back to a position where we are operating oil and gas properties.”

To establish its formal succession plan, leadership at Miller Energy relied on internal staff and hired outside experts. “It was insightful having somebody from outside the family realm look at things,” Miller said. “In the throes of day-to-day work, you kind of have blinders on. It was good to have that third-party perspective that was unbiased and not entrenched in the generational business.”

However succession planning takes shape at various companies, it’s important to remember they’re likely to evolve over time.

“I think it’s important to realize the process in general is very fluid,” Miller said. “It’s not a static ‘Make a change and let it sit.’ It’s ‘Make a plan and from day one you’re beginning to adjust it.’ It’s always changing.”



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COVER STORY VIEWPOINT

Mike Odar

PRESIDENT,
GREENLEAF TRUST
KALAMAZOO, MI

CULTURE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN A WORKING ENVIRONMENT.

At Greenleaf Trust, our culture benefits not only colleagues, but ultimately our clients. We intentionally create a culture where we look for talented people, and then create an environment for them to do their thing and be who they are. If our team has the types of opportunities to do what they love and be who they are, who's going to benefit from that? The client. This type of culture allows us to create a rich relationship with them. We work hard at it every day. It takes a lot of daily work, but it's one of those things where, if we work hard at it, the benefits are immeasurable.

Trust, candor, and recognition are backbones of our culture.

Before collaboration, there needs to be a foundation of trust. It's not something that somebody is brought into and automatically

happens. Trust takes a lot of work. There's going to be times that people disappoint me, and I know there's going to be times when I disappoint them. When these situations happen, we respond through our foundation of trust.

I believe in the use of candor in our world. Candor is not a bad thing, and it's not something that's personal. We don't want to have a meeting after the meeting. If someone has something on their mind or if there's something that we can do better, we encourage them to speak up. The thing I tell everybody on their first day of work is this: "In your first 20 days, you're going to be onboarding. Be a sponge. Soak it all up. After that, we want to know how we can get better."

Recognition is a big thing for us. It must be appropriate recognition. It's not necessarily bringing someone up on stage and saying, "Hey, you did a great job," which could be terribly terrifying to someone. Recognition might be more meaningful behind the scenes, delivered in a relational setting. It's important to know that our colleagues know they are appreciated.

In my role, I focus on developing current and future leaders to support our clients within our culture. I have profited from my exposure to great mentors, like Bill Johnston, who have

helped to shape my perspectives. Here are a few things I've learned that guide me as I help others develop in their careers.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD I GIVE MY 20-YEAR-OLD SELF?

I would tell him to be more mindful. By mindful, I mean be in the moment. Focus on the experience at hand. I do a lot of self-reflection. I'm an achiever. So, if you give me something to do, I'm going to do it. That's the way I approached college. I worked hard. But

if I was more mindful, more in the moment, I believe I would have had more opportunities to learn. It wasn't until I went to the University of Chicago's Advanced Management program that that sunk in. I was more aware of myself so I could really soak up the learning environment.

If you can be who you are at all times, you're going to connect more to the people around you.

AS A POINT LEADER IN THE ORGANIZATION, WHAT DO I WISH I KNEW BEFORE I TOOK THIS ROLE?

You lead people. You mentor them. Your job as a manager, when you deal with people whom you lead, is not about what you need to get done. It's about helping them grow and helping them get what needs to be done. What is difficult is motivating people who are different than you. I've learned through motivating that you should check yourself every once in a while. Some people might need a little bit more help, a little bit more guidance. Learning that has been a journey, but it's fun once you understand who that person is you are motivating. Then you have a playbook and know the right buttons to push and how to motivate them.

We don't want to have meeting after meeting. If someone has something on their mind or if there's something that we can do better, we encourage them to speak up.

FIND A MENTOR. WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

I view a mentor as somebody who is going to be there. It can be official. It can be unofficial. Mentors don't even have to be in your same company. They can be in different companies, different parts of the community. Look for somebody who you can go to for advice, somebody who you can go to and who believes in you unconditionally. Your mentor has to also be able to give you hard feedback, like, "Mike,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51 ►



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COVER STORY VIEWPOINT

Brianna Pate

DIRECTOR,
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST
KALAMAZOO, MI

MILLENNIALS. YOU CAN'T LIVE WITH THEM, BUT YOU REALLY CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT THEM.

Over time, our society has developed a common narrative of the millennial generation (individuals between 18 and 35 years old, give or take a year or two) that is, in large part, a mischaracterization for many millennials. Hopefully by the end of this piece, you will have a more conclusive and better understanding of millennials in the workplace and get a glimpse into what we really want. After all, the millennial generation is the largest generation in the workforce.

To start, let's get one thing straight: Millennials are absorbed with work. In fact, according to a recent study by the World Economic Forum, more than 40 percent of work martyrs are millennials. While many see us as lazy slackers (cough, the media) with a serious entitlement problem, we are a generation of individuals who sacrifice things of great value (hobbies, social

gatherings, relationships) for the sake of work we believe in. Further, in the technology-driven age of today, there is constant connection to our clients, teams, and work through Slack, Skype, iPhones, and mobile desktops. For example, I commute an hour to work each way. To aid in my success, I work from a remote location one to two times per week. This might not have been possible 10 years ago, but thanks to my iPhone and a remote desktop that functions just as if I were in the office, I can operate at full strength from Grand Rapids.

Perhaps you don't fall into the category of society that believes millennials to be lazy, but even so, you may not know what we want when it comes to the workplace. The three most important things millennials look for in a career are financial compensation, growth and career opportunities, and sense of purpose, with work-life balance coming in a very close fourth. You don't have to take my word for it. Global Shapers Survey gives us the numbers: 54 percent of surveyed millennials consider financial compensation one of the three most important criteria when considering a job, compared to 45 percent who value career advancement the most, and 37 percent who think having a sense of purpose is the most important factor. In short, millennials desire to be paid well and grow personally

Stewarding the future is not to be a conflict of old versus young or generation versus generation, but rather something in which everyone has a share.

and professionally. Then, in turn, they feel empowered to impact on society.

The problem isn't that millennials aren't hard-working. The problem is that we are unconventional in our work. I believe we can all agree that our generation has caused quite the disruption in the workplace and life in general. However, I want to reinforce that the dilemma lies not in our work ethic but in the way we work. Existing point leaders and organizations

consistently try to squeeze millennials into their current mold. It has worked thus far, so it should work now, right? No. Leaders need to strive to understand and acclimate our generation to the workplace. With a mindset of learning and a spirit of collaboration, we can take organizations to the next level. Or point

To start, let's get one thing straight: Millennials are absorbed with work.

leaders can choose the easy route and continue to avoid change, turn the other way, and chalk us up as lazy.

Whether you pick the former or latter, I am here to share that the exodus of boomers from the workforce will soon result in millennials filling every leadership role at every organization. Ready or not, here we come! The innovations, choices, investments, and resource management decisions point leaders make today can shrink or stretch the future for our organizations tomorrow. The way CEOs lead now affects the way in which millennials will integrate into the C-suite. It takes great coaching to take a chance on a generation that can ultimately change the game for years to come.

I think it is time we all stop pointing fingers

and casting general characterizations and start working together. Once we collectively see the future as a public good to be stewarded rather than owned, we can cultivate the vision and tools to govern it so access to opportunities will endure from generation to generation. Stewarding the future is not to be a conflict of old versus young or generation versus generation, but rather something in which everyone has a share.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51 ►

they made it possible

After working in the health-care industry for many years, Melanie Norman decided it was time for a change. She and husband Jeff worked with Arbor Financial to purchase Great Lakes Pondscapes last July, and they've been creating tranquility for customers ever since.

Melanie Norman

Co-Owner
Great Lakes Pondscapes

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SOURCE: "GLOBAL SHAPERS ANNUAL SURVEY," WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2016

TOP 10 MANAGERIAL TRAITS

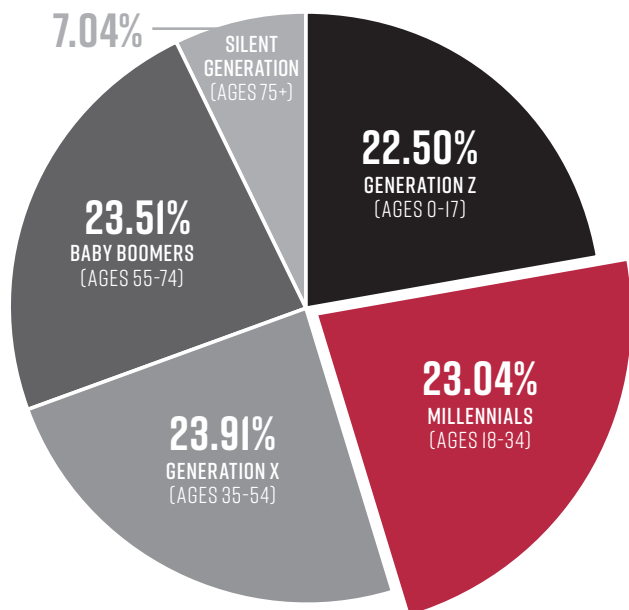
THAT MILLENNIALS VALUE
IN THE WORKPLACE

- 1 INTEGRITY AND HONESTY
- 2 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR AND LISTENER
- 3 EFFECTIVE AT EXECUTING DECISIONS, IMPLEMENTING, AND DELEGATING
- 4 EFFECTIVE AT MAKING DECISIONS
- 5 CREATIVE AND EFFECTIVE AT EXPLORING NEW POSSIBILITIES
- 6 EMBRACES DIVERSITY AND HAS NO FAVORITES
- 7 WARM, APPROACHABLE, AND EMPATHETIC
- 8 WILLINGNESS TO LEARN FROM OTHERS, INCLUDING PATIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY
- 9 PARTICIPATES IN GETTING WORK DONE WITHOUT MICROMANAGING
- 10 SELF-MOTIVATED AND A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

PHOTO | STOCK.COM/LITTLEHENRABI

THE CURRENT LEADER'S LEGACY

There's no perfect science to figuring out the start and end dates of the generations, with various think tanks, like the Pew Research Center, MetLife, Gallup, and Australia's McCrindle Research Center, all using different models. Here's 269 MAGAZINE's take based on 2017 U.S. Census estimates for the generations in Southwest Michigan.



WHAT'S THE DEFINITION OF A WORK MARTYR?

Those who believe that it is too difficult to take vacation because they believe no one else can fill in for them, want to show their dedication, worry they'll be seen as replaceable, or feel just plain guilty for using paid time off.

SOURCE: "THE WORK MARTYR'S CAUTIONARY TALE," PROJECT: TIME OFF, 2016

BY THE NUMBERS

70%

OF **MILLENNIALS** LOOK OPTIMISTICALLY TO THE FUTURE (AND MORE THAN HALF BELIEVE THEY CAN ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO DECISION-MAKING IN THEIR COUNTRIES).

SOURCE: "GLOBAL SHAPERS ANNUAL SURVEY," WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2016

74%

OF **MILLENNIAL JOB SEEKERS** WANT TO KNOW THAT THEIR WORK MATTERS.

SOURCE: "PURPOSE AT WORK—GLOBAL REPORT," LINKEDIN, 2016

43%

OF **WORK MARTYRS** ARE MILLENNIALS. (COMPARED TO JUST 29% OF OVERALL RESPONDENTS)

SOURCE: "THE WORK MARTYR'S CAUTIONARY TALE," PROJECT: TIME OFF, 2016



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bosserdfamilyfarm.com
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3 SPRAGUE'S FAMILY FUN FARM

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Just Like Dad

THE CEKOLA SIBLINGS OF KALAMAZOO ARE GROWING THE FAMILY BUSINESS(ES)

BY ANDREA PRATT PHOTOS DAN VAN DUINEN



FROM BACK, LEFT TO RIGHT:
BILL, JOE, LARRY, POLLY,
DOLORES (MOM), TERRY, NICK

THE CEKOLAS ARE NOT WHAT YOU'D CALL A TYPICAL FAMILY. AND THEY KNOW IT.

"Everyone looks at us like we're weird," laughs Bill Cekola.

If you're from Kalamazoo, you likely know, or know of, the family. On the off chance that you don't know them, perhaps you're familiar with their businesses? They include Imperial Beverage, Jac's Cekola's Pizza, and Chocolatea. You see, what makes the Cekolas atypical is their veritable business empire.

"People say we're a strange family because we get along, work together, and are partners," explains Bill.

But Bill and his five siblings are not "partners" in the traditional sense. For the most part, they own and operate their businesses independently. However, they all have one big thing in common: the influence of Big Joe, their innovative, entrepreneurial father who was deeply devoted to his family and to Kalamazoo.

SERIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Three generations of Cekolas have started and owned businesses in the area, beginning with Rose and Nicholas Cekola in 1925. They opened Cekola's Grocery on the corner of North and Gull roads and passed it down to their son Joseph "Big Joe" Cekola. When Big Joe took the reins of his parents' grocery in the 1960s, he transformed the little Italian shop by adding innovations such as chicken wings and home delivery of classic Cekola's pizza.

"He was doing chicken wings before they were a thing," says Joe, Big Joe's third-eldest son.

"And he was delivering pizza way before Domino's thought about it," Bill adds. "On slow nights, he would even put pizzas

in the back of his old International truck and drive around, knocking on doors. He was very entrepreneurial and worked hard, so he would always find new things to try."

But that was just the start for Big Joe. With his next venture, he left his day job at the local paper mill to become a full-time business man.

He purchased a huge hall on Portage Road and converted it over the years to include nightclubs, bowling alleys, a billiard hall, a roller-skating rink, and a restaurant. He moved the Cekola's pizza operation to the hall as well. The "Front Door, Back Door," as it was called, is the place where his children first became involved in the family business.

"We have memories of walking there after school at Saint Augustine's," says Polly Cekola. "We would work at the bar, cleaning, stocking, making soda, and counting change. It wasn't an option not to work for the family."

Big Joe continued to acquire new businesses—and make them successful. Between 1970 and 1980, he opened seven more, including more night clubs and restaurants, a coffeehouse, and a pool hall.

Then it happened. On May 13, 1980, a tornado flattened downtown Kalamazoo. In only 25 minutes, five people were killed, 79 were injured, and over \$50 million in total property damage occurred.

"He lost everything," says Bill. "It was devastating."

"At the time, he said he was done," adds Polly. "He just wanted to keep Cekola's pizza and make it more family-focused."

Big Joe's teenage night club, The Light Factory, had escaped major damage. It became Star World, a place for families to play video games, host birthday parties, and eat Cekola's pizza. When Big Joe had the opportunity to buy West Michigan Beverage in 1982, he gave his young-adult kids their first taste of business management by putting them in charge of Star World.

"We had seven really good years," says Bill. "But when video games hit the home market, things started falling off."

Around this time the Cekola kids started going different ways. Though some went to school or moved away, they never strayed far from their roots.

A NEW ERA

Big Joe passed away in 1994, at the age of 62, but his legacy is carried on by his six kids. Some of them took over his businesses, others started their own, and most have remained in Kalamazoo. Many of their own children and other family members are involved in the family business as well.

BIG JOE LIVES ON

Along with an entrepreneurial spirit, Big Joe instilled a devotion to family and Kalamazoo in his kids.

“Their dad was very active in the community,” says Bill’s wife, Kellie. “A lot of it was behind the scenes, but taking care of family and community was important to him. That’s what we wanted to do with our businesses.”

Big Joe grew up in a tight-knit Italian community in downtown Kalamazoo, where the neighbors took care of each other, and families stayed and never moved.

“This was my dad’s community. He cared so much for it and wanted to see it grow. He took care of it, and it took care of us,” explains Polly. “This is home!”

The rest of the siblings agree.

“It’s a sense of family that doesn’t exist anymore,” adds Kellie. “Terry, who lives in Colorado, is even back here all of the time. No one has a desire to leave.”

The closeness of their family and community has also played a role in the success of their businesses, the Cekola siblings say.

“Every step that they take, they are there for each other,” says Kellie. “I think that makes a huge difference. They count on each other, they talk to each other, and they check in on each other.”

This was my dad’s community. He took care of it, and it took care of us. This is home!

“We support each other, but we don’t step on each other’s toes,” says Joe.

But they aren’t afraid of saying what they think.

“We’re open and honest; we just say it,” adds Joe. “If Polly doesn’t like something, she’ll just tell me, even if she knows it won’t change my final decision.”

It helps to have someone who keeps them all on the same team.

This is where the sixth Cekola sibling, Nick, comes in. The eldest at 58, Nick was born with Down syndrome.

“He’s truly the glue of the family, and what has kept us together,” says Polly. “He’ll call and ask if we’re busy. He worries about everyone, and just has a huge heart.”

Nick lives with their mother, Dolores, whom the siblings also describe as the pillar of the family.

When doctors recommended that Nick be institutionalized as a child, as was the norm for children with Down syndrome at the time, Big Joe wouldn’t hear it.

“Dad’s passion was to keep Nick at home,” says Bill. “It was difficult, but Nick was part of the family. He and Dad were inseparable; they did everything together.”

“Dad took him to work every day. He was just as active in the community and businesses as everyone else was. He still works at Jac’s, and at Imperial,” adds Kellie.

“He’s worked at Imperial longer than me!” laughs Joe.

In the end, watching their father care for family and community has inspired a similar approach to business for all the Cekola siblings.

“Our mission is to take care of our employees and our community,” says Joe. “And when they succeed, they help us succeed.”

“We all see it similarly because of Dad. He gave people opportunities, gave them jobs, and gave them the shirt off his back,” adds Bill. “He did it so naturally, and I think we learned from that.”

While that may add to the peculiarity of their family business, they’re OK with that.

**Oil and
vinegar
were so
nostalgic
for me;
it just
felt right.**

POLLY CEKOLA



1

CHOCOLATEA & THE PANTRY ON TAP

SIBLING:
POLLY CEKOLA

“I opened Chocolatea in 2008 because I had a passion for tea, and the drive to own a small business,” says Polly. “I wanted to have a small retail store with a little café, so that’s what I did. Dad would have been proud, and I know he would have had a cup of tea with me.” The shop carries a wide range of teas, coffee, and desserts.

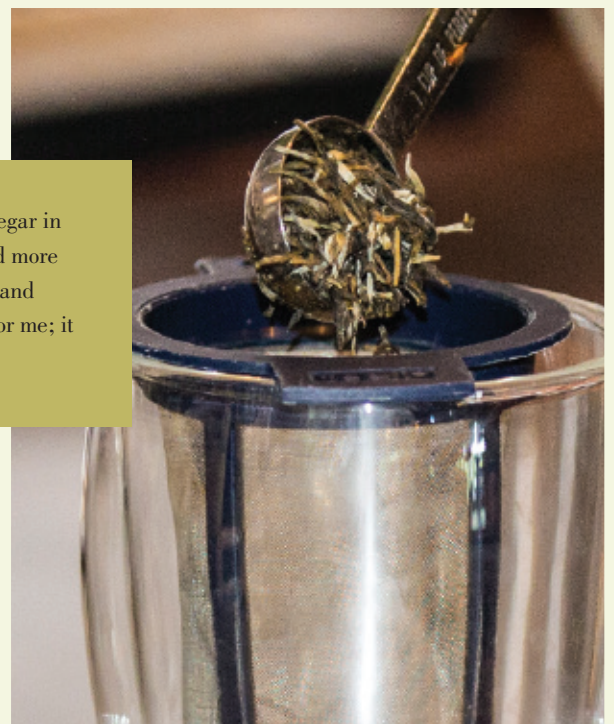


POLLY GIVES AN OLIVE OIL RUNDOWN AT THE PANTRY.

Polly opened The Pantry on Tap Oil and Vinegar in 2015, in the same shopping center. “I needed more space, and wanted to sell spices, herbs, oils, and vinegars. Oil and vinegar were so nostalgic for me; it just felt right,” she says.

Dad would have been proud, and I know he would have had a cup of tea with me.

POLLY CEKOLA



2

IMPERIAL BEVERAGE

SIBLINGS:
JOE & LARRY CEKOLA

West Michigan Beverage, purchased by Big Joe in 1982, evolved into Imperial Beverage. In 1994, his son Joe took over the business.

“When we first started, we were by far the smallest wholesaler in Michigan. Out of 220 beverage wholesalers, we were ranked 219th!” he says. “We had to be more innovative, and we had to listen closely to our customers.”

By adopting wine and microbrews early on, the business grew rapidly. “People would laugh at us,” Joe recalls, “and say, ‘Why are you picking up all that weird beer?’ My competitors actually had a nickname for me: ‘Weird Beer Joe.’”

Thanks to his leadership, Imperial Beverage has steadily grown for the last 25 years and was even named Craft Beer Distributor of the Year in 2010. The company has won many other notable awards, and, in Joe’s words, “started a thing called Kalamazoo Beer Week.”

Today, Joe is president, and his younger brother Larry is vice president of sales and marketing. Many other Cekola family members are involved in operations as well.

People would laugh at us and say, “Why are you picking up all that weird beer?”

JOE CEKOLA



JOE AND LARRY SHARE A LAUGH WITH JOE'S SON, JOEY, AT IMPERIAL BEVERAGE.

We probably have 900 games located throughout the state of Michigan today.

BILL CEKOLA

3

STAR WORLD AMUSEMENT

SIBLING:

BILL CEKOLA, WHO CO-OWNS WITH FRED HECOX

Star World still exists, though no longer as a family entertainment center. In 1984, the Cekolas started taking the games from inside Star World and putting them on location in bars, theaters, restaurants, and other facilities. “We probably have 900 games located throughout the state of Michigan today,” says Bill. They sell and rent games for commercial or home use, put games on location, and also repair and collect them.



THIS FAMOUS CEKOLA'S PIZZA IS READY FOR THE OVEN.

4

JAC'S CEKOLA'S PIZZA

SIBLINGS:
BILL CEKOLA
& WIFE KELLIE

When Star World closed in 1991, Cekola's pizza was no longer available to the public.

"Our son Dylan came to me one day in 2011 and said 'Dad, I've never had a Cekola's pizza,'" says Bill. "We knew that we had to bring the pizza back, in some way."

Bill and Kellie, with help from their children, opened Jac's soon after. Alongside pizza, Jac's serves other authentic Italian foods and a large selection of beer and wine. Why "Jac's?" Their father, Joseph Anthony Cekola, used to sign his name J.A.C.



BILL'S SON DYLAN TOSSES
A CEKOLA'S PIZZA INTO
THE OVEN AT JAC'S.

**Our son Dylan came to me one day in 2011
and said 'Dad, I've never had a Cekola's pizza.'**

BILL CEKOLA



5

ELITE BRANDS OF COLORADO

SIBLING:
THERESE 'TERRY' CEKOLA

The only one of Big Joe's children not located in the Kalamazoo area, Terry took a different path from her siblings in the '80s. Working with the international non-profit Up with People, she traveled the world and then was relocated to Colorado. When the non-profit suspended its operations, she opened Elite Brands of Colorado, a distributor of fine wine (and now beer and spirits, too), in 2003.

"Terry always had the drive to start her own business. Talk about a risk taker! She started

really small, with three employees, including her," says Polly.

"Terry jumped all in," adds Bill.

With brother Joe's guidance from the start, Terry grew her business from under a million dollars in sales the first year to over \$30 million in 2016. Sister company to Imperial Beverage, Elite Brands of Colorado is the 2017 Craft Beer Wholesaler of the Year.



David Rhoa, President, Lake Michigan Mailers, and Chris Mars, Vice President, Commercial Banking, First National Bank of Michigan.

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BY HEATHER BAKER PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

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150 YEARS OF TAILOR-MADE HISTORY

Founded in 1867 by Samuel Rosenbaum as a material and sewing notions firm, the company originally traded under the names Kalamazoo Pant and Overall and the Kalamazoo Pant Co. When Rosenbaum's sons entered the business in 1902, the partnership then changed to a name reflective of the times: Saml. Rosenbaum and Sons.

The Wool Labeling Act of the 1930s required the corporation's name to match its trade name, hence it went back to Kalamazoo Pant Co. During this decade, the company began selling goods left over from sales to stores, and by 1938 it had split into separate divisions—one for retail and the other for manufacturing. Manufacturing then moved to Columbus, Mississippi.

In 1968, the Phillips-Van Heusen Corporation purchased the company for its Redwood & Ross retail stores, which were highly profitable at that time. The Seminole Manufacturing Company of Columbus, Mississippi, purchased the manufacturing operations in 1970 and chose Kazoo, Inc., for the new name. It began making a small clothing line of dress pants labeled by the Edwards Garment Co.

By 1978, as people began shopping more in malls and less in stand-alone retail shops for brands associated with their names, the company devoted its energies to the Edwards business. In 1981, a small assembly plant started sewing again in Kalamazoo. It's not so small anymore.

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CUSTOM BRANDED
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PLANT STARTING SEWING
AGAIN IN KALAMAZOO. IT'S
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REV UP

YOUR TEAM'S ENGINE

ZEIGLER MOTORSPORTS AIMS TO MAKE ORGANIZATIONAL TRAINING FUN (AND FAST!)

BY ANDREA PRATT PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGLER

FOR MANY, THE THOUGHT OF TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISES CONJURES YOUTHFUL IMAGES OF CAMP COUNSELORS LEADING CAMPERS DOWN TO THE LAKE, OR HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGERS STRUGGLING TO STIR UP EXCITEMENT WITH CLICHÉD ACTIVITIES LIKE THE TRUST FALL, TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE, OR A GAME OF CAPTURE THE FLAG.

More sophisticated options have cropped up, even going as far as “extreme team building” in the form of simulated plane crashes or wilderness survival challenges. However, if you’re looking for something more accessible—and less terrifying—you may find what you need right around the corner.

This past March, Kalamazoo-based Zeigler Auto Group opened Zeigler Motorsports. The 85,000-square-foot facility, located on Sprinkle Road in Comstock Township, is surrounded by three vehicle test tracks and four miles of trails for motorsports enthusiasts, and is home to a showroom with 14 motorsports brands on display, a tap house, and the Elevate Leadership and Team Building Academy.



We challenge you, but it's also about laughing and having fun as a team.

Elevate, as its name suggests, offers professional team building and leadership training services. Organizations of all sizes are welcomed.

Aaron Zeigler, president of the Zeigler Auto Group, says that Elevate grew out of a desire to help other companies bring their teams together, develop future leaders, and, ultimately, grow.

“We get asked all the time how we’ve had such tremendous success growing our company, and we say it’s from developing our people,” Zeigler says. “We’ve always been a big believer in training and development. I think that’s one of the reasons we have low employee turnover, and why people are really interested in coming to work for us.”

According to Zeigler, the training systems used at Zeigler Auto Group and now offered through Elevate have grown out of the philosophy that true leaders serve their teams, and engage them in their work. “Leaders inspire their employees to constantly think about new ideas, new ways of doing things, better ways of doing things, all for the success of the company,” he explains.

Zeigler Auto Group started using the specialized leadership and team-building training 12 years ago, when Mike Van Ryn joined the team as director of talent development. Formerly a teacher and principal, Van Ryn built up the system that has been so successful for Zeigler Auto Group, and helped conceive the idea for Elevate.

“Over the years, we’ve focused on leadership training, team building, and developing culture and camaraderie,” says Van Ryn. “As we’ve added more and more to our training toolbox and seen great results, Aaron and I thought it would be great to share the experience with others as well.”

THE TRAINING

With over a decade of trial and error under their belts, and a commitment to continually learning and applying new ideas,



Zeigler, Van Ryn, and the rest of the Elevate team believe they have built a fresh, inviting training experience. Instead of purely lecture-style training, each staff member focuses on helping each individual participant understand and appreciate one another.

“Our goal is to tailor the training to the needs of each group, and to help everyone who attends get to know each other and have a fun, productive experience,” Van Ryn says.

Elevate currently offers three distinct training seminars that act as a curriculum framework, but can be modified based on the needs of each individual organization. You can choose one, or do all three on separate days. The first focuses on the elements

are vehicles suspended from the ceiling...and the actual training room is huge and has all the latest technology. Altogether, it’s an exciting, warm environment that helps cultivate progress.”

Elevate seminars are taught partly in the state-of-the-art classroom, but the unique setting of a motorsports park allows for the unexpected.

Participants are invited to “get out of their comfort zone” and experience the motorsports tracks with their teams. Fortunately, a professionally taught safety course and safety equipment are included.

“We’ve built up a neat team. The leaders of Elevate are the same people who have provided training for our team and other companies over the years,” says Zeigler.

Mike Van Ryn remains a pivotal component, and guest leaders and speakers include Jim Culhane, former NHL player and coach, and Lawrence Plaisier, former longtime educator and school administrator.

THE RESULT

The setting of Elevate may be distinct from any other training you have experienced, but Zeigler can vouch for its effectiveness in bringing teams together and creating leaders.

“With the number of employees we have, it can be hard to get to know people,” he says. “But if you spend a day and have an experience with them, you really get to know them. As a team, these experiences have brought us together.”

Zeigler has also seen the impact of the training on the growth and success of his employees.

“The only way you can keep people long-term is to develop them and create opportunities for them,” he stresses. “One of our employees started out washing cars for us, and then he became a service writer, then a salesman, then a sales manager. Now he runs five dealerships. I’ve got a ton of examples like this.”

Mike Van Ryn adds, “In the end, we believe that developing people and companies in our community will foster the success of our community. Our training has worked so well for us, and we hope to share that success.”

When you’re in an intense setting like that with your peers, it allows you to bond and connect even more.

needed to build a company culture that promotes employee engagement, and is called “Building a World-Class Culture.” The second, “Creating a Winning Team,” is designed to increase the level of cooperation between each tier of a given corporate structure. The final, called “Enhancing Your Leadership,” seeks to uncover the leadership qualities of everyone present.

“Depending on the training you choose, the experience will look different,” explains Van Ryn. “But, they’re all engaging and don’t have you sitting in your seat the whole time. We challenge you, but it’s also about laughing and having fun as a team.”

THE SETTING

The experience is only enhanced by the atmosphere, adds Van Ryn.

“I’ve seen people walk into our showroom for the first time, and their jaws just drop. It’s got waterfalls, it’s got a boardwalk, there

“Classroom work can get everybody closer together, getting to know each other, and working together toward one common goal, but we also offer the option to go riding on side-by-sides on the track, so your heart gets going a little bit,” Aaron Zeigler says.

“When you’re in an intense setting like that with your peers, it allows you to bond and connect even more,” adds Van Ryn.

THE LEADERSHIP

While the terrain park is sure to catch a participant’s eye and make their heart beat, the true draw of Elevate is arguably the people who have invested in perfecting its curriculum.



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ZOOM IN WITH KZOOM

A Q+A WITH DAN MARTIN

VIDEOGRAPHER, EDITOR, AND FOUNDER AT KZOOM

BY HEATHER BAKER | PHOTOS BY STEVE HERPPICH

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better from the shooting phase, and making it better than what the customer expected in the editing process, to the point where the customer says, “This is incredible!”

AS A VIDEOGRAPHER WHO FOUNDED HIS OWN COMPANY, HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR ROLE?

I’m like a rainmaker in training. I’ve shifted from doing things to making things happen. I still am actively involved in almost every key project in some way, but sometimes it’s oversight.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU WANTED TO DO THIS?

Coming up on Christmas time during eighth grade, my parents asked, “What do you want for Christmas?” I said, “I really want a video camera.” They said, “That’s way too expensive.” The one I was looking at was \$750. My mom made a deal. She said, “We will do this, if this is your present for your birthday and for Christmas.” My Aunt Ellen, always a very close family member to our family, went in half with them.

HOW DID YOU START YOUR BUSINESS?

It was 2003. I had just moved on from another job unexpectedly, and my father-in-law, with full faith in me, as I did not have the skills or the experience of running a business, said, “How much do you need a loan for?” I calculated [an amount] way smaller than I ever should have because I didn’t know what I was getting into. He wrote a check to me for \$7,200 to buy a computer and my first camera online. When it came the next week, he said, “I have a project in Three Rivers, Michigan, where I need some photos and video taken of a strip mall. How much do you charge an hour?” I gave him some low price. He replied, “Nope! You charge \$100 per hour!”

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF YOUR ART?

My favorite part about the design process is taking an idea, making it better from the brainstorming phase, making it

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT IN YOUR INDUSTRY?

Skills that are most important for somebody who works for Kzoom are relational. Of course, somebody needs a background with editing, videography, shooting, and having an eye for a shot. But a lot of that can be taught. We want to be known as a company that is excellent at working with people. We value having interpersonal skills. It brings people out in an interview when somebody is interested in them. If I’m smiling at you while you’re on camera, I can cause you to smile on camera.

HOW HAS VIDEOGRAPHY CHANGED?

In the early 2000s, I read an article that said the future of this field will require someone to be multi-talented. Up to then, a lot of professions historically had been totally specialized. For example, you were just a boom mic operator, or just an editor, or just the director of photography. Something that’s unique about Kzoom now, and it’s not just here, is that you have to be multi-disciplined. Today, all our employees are shooter-editors. If (a Kzoom employee) shoots a project, they’re editing it and they’re the project lead communicating with that customer. The customer knows who they worked with during the shoot and has access to communicate with that person at any time. Our customers have direct access with the person who knows the most about that project.

WHAT’S YOUR DREAM PROJECT?

My older brother and I dream about creating a tourism website or business. Our family

grew up going to the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee for vacations. We go as an extended family now with our kids. I would love to build out a tourism website that was video-based for families to see through video what a hike looks like through the Smoky Mountains or what an attraction looks like. It would be catered to a family so that they could plan an entire vacation.

IF YOU HAD TO CHANGE CAREERS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Hobby farming. My wife and I have five kids, from age one to 12. We have farm animals on 80 acres at home. Right now, we have seven goats, seven pigs (a couple of them are not going to be here with us next week), around 40 chickens, rabbits, cats, cows, four turkeys, and four ducks. Our farm is Woodsong Farm. You can find it on Facebook. We have two goats that we milk every day, twice a day, and whose milk we share with people in the Kalamazoo area who are lactose-intolerant and with families who have kids with autism as prescribed by their doctor. When you work seven out of every eight hours a day behind the computer, you want to go home and milk a goat!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT?

Find a local nonprofit or charity that you’re passionate about, and then volunteer to donate your time to create a project for them. If you’re passionate about what they do, you will put your whole self into it.

DO YOU EVER THINK YOU’LL AGE OUT OF YOUR FIELD?

My wife just asked me this the other day. At Kzoom, we got into this because we had a passion for it. That doesn’t go away over time. Being in a technology generation, we’re excited to get and use the next thing.

WHAT MAKES VIDEOGRAPHY SPECIAL?

We take for granted the capability to preserve a moment. It’s fascinating, to capture something in the present so that someone can come back and relive that moment. It’s bringing somebody’s eyes into your eyes to show them the way that you’re seeing something or have them experience a point in time. Don’t we all wish we could live forever and not be bound by time? Video is this thing that helps us supersede that desire to push pause.

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PRESIDENT,
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A Q+A ABOUT LEADERSHIP

WITH LOCAL LEADERS

DEBORAH JACKSON

MATHEMATICS TEACHER AT MAPLE STREET MAGNET
SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS IN KALAMAZOO

RICK SEARING

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE (IB) EDUCATOR AND DIPLOMA
PROGRAM COORDINATOR AT PORTAGE NORTHERN HIGH SCHOOL

DEFINE LEADERSHIP.

DEBORAH JACKSON: Teachers, individually or collectively, influencing others to improve teaching and learning for students.

RICK SEARING: The ability to get a group to come together around a goal.

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

DEBORAH: Linda Comer, my child's elementary principal. Her focus was on building relationships with all the students.

RICK: My wife has always had the ability to keep me focused and to separate the things that are important and non-negotiable from the things that might seem like an attractive option in the spur of the moment.

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

DEBORAH: Being a teacher-leader, you have to first facilitate the increase of student learning and achievement. As an individual teacher, you have to be willing to take some risks.

RICK: I think the most important day-to-day decisions are the ones where you're setting an example. [You can't] say that "these are your expectations" or that "these are things that you want everybody else to value" but not exhibit those things yourself.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THAT YOU SEE FACING LEADERS TODAY?

DEBORAH: Sometimes, people don't realize that teachers are leaders. To me, that's a challenge that teachers face every day, because you're leading.

RICK: The biggest challenge for those of us in education is the idea that we want kids to be more prescriptive about what they need to know and when they need to know it and how they need to know it.

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

DEBORAH: I like hanging out with my family and friends. In the summer, I like backyard parties. In the winter, I'm not a skier. But, I don't mind being the person that's got the hot chocolate and cookies ready when everybody comes in.

RICK: I like to play a lot of golf. My wife and I cycle quite a bit.

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

DEBORAH: Crow's Nest. I like the turkey sandwich with sweet potato fries.

RICK: In the summer, I can't think of any place better than the patio at Bell's.

IF HAPPINESS WERE THE NATIONAL CURRENCY, WHAT KIND OF WORK WOULD MAKE YOU RICH?

DEBORAH: I love working with middle school children. [In] middle school, you have to be able to know that, from minute to minute, [the students] may change. Today, they may be the first grader, and 30 minutes later, they may want to be the adult in the room.

RICK: The work that I'm doing right now.

I enjoy working with my colleagues in the educational field. And I love being around young people who have innovative ideas and tons of choices in front of them.

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

DEBORAH: My husband. Governor Snyder. Reggie Weaver.

RICK: President Obama. Joe Maddon, the manager of the Cubs. Bob Poole (who represents the IB program for North and South America).

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

DEBORAH: A good book. My favorite robe. FaceTime, because I have a new grandbaby, and every night her mom FaceTimes me so she can get to hear my voice.

RICK: I like to have a good book when I'm on the plane. Something that, when I know I'm going to be stuck someplace for three or four hours, can hold my undivided attention. I like to make sure I have a good data plan, especially if I'm out of the country. When I do travel for work, I have an open mind and realize that the way that we do it in Portage is not necessarily the right way. It's just one way among many.

WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

DEBORAH: President Obama. He is always so cool under adversity.

RICK: I would like to meet the Pope. [He] seems to really have brought a new vibrancy to what's going on in the church.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

DEBORAH: My students. Every day. Today I had a student come up to me and say, "Miss Jackson, I need some help." I was like, "Oh? What are we going to do about it?" He (asked), "Well, can I come in at lunch?" I'm like, "Of course you can!" To me, that's so inspiring.

RICK: What inspires me every day as an educator is knowing that there's a group of students waiting for me in the classroom or a group of colleagues that I'm working with who all really believe that teaching and education, public education, is like a pure form of social justice.

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

DEBORAH: Relationships are really important, so I make decisions and I interact with parents, students, and other teachers and always try to find that common thread that's going to have students be the best that they can be.

RICK: I read a ton. One of the apps that I like to use a lot is Flipboard. It randomly selects things that you wouldn't have normally come across and read that are applicable in one way or another that you can share or implement or at least process.

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

DEBORAH: Snapchat. I have an older granddaughter. She introduced me to Snapchat. I love it. Which [app] would [I] really need? My app for Gmail. If my students or parents are emailing me, no matter where I am, I can always check my emails and email them back.

RICK: Google.

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

DEBORAH: It starts with my belief that all learners can be successful. I'm [our] team leader, so when we sit down in this classroom, we're thinking about all children being successful [as] we are making our teaching strategies.

RICK: With students and colleagues, it's about building relationships. There's going to be days that you're going to come to school and it's not going to be an "A" day for you in the classroom, or an "A" day for you as a leader. But when you have built solid relationships with the kids in your classroom or the people you work with, then it's going to make you rise above.

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

DEBORAH: I believe that being a leader is about continually learning, and because of that, I'm reading. Last summer, I did a couple of classes. Whatever is out there that's new, I need to be a part of it so my students can continue to grow.

RICK: I enjoyed being involved with the First 50 program at Southwest Michigan First, because it took me outside of the education realm. Even though the challenges of education or non-profits (or manufacturers) aren't the same, lots of times, the themes can apply.

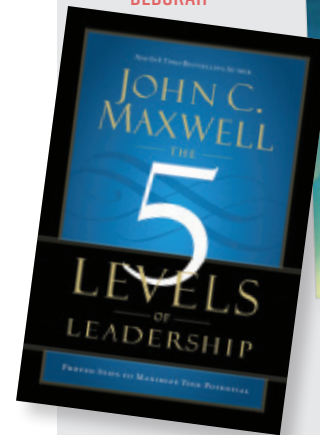
WHAT IS YOUR LIFE QUOTE?

DEBORAH: "Education must not simply teach work—it must teach life." —W. E. B. Du Bois

RICK: It's not really a life quote or even one that most people would be familiar with. The IB program has a learner profile. It includes things like [being] caring, inquisitive, reflective, principled, informed. That's the standard by which I am measuring the kids in my class, our program, and myself.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE LEADERSHIP BOOK?

DEBORAH



RICK



When you have built solid relationships with the kids in your classroom or the people you work with, then it's going to make you rise above.

RICK SEARING

Whatever is out there that's new, I need to be a part of it so my students can continue to grow.

DEBORAH JACKSON

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Don't Let Anyone Tell You There Is Something You Can't Do

PATTI POPPE

PRESIDENT AND CEO,
CMS ENERGY AND
CONSUMERS ENERGY

STORY BY HEATHER BAKER
WITH REGAN DEWAAL

PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

1968 | BORN IN JACKSON, MI

I am a girl from Napoleon. It's a little town near Jackson. I grew up within driving distance of Consumers Energy's headquarters. My dad worked for Consumers and my mom was a [school] principal. It was a very simple life. I had good friends. I love small towns.

1986 | ATTENDED NAPOLEON HIGH SCHOOL IN NAPOLEON, MICHIGAN

I had two teachers in high school who made a huge difference for me. One was Anita Johnson; she was my math teacher. She told me something I'll never forget: "Patti, don't let anyone ever tell you there is something you can't do. Just don't let anyone ever tell you that." She opened my mind to not thinking small. My other favorite teacher was my speech coach and forensics coach. To learn to publicly speak has turned out to be such an incredibly important skill.

1989 | GRADUATED FROM PURDUE UNIVERSITY WITH A BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING

One of the reasons why I went to Purdue is they had a strong Women in Engineering program. My dad really wanted me to be an engineer and I really did not. I thought it sounded boring. He kept pushing me. He had seven daughters, I was the seventh and



PATTI'S DEFINITION OF IMBALANCE

We each have a finite amount of time. To spend and imbalance our lives around the things we love the most is the real opportunity. Design your work to be fulfilling, so that it's as much fun as your non-work.

I say, imbalance your life. Let the scale drop to the floor for the things that you love the most. My life is imbalanced, dramatically

imbalanced to the things that I love doing the most. My family time and my work time are both joyful. I don't strive to have less of one, I want to have more of both. I encourage you to kind of rethink the conversation around work-life balance. There is some equilibrium that will make you happy. You'll be happy when you are doing what you love to do more often.

he had tried six times before. We got a little postcard from Purdue for its Women in Engineering Career Day. I went down there and I met these incredible women who were smart and pretty and funny. I thought, “Well, they don’t seem so boring, what’s with them?”

At that time, [the program] was about 25 percent women. There are certain majors, like biological engineering and biomedical engineering, that have a much higher percentage of women than others. Industrial engineering is often in the 35 percent [range]. The percentages in total have not grown that much. The total number of students has grown, the total number of engineers has grown. So, the absolute number of women engineering has grown, but the percentage hasn’t.

1991 | EARNED A MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING FROM PURDUE

I had great professors at Purdue who really challenged my thinking and taught me about queueing theory. When I went to the automotive factory, I had some unique skills and qualifications that made a big difference for the plant.

1990-2005 | WORKED AT GENERAL MOTORS IN PLANT MANAGEMENT

When I graduated from college, I went to General Motors (GM). My husband and I had a great adventure with GM. I said whatever happens after I graduate, I’m not going to work in a factory. Then I spent the [next] 20 years of my life in factories—car and power plants. Sometimes you rule things out and it could be something extraordinary.

A third of our board is women. A third of our officer core is women. Because we have bench strength of really talented women, it’s not surprising that a woman would become CEO.

2005 | THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FELLOW GRADUATED FROM STANFORD UNIVERSITY WITH A MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT

I didn’t know what I didn’t know until I went to Stanford. I learned so much about the world when I was there, from my classmates and from the experiences that are designed into that program.

I met these incredible women who were smart and pretty and funny. I thought, “Well, they don’t seem so boring, what’s with them?”

2005 - 2011 | HELD ROLES AT DTE ENERGY THAT INCLUDED POWER PLANT DIRECTOR AND DIRECTOR OF REGULATED MARKETING FOR ENERGY OPTIMIZATION

There was a time when I heard through the rumor mill that I was going to be named power plant director for these five plants. I was ready for something different. I was going to decline the opportunity. My friend Zara called me. She had hired me at GM about 15 years earlier, and she’s a mentor of mine. She said, “Patti, do you think they’ve ever had an outsider run their power plants?” I had been at the company maybe like six months. I said, “No, I don’t think so.” She asked, “Do you think they’ve ever had a woman run their power plants?” “No,” I said. And she said, “Maybe they think this is a big deal.”

I took that job and it was awesome. I learned about our industry, boots on the ground with the real people who make electricity. What a miss it would’ve been if I had not taken that opportunity.

2010 | NAMED A “POWER OF 100” MEMBER OF MICHIGAN WOMEN’S FOUNDATION

There are some incredible women in Michigan. It’s inspiring.

2011 | BECAME VICE PRESIDENT, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND OPERATIONS AT CONSUMERS ENERGY

I was one of those kids from a small town who thought that the world was a big place. My husband and I traveled, moved around, and really never expected that I would end back up at Consumers. It really was a twist of fate and a great blessing. I do feel like it’s a fairy tale. Like how is that possible? There is a Bon Jovi song, “Who Says You Can’t Go Home,” and I think it’s my theme song.

The opportunity to lead our customer experience and operations team was such an important, strategic priority for the company. We created the team when I came, and it was a turning point for the company in our recommitment to customers. We always cared about our customers, but we knew that we could improve their experience. To be the person leading that was great preparation to lead the company.

2015 | PROMOTED TO SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS, ENGINEERING AND TRANSMISSION

Being close to how we deliver (services) for customers was a real opportunity.

JULY 2016 | NAMED PRESIDENT AND CEO OF CMS ENERGY AND CONSUMERS ENERGY

What surprised me was how much people want to follow. I have to be very thoughtful about ideas, because people will do what I ask. So I need to be careful about what I ask for.

Our workforce is high skill, high talent, and they have high pride. We think of ourselves a bit like the Marines. When people are taking shelter, our cruisers are heading out. When we’re evacuating a building for a gas emergency, our crews are going in.

2016 | GRAIN’S DETROIT “MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN” HONOREE

The thing that was interesting to me about that award was how many other women at my own company contributed to my success. I am not alone. A third of our board is women. A third of our officer core is women. Because we have bench strength of really talented women, it’s not surprising that a woman would become CEO.

We've Got Spirit, Yes We Do

WE'VE GOT SPIRIT FOR
ALL THINGS KALAMAZOO

BY ANDREA PRATT | PHOTOS BY JOHNNY QUIRIN

For Andrew and Kathleen Widner, opening a small business in Kalamazoo seemed like the next step in their lives.

“We were seeing downtown Kalamazoo growing and were really inspired by that,” says Kathleen Widner. “We started thinking, ‘Wouldn’t it be neat to be a part of positive things happening there?’”

With backgrounds in finance and marketing and public relations, respectively, the longtime residents of Kalamazoo possessed the groundwork to be successful business owners. For additional guidance, they connected with the Small Business Development Center at Western Michigan University and Downtown Kalamazoo Inc.’s retail incubator program.

These community programs helped the Widners create a business plan—but not for the store they had originally imagined.

“We had first noticed that there wasn’t a dedicated dessert place downtown,” Kathleen Widner explains. “That was the

initial idea: just ice cream.”

When it was suggested that they partner ice cream with something not so seasonal, the Widners realized they could bring a spirit shop to the community. The idea for The Spirit of Kalamazoo was born, and the store opened in 2011.

Today, the store offers “All Things Kalamazoo,” including T-shirts, hats, mugs, cups, and magnets that represent Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, and, of course, Kalamazoo in general.

The shop also carries Michigan-themed merchandise and 24 flavors of Plainwell Ice Cream available in cups, cones, milkshakes, and sundaes.

Kathleen Widner says that among her favorite products are the tongue-in-cheek T-shirts with original sayings, such as “Just Another Animal in the Zoo.”

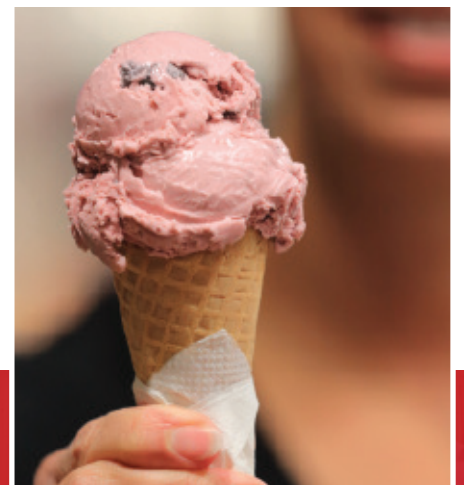
“And, obviously, I love the ice cream,” she adds.

A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Other than temperamental Michigan weather causing some interference with ice cream sales, the Widners say that their experience starting a business in Kalamazoo has been overwhelmingly positive.

“We’re really grateful to the community for the success that we’ve had, and we appreciate all of the people that helped get us here,” says Kathleen. “Kalamazoo is very progressive. The community wants to support local, small businesses and see them succeed.”

We had first noticed that there wasn’t a dedicated dessert place downtown. That was the initial idea: just ice cream.





RETURNING THE FAVOR

Though the Widners originally saw opening a business as a financial investment, The Spirit of Kalamazoo has also become a way that they can start reinvesting in the community that supports them.

“It’s a small thing, but we have a tip jar by our cash register that isn’t actually for tips,” says Kathleen. “We donate the money to a different cause every couple of months.”

They have donated to dozens of organizations, including Kalamazoo Can, the American Cancer Society, the Kalamazoo Animal Clinic, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited. When *269 MAGAZINE* spoke with Kathleen Widner, the collection from the tip jar was dedicated to the construction campaign for the remaining 13 miles of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail.

“We try to donate to causes that speak to us,” explains Kathleen. “We feel that the trail is a great community-wide cause, something that is available for everyone to enjoy.”

Kalamazoo is very progressive. The community wants to support local, small businesses and see them succeed.

CUSTOMER-FOCUSED

The Widners remain very involved in the day-to-day operations of the store. Kathleen is onsite four days a week and works a fifth day offsite. Andrew maintains a day job, but he enjoys his weekly shift at the shop.

“We’re hands on,” says Kathleen. “We work the cash register, scoop ice cream, clean the floor, restock shelves, serve customers—anything that needs to be done.”

For the Widners, the best part of business ownership is the relationships they’ve made with their employees, other downtown business owners, and customers.

“Our focus is serving the customers, and we’ve gotten to know a lot of them really well. We wouldn’t be here without them,” says Kathleen.

The Widners’ dedication to their customers has proven fruitful. In 2016, the Spirit of Kalamazoo officially made the move from Portage Street to the Kalamazoo Mall, and is now located in the heart of the town that it represents.

In the future, the Widners would like to see further growth, but mostly “we’re trying to keep doing what we do, and do it even better,” Kathleen explains. “I think the store is just a happy place to be, and we want that to continue to be the focus.”



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Mike Odar

FROM PAGE 19

I don't know if you should have done that. What if you did it differently? What would have happened?"

WHAT'S THE GREATEST LESSON I'VE LEARNED?

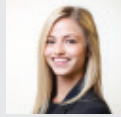
Knowing who you are is very helpful. Early on, in my life and in my career, I didn't think about that, because I was all about "getting on down the road." Knowing who you are helps in a lot of situations. When I found out who I am by going through the Gallup® StrengthsFinder assessment, I discovered that I'm an achiever and an arranger. I like to get people together. Knowing this now helps me perform in a lot of different situations more appropriately.

WHAT ARE THE BEST PIECES OF ADVICE I'VE RECEIVED?

There are two. First: Be yourself. Don't be somebody you're not. Come across as real. There will be some people who are not necessarily going to connect with you, but they will respect you. I would rather be respected than liked. It's important that you are who you are. If you are not, by the end of the day, you will be completely exhausted. If you can be who you are at all times, you're going to connect more to the people around you.

Second: When people reveal themselves, believe them. People, in different situations, will be who they think you want them to be, and act a certain way. There's this button in my head that will sometimes go off when I come across that person in a more real situation where they behave like their true self. That to me is a revealing moment. I say, "Ah-ha. Now I know who you really are."

Mike Odar is president of Greenleaf Trust (greenleaftrust.com), a privately held wealth management firm with specialized disciplines in asset management, trust administration, and retirement plan services with locations throughout Michigan in Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Birmingham, Traverse City, and Petoskey.



Brianna Pate

FROM PAGE 21

To move forward, we must first take a glance back. The economic unrest of the early 1980s and 1990s had ramifications for the way millennials work. Coming of age during an economic downturn has its side effects. When millennials land jobs, we bring with us a strong desire to prove ourselves. A report put out by McKinsey Global Institute found that between 2005 and 2014, the real income of up to 70 percent of households in advanced economies flattened or fell. For the first time, this left us 20-somethings worse off than our parents. The future is slowly beginning to feel like more of a burden young people are indebted with, rather than a public good to inherit. The good news is we are still somehow bubbling with optimism. The World Economic Forum tells us that 70 percent of millennials see the world as still full of opportunity. It simply takes a great leader to harness it. Here is a list of five things that a great leader can do to harness the innovation and brilliance of millennials:

1. SHOW US THE MONEY.

Many leaders think this has slid to the back burner for many millennials, but the numbers show that getting paid well is still a top priority for emerging leaders.

2. BE A COACH, NOT A BOSS.

Per Gallup®, 58 percent of millennials say quality of management is extremely important. Schedule time out of your day to share authentic conversations, teach us what it looks like to operate in different environments, and offer us opportunities to attend classes, webinars, conferences, and other learning events.

3. FOSTER PURPOSE.

Work matters, as 74 percent of millennial job-seekers told LinkedIn. Help millennials figure out how to define their sense of purpose within the organization's greater mission and collectively create meaningful work that benefits both employees and employers.

4. TRANSPARENCY WINS.

The Global Shapers Survey tell us that millennials think government accountability and transparency are the most serious issues affecting the country today. Build trust with the millennials on your team by apologizing when you make a mistake, being honest with financials, saying what you mean, and allowing them to work through problems alongside you.

5. PROMOTE WORK-LIFE BALANCE.

We have all heard this before, but millennials are in it to change the game. Working remotely and nontraditional hours will become the new norm. We're not lazy; rather, we are striving for a better work-life balance in which we can truly take care of ourselves and spend time with our families, something the former generations have neglected. We owe it to future generations to break this habit.

As many say, "America's future hinges on its youngest professional generation." Millennial leaders are emerging. What are you going to do champion them?

Brianna Pate is a millennial who grew up in Southwest Michigan and graduated from Western Michigan University. She works for Southwest Michigan First, where she attaches her passion and belief to the organization's mission that the greatest force for change is a job. Learn more at southwestmichiganfirst.com.

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BY RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO ISTOCK.COM/CINEUNO



Statues, Stars, and Halls of Fame

MAY YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT BE THE MARK YOU LEAVE ON OTHERS

AS A CULTURE, WE REVERE LEADERS BY ERECTING STATUES OF THEM IN PUBLIC SQUARES OR PLACING STARS WITH THEIR NAMES ON THEM ALONG WALKS OF FAME. WE BUILD BUILDINGS TO HONOR THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

But, what if our leaders' greatest successes were not enshrined in bronze but made of flesh and blood?

What if your greatest impact is not something you achieve, but whom you liftup and what they achieve? What if your legacy is the people who follow you and their successes? There is an adage that growing leaders is like planting a tree whose shade you will never enjoy.

Southwest Michigan is at a crossroads. We are at statistical full employment, far outpacing the nation, yet we still suffer the hangover of our "lost decade" from 2000 to 2009. That was the decade when Michigan led the nation in a one-state recession with lost population, jobs, and income at a pace on par with losses realized during the Great Depression. We are still paying for that decade of malaise, which is especially compounded with a decline in high school enrollment and graduates. Combine this with baby boomers retiring en masse and we have problems we have never before encountered.

This is where you come in. It will no longer be enough to just have a hall of fame honoring lives worthy of erected statues. A hall of fame simply will not scale to meet the needs of our region in the future.

For our region to be successful, we must each commit to liftup the next generation of leaders and to mentor those who will step up next. Make a commitment that you will be known not just by what you achieve on your own, but also by who is in your leadership family tree.

Who are the men and women who will speak your name in reverence? You get to choose. Please choose now and choose often.

ALWAYS FORWARD,

Enjoyed this article? Let us know! Tweet @269Mag using #269Mag with your thoughts.

What if your greatest impact is not something you achieve, but whom you liftup and what they achieve? What if your legacy is the people who follow you and their successes? There is an adage that growing leaders is like planting a tree whose shade you will never enjoy.

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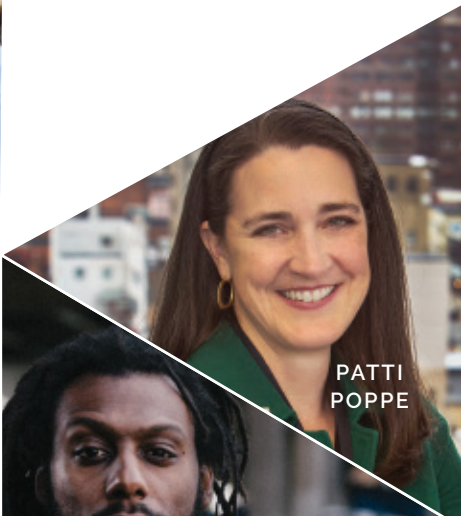
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BY THE NUMBERS

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- \$14 MILLION in purchases with area businesses in 2016.
- \$21.5 MILLION paid in property taxes in 2016.
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