

# 269

MAGAZINE™

**inside:**

A SEASONAL SELECTION  
OF SKI SLOPES,  
SLEDDING HILLS,  
AND SHOPS IN  
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

THE IMPORTANCE OF

THRIVING

IN THE

WORKPLACE

CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT FEED THE BOTTOM LINE

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*At our annual family event, seeing team members' eleven children all playing together in the lake.*

*Welcoming three new members to our growing team!*

*Donning an apron and preparing a shrimp boil side by side with our CEO for several client appreciation events during the summer.*

*Celebrating the groundbreaking of Stryker Corporation's new Stryker Instruments R&D Center and having the opportunity to have a positive impact on the community and the families of those who will work there.*

*Having fun as a team during our Popsicle-Off! Each team member brought delicious homemade popsicles, leading to a contentious competition (and a sugar high for all involved).*

LOOKING BACK  
*What was your favorite moment in your workplace this year?*



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

PHOTOS ISTOCK.COM/BPLANET



## This Is No Fish Story

ENGAGED EMPLOYEES LOVE TO SWIM IN WONDERFUL WORKPLACES

### LOVE DISNEY MOVIES, AND *FINDING NEMO* IS A GREAT ONE.

It opens with a clownfish couple named Marlin and Coral admiring their new home in the Great Barrier Reef. Engulfed in aquamarine waters, surrounded by colorful corals, and filled with diverse marine animals, it's the perfect place for a fish. Well, it's perfect until a barracuda shows up and eats Coral and her entire clutch of eggs (save one, of course, which develops into Nemo).

That opening scene offers quite a parallel to workplace culture. Before you call this a “fish story,” give me a chance to explain.

Think about it: fish swim in an ocean, or any body of water for that matter, unconcerned about their part in the aquatic environment until something drastically changes—such as a bigger fish or fisherman's hook coming along to threaten their existence. Unfortunately, many people go to work every day unaware that they are participants in a workplace culture. They might even find it hard to describe it if asked. Only when there is a significant change, either for the better or worse, can they then put their daily existence into words.

In this issue of *269 MAGAZINE*, we focus on why workplace culture matters. Why does it matter? High-performing cultures attract and retain top talent, outperform competition, and withstand tests posed by changing economic conditions.

We also share this year's notable Wonderful Workplaces—companies in Southwest Michigan with winning cultures. While these companies all exhibit their culture in different

ways, as you see in their examples—some deliver outstanding customer service, others look for activities to make their employees smile during busy seasons, and others build a place that feels like a home away from home—the one thing that binds them all together is that their dedication to a positive culture comes from the top.

Organizational leaders, indeed, have the singular ability to dictate the current of their workplace culture. Since 2000, when Gallup® began measuring and reporting on U.S. workplace culture, it has found year after year that only about one-third of American workers are engaged. What does engaged mean? Engaged employees are those who are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and company. Gallup's research also shows that company leadership accounts for a 70 percent variance in employee engagement. So, the numbers add up: when managers don't create an engaging environment, workers are not happy.

But when workers are happy, they swim like dolphins! There is lower absenteeism and turnover. There are fewer safety incidents and quality defects. Customers have higher satisfaction rates. And productivity, sales, and profitability are higher. Check out our scorecard on page 15 for the numbers.

**There are many great workplace cultures in Southwest Michigan.**

**If you happen to work at one, tell everyone you know. If you're looking to build one, get schooled and reach out to learn from others who are employed in engaging environments.**





**While you can't have a tiki bar in the middle of the office, you can offer healthy snacks, fresh coffee, and clean drinking water to your team.**

It's safe to say, if you are a manager, you should endeavor to create a workspace that offers an environment more like the Caribbean Sea rather than a brackish swamp. Impossible, you say? Not so much. It just takes an open mind. While you can't offer beach loungers, you might stock up on ergonomic office chairs or standing desks. Blue waters and sandy beaches are not an indoor option, but maintaining a clean and safe environment is. While you can't have a tiki bar in the middle of the office,

you can offer healthy snacks, fresh coffee, and clean drinking water to your team. Fill your benefits package with the offerings of a five-star hotel. And finally, the most impactful things you can do as a leader or engaged employee don't require a financial investment: welcome team members by name with perky "Good mornings!" and a bit of personal conversation, much like a cruise director.

There are many great workplace cultures in Southwest Michigan. If you happen to work at one, tell everyone you know. If you're looking to build one, get schooled and reach out to learn from others who are employed

in engaging environments. If you're leading one, see how you stack up by participating in programs like Best and Brightest Companies to Work For®, *Outside* magazine's Best Places to Work, or Great Place to Work®. Together, let's make Southwest Michigan the Caribbean of workplace culture!

**READ ON,**

*Heather*

Tell us about your Southwest Michigan stories @269Mag!

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To learn more about Treystar’s managed and developed properties contact Fritz Brown at [fbrown@treystar.com](mailto:fbrown@treystar.com) or call 269.329.1808. To hear the rest of Todd’s story and CSM Group’s transformation of The Foundry visit [thefoundrykzoo.com/csm](http://thefoundrykzoo.com/csm).

Todd McDonald  
President  
CSM Group



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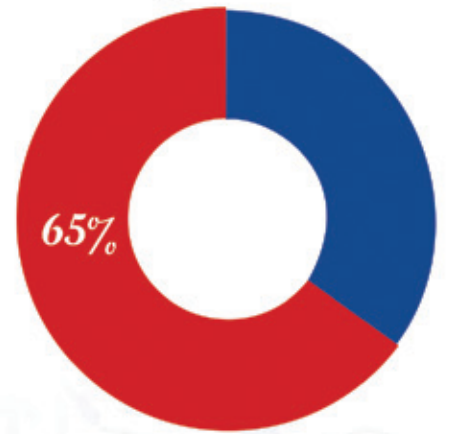
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THE IMPORTANCE OF

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# WORKPLACE

CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT FEED THE BOTTOM LINE

BY RICK VAN GROUW  
PHOTOS STEVE HERPPICH

**A**fter college, Ron Kitchens worked at a satellite property of a national building materials company. Kitchens thrived and worked his way up from unloading trucks to interim CFO. One day, the company president stopped by and took him to lunch.

“He said, ‘Hey, would you be interested in moving to New Orleans to be the general manager of that facility?’” Kitchens recalls. For the newly married Kitchens—“we were literally giving plasma on the weekends so we had extra money to pay the bills”—the job offer was a huge opportunity. “I told him I absolutely would,” Kitchens said.

The next morning, Kitchens’s boss called him into his office. Rather than issue compliments or congratulations about the job opportunity, his supervisor screamed at Kitchens. “He said he was the one who would tell me when I left, and that my job was to make him money, and that I would be staying there, not going to New Orleans, not getting promoted, and that he would decide when I was worthy of another position.”

Kitchens quit. Part of what he took away from that encounter was an

epiphany: “I made a vow that at the point in my career when I got to make the decisions on what the culture was ... that I would have a different place when I was in charge,” he said. “I just didn’t ever want to be in that type of environment again.”

Today, Kitchens is CEO of Southwest Michigan First, an economic development consulting firm serving seven counties in Southwest Michigan. Following through on his vow, he approaches leadership and workplace culture from a very different perspective than the one he experienced early in his work history.

“My whole career has been about creating an environment where people thrive and they can work as a team,” he said. “It’s about getting the right people in there. The idea is about fit—making sure people have not just the minimum educational background or the experience, but that they fit with the organization, that their goals—personal and professional—are aligned with the organization, that their ability to run is the same as the organization’s.”

Workplace culture, measured by employee engagement, is crucial because it contributes directly to the bottom line. The Gallup® organization daily tracks employee engagement, defined as employees “who are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace.” Gallup categorizes employees as engaged based on their responses to topics that predict “important organizational performance outcomes.” The engagement rating comes from 1,500 daily interviews with employees and has a margin of error of 3 percentage points. According to Gallup, organizations with 60 percent or higher employee engagement tend to be three times more profitable than organizations with low workforce engagement.

The national average for employee engagement is 32 percent, and Kitchens is proud of his company’s 100 percent engagement level. Southwest Michigan First measures company-wide engagement biannually using tools from HUMANeX Ventures.



**Building relationships is so crucial to productivity. The bottom line is what's impacted—either positively or negatively—by your ability to build relationships across cultures.**

“Clearly it’s a profit strategy. It’s a performance strategy,” Kitchens said. “An engagement score by itself is an indicator of where your ability to succeed is. It’s like a race car, knowing that if you’re going to race at Daytona, your car has to go at least 200 miles an hour to stand a chance of winning. We know that our engagement score needs to be 80 percent if we want to be elite performers in our industry. But if you’re at 40 percent or if your car can only go 120 miles per hour, you can’t race at Daytona. You don’t have the right vehicle. It’s about understanding that engagement is an indicator of the opportunity succeed, not the outcome.”

**CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE FOSTERS ENGAGEMENT**

Kristin Ekkens began a recent Tuesday with a phone call. On the line were employees of her client in India, Dubai, and several locations in Africa.

“We talked about being able to communicate across cultures,” Ekkens said. “Age, race, ethnicity—it takes a high level of cultural intelligence for leaders, for employees, for individual contributors, and for managers to be able to work across all those levels of culture.”

Ekkens is director of corporate partnerships for the Cultural Intelligence Center, a Michigan-based consultancy that provides research-based solutions for workforce issues, whose clients include Perrigo, Medtronic, and Whirlpool. Ekkens

talks about workplace culture in terms of cultural intelligence—“the capability to work and relate effectively across various cultural contexts” such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and gender identity. When organizations notice workplace anomalies or friction among their workforce, they reach out to the Cultural Intelligence Center.

“The biggest issue I’ve seen in the last four years is the feeling of exclusion,” Ekkens said. “It starts with one person or a small group who feel that their manager doesn’t know how to

include them. Maybe they feel like they know how to be a good leader, but maybe they’re not adapting how they work across cultures using different approaches. Maybe the manager has one mindset or believes that there’s only one way to work and is excluding their employees. All of a sudden there’s a gap, and the gap gets wider, and it causes issues with communication, with engagement, with lack of trust. Ultimately, the employees start to be actively disengaged.”

Ekkens stressed the direct causal link between employee engagement, productivity, and profit—essentially, a “happiness quotient.”

“You’re trying to get employees satisfied and engaged. They work full time, many hours each day, day after day. Ultimately, you need to understand that just showing up for work, getting things done, and focusing on productivity is counterproductive. Building relationships is so crucial to productivity. The bottom line is what’s impacted—either positively or negatively—by your ability to build relationships across cultures.”

**A CHANGING WORKFORCE LANDSCAPE**

Workplace culture today isn’t what it’s always been. In their 2017 book *The Future-Proof Workplace*, authors Linda Sharkey and Morag Barrett identify six factors of change that move a twentieth-century workplace into the twenty-first century. Second on the list behind leadership is workplace culture.

**HIRING FOR SUCCESS:**

To make sure they get the right people on the team, Ron Kitchens and Southwest Michigan First have a highly purposeful hiring strategy.

**FIRST**, the company uses a third-party vendor to conduct an online analysis to measure applicants’ strengths and the intensity of those strengths against those of current team members.

“These factors require considerable reshaping of fundamentals in any enterprise,” the authors say. “How you develop people, how you organize work to deliver values to your customers, what human relations practices you put into place to advance your workforce. Google, and other forward-thinking companies, have proven that emotional connections are the key to a successful twenty-first-century business.”

In other words, “It’s all about relationships,” according to a 2016 Forbes article about two recent studies that examined workplace culture. One of the studies examines the causal relationship between employee happiness in their workplace and their general productivity; the other describes the importance of collaborative relationships and building a culture where employees have “lively, high-energy interactions with one another on a regular basis.”

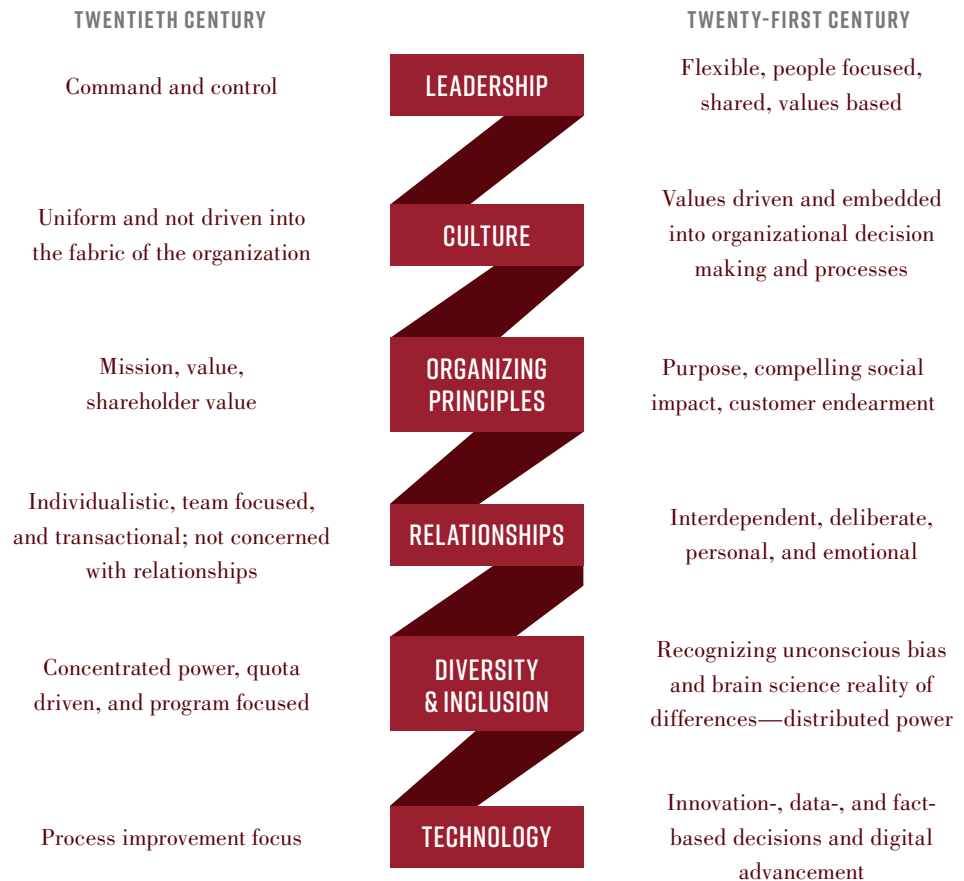
The goal, then, is to ensure productive—dare we say synergistic—relationships. Kitchens says the cornerstone of a successful and productive workplace environment is making sure you have the right people in the right positions.

“I like to think there are four kinds of horses—plow horses, quarter horses, racehorses, and show horses,” Kitchens said. “If you’re planting crops, you need plow horses. If you want to win the thoroughbred race, don’t enter a plow horse into that race. You have to know what you want and then acquire the correct kind of horses.”

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 46**

## SIX FACTORS OF CHANGE

Key influencers to transform the workplace.



SOURCE: “THE FUTURE-PROOF WORKPLACE: SIX STRATEGIES TO ACCELERATE TALENT DEVELOPMENT, RESHAPE YOUR CULTURE, AND SUCCEED WITH PURPOSE,” BY LINDA SHARKEY, PHD, AND MORAG BARRETT

**NEXT**, candidates go through a screening of their skills or competencies with a senior manager, a long-term employee, and a recent hire.

**THEN**, small groups of Southwest Michigan First team members interview each candidate in the boardroom or off-site at a coffee shop or restaurant.

**FINALLY**, the applicant pool is narrowed to the top three. Kitchens makes the final selection. By then, “I can pick any of the three I want, because they’ve been completely vetted. They’ve been through the team fit. They have the endorsement of the entire team. And all I have to do is pick the one I think best fits long term or who has the best opportunity to grow in our organization.”

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# WHY WORKPLACE CULTURE MATTERS...

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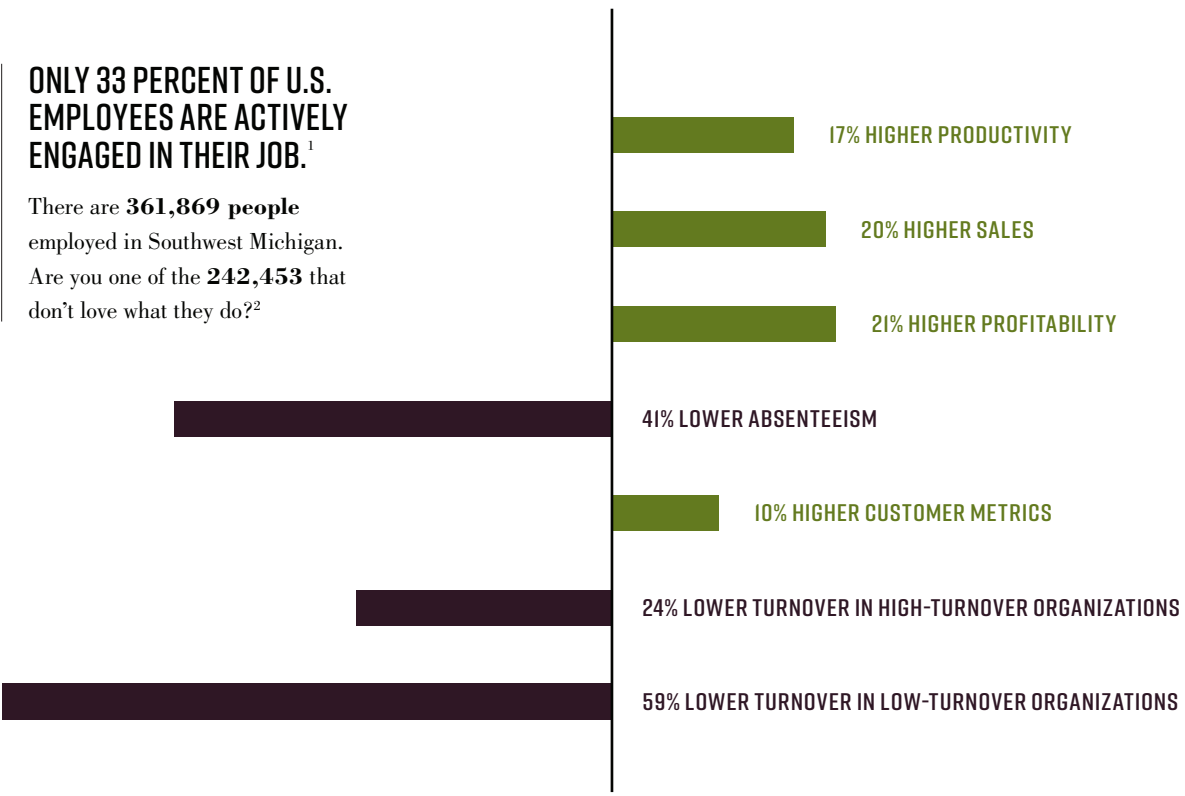
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# 86%

OF EMPLOYEES SAY THEIR COMPANY APPRECIATES THEIR WORK.

#### SOURCES

1. STATE OF THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE REPORT, 2017, GALLUP®
2. EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS IN BERRIEN, BRANCH, CALHOUN, CASS, KALAMAZOO, ST. JOSEPH, AND VAN BUREN COUNTIES, MICHIGAN DMTB, BUREAU OF LABOR MARKET INFORMATION AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES, LOCAL AREA UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS (LAUS), JULY 2017. PRELIMINARY DATA; NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED
3. BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE GUIDE, 2017, CORP! MAGAZINE
4. STATE OF THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE REPORT, 2015, GALLUP®

# Becoming A

# W O N D E R F U L

## Nine Companies in Southwest Michigan Share Their Secrets

BY HEATHER BAKER & JAKE FREDERICKS  
PHOTOS STEVE HERPPICH  
& MEG MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY

PING-PONG TOURNAMENTS. GIFT EXCHANGES. FRIENDLY PRANKS. MYSTERY TRIPS. CHILI COOK-OFFS.

What do these things have in common? They are all elements that can help make a workplace wonderful.

We're not just making this up. We've scouted Southwest Michigan to find workplaces that know how to make work both fulfilling and fun for their employees. These workplaces know that creating a comfortable, energetic, and team-oriented environment isn't only nice, but necessary. And they know that while profits are important for their success, healthy, happy people are vital.



The 269 *MAGAZINE* Wonderful Workplace Awards recognize the standout efforts made by several local businesses and explore some of their proven methods for success. These businesses demonstrate that a thriving company culture can engage and empower employees and employers alike, and pay dividends.

Want to be a wonderful workplace? Read on for inspiration, and maybe—just maybe—you should invest in a Ping-Pong table.

THE INAUGURAL HONOREES FOR A

**Wonderful  
Workplace**  
2017 | POWERED BY 269 MAGAZINE



## The Vibe at JVTR Is Anything but Taxing

JANSEN VALK THOMPSON REAHM PC | PUBLIC ACCOUNTING

Jansen Valk Thompson Reahm PC (JVTR) makes sure its hardworking accounting, tax, and consulting experts are excited to get up in the morning by taking steps to make its office a great place to work. “Up until about five years ago, the culture here was a very traditional public accounting culture. That meant suit and tie every day; you used to punch a clock, work on Saturdays, and sometimes take work home with you, depending on the time of the year. The only fun part of the day was when you talked to each other,” says Manager Keith Hayden.

In recent years, the company has completely rejected these once-accepted norms. For example, last summer the entire staff boarded a trolley and embarked on its annual mystery trip, which they later learned would be a day filled with picnicking, bowling, mini golf, and laser tag. In another team-building initiative, coworkers regularly cheer

each other on during annual Ping-Pong and foosball tournaments held in JVTR’s remodeled basement. In fact, employees are encouraged to take incremental breaks each day to either improve their game or simply have some fun. According to Hayden, “The quality of work is much higher now, and the work we do is more diligent, because you feel good about yourself. You don’t feel chained to the desk.”

One of the most exciting things about these initiatives at JVTR is that they begin at the employee level. All of the tournaments and trips are all proposed, planned, and organized by individual team members. “Putting in the Ping-Pong table and the foosball table was approved by the partners,” says Hayden. “But they allowed staff members to take the lead on it. The foosball tournament and Ping-Pong tournament, the

summer picnics that we have organized, and the mystery trip are really about allowing the young staff members to volunteer and take the initiative.”

This is important in a time where companies are trying to attract and retain top talent in the region. JVTR, a firm that has enjoyed 99 percent client retention since its formation in 1996, is now also benefiting from a focus on the opinions and well-being of its team members. “Times are changing,” says Hayden. “It’s a lot more common to change jobs than it once was. Before I started here, I was switching public accounting jobs, looking for a place with the right culture. It wasn’t necessarily for the money, a promotion, or opportunity for advancement—culture is really starting to matter to people.”



**The quality of work is much higher now, and the work we do is more diligent, because you feel good about yourself. You don't feel chained to the desk.**



## Community Matters Most

**NULTY INSURANCE | INSURANCE AGENCY**

A family-owned business since 1945, Nulty Insurance has always focused on people over profits. “It’s beyond just checking boxes. Everything we do is centered on the relationships we have built here. When we walk into work, each of us has the feeling that Nulty cares. It cares about us,” says Small-Business Advisor Ben Miller.

In order to build this community of caring, Nulty has established different company committees to make sure everyone is meshing well as a team, giving back, and having fun at the same time. One committee, the Champions Task Force, opens up communication between the team and its leaders. Miller, a member of this committee, has found it to be an effective way to get things done: “We did a survey on engagement and took the results to the management team—we found that employees would really value regular team-building meetings. After reviewing the survey, they added more of what we asked for. Management usually steps up right away if there are any suggestions that people make.”

Although Nulty pays special attention to its own workplace community, the company is constantly hard at work within its surrounding community as well. Another employee-based committee, the Nulty’s Needs Team, regularly coordinates with local charities like Loaves and Fishes and the Humane Society to make an impact in the lives of others. “One time, we put together meals for kids in a program that allows kids to take not just lunch, but breakfast and dinner home on weekends and during the summer for families that rely on school meals,” says Miller. “In fact, Nulty even pays us for some of the charity work we do each month.”

In cultivating a close-knit culture of togetherness, Nulty shows that its mission goes beyond business as usual. Over the years, it has built its success on a foundation of values that help set the company apart. “At most places, you come to work, you do your job, and you leave,” says Miller. “Here, you want to come to work, and you want to be around these people. It’s just a welcoming atmosphere—you get the sense that you really matter to everyone, even the people in charge.”

**At most places, you come to work, you do your job, and you leave. Here, you want to come to work, and you want to be around these people.**





## Unity Brings the Workforce Together

WIGHTMAN & ASSOCIATES | ENGINEERING,  
SURVEYING & ARCHITECTURE FIRM

Connecting diverse disciplines like architecture, engineering, and surveying across multiple locations in Benton Harbor, Portage, and Allegan has proven to be a unique challenge for Wightman and Associates. However, over the years, this dynamic has bonded its employees together, creating a special culture that invigorates the professional and private lives of everyone involved. “We have a lot of resources in our firm, and they all have to learn how to work in a collaborative team environment. We need to know our coworkers and be able to call them up to get stuff done. It’s been critical to our continuity as a team across offices and specializations to be able to do that,” says Alan Smaka, director of the Portage office.

One of the solutions to this problem arose organically. “A unique event has pulled us together that started early in the history of our company,” explains Smaka. “At one point, we were in three main houses and had satellite offices throughout; we had a very hardworking team, and we would get to Friday and need to let loose and have some fun. It started as a small group having drinks at a bar, and then grew and evolved as people got married and had families.”

Today, coworkers from every office gather about twice a month during the summer for a company-wide event. “Different people host every time. And gosh,

the attendance has grown. You could have anywhere between 70 and 100 people,” says Smaka. Every team member, along with their entire family, is encouraged to attend. The gatherings promote a culture where even the youngest members of the Wightman family know the names and faces of employees working across Southwest Michigan.

Such a unifying, positive culture has allowed Wightman to accomplish great things together. For instance, team members cooperate to cultivate a single community garden with shared plots and responsibilities. Last year, the annual harvest produced enough tomatoes and peppers to make plenty of salsa to share with clients and family.

This same model has allowed Wightman and Associates to expand its business, synthesizing the work of diverse employees to complete incredibly complex projects. “Regardless of whether it’s for the clients or the staff, a lot of what we do is just about people in general,” says Smaka. “Everything we do, it’s about the people. And I think when you focus on people, it’s easier to do the right thing.”





## Finding the Right Fit

CONSUMERS CREDIT UNION | CREDIT UNION

Regular cookouts, gift exchanges, football tailgates, and charity walks are all a way of life for an employee at Consumers Credit Union. “The best part about working here is definitely the atmosphere—and our CEO’s grilled chicken, which really is amazing,” says Shawn Premer, chief human resources officer.

CEO Kit Snyder, though well known for his barbeque ability, is also the inspiration for the team’s collective strength and synergy. “Our CEO has been our leader for 34 years and is the driver of our culture. The executive team members are really the keepers and the ambassadors, but he has had this philosophy for his entire tenure with the credit union. When he was hired, there were four people; now we’re almost 300,” says Premer.

Averaging 18 percent annual growth for 30 consecutive years, Consumers Credit Union regularly hires new team members. “It all starts with the hiring process. It really has been the key to providing a workplace of camaraderie, friendship, and fun, because we hire for culture first. We will absolutely leave a position unfilled if we don’t find the right fit. We hire for attitude, train for skill,” explains Premer.

To fill each position, the credit union mounts a search for someone who lives and breathes the company’s values of honesty, authenticity, and servant-leadership. Each applicant is screened by behavior professionals well before they ever sit across the desk from a hiring manager.

After determining that a candidate’s core values align with the credit union, one final hurdle must be cleared. Before starting their new career, prospective employees are observed in a realistic job shadow. The purpose is to observe how each individual interacts with both coworkers and clients alike. This allows the company to see beyond an applicant’s interviewing skills to get a sense of their fit in the workplace and on the team.

After such a rigorous process, those who prove to be a natural fit can finally relax. “It all begins the morning of day one. Everyone is cracking jokes; it’s all handshakes and first names,” says Premer. “New employees will get to learn our history and goals, but the atmosphere is guaranteed to be fun and upbeat, because we already know they will fit right in.”



**We will absolutely leave a position unfilled if we don’t find the right fit. We hire for attitude, train for skill.**



## The Key Ingredient for Workplace Success

### NATIONAL FLAVORS | FLAVORING MANUFACTURER

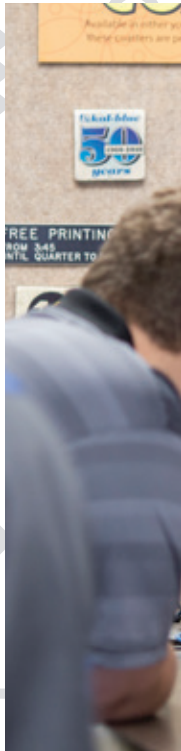
What could be more rewarding, or more delicious, than creating the latest flavor of ice cream? The experts at National Flavors aim to do just that by blending enticing essences that go into everything from baked goods to confections. Similarly, as an organization, National Flavors has been able to perfect its recipe for wellness in the workplace. “Continuous improvement is a big deal here. Anytime we have something that we think we can make better, we own it together and changes happen fast,” says Katie Harmon, quality control supervisor.

Taking an extra step to promote physical well-being, National Flavors has initiated several unique programs. For example, team members gather twice daily for community stretching exercises. Upbeat music plays through the corridors as everyone has an opportunity to get out from behind their desks to gather for a

much-needed break. This tradition brings the team together as they get to have a laugh, shake off any their stress, and move together as one.

Each employee is also encouraged to track their physical activities in an effort to promote healthy lifestyles both in and out of the workplace. “We have developed a program where we earn points based on activities that we do each day. For instance, we get points for the steps we take. There is a list of activities that we can perform, like mowing the lawn and playing soccer. Then we get rewards, like gas gift cards or National Flavors swag, when we collect enough points,” says marketing coordinator Kayla VandeBunte.

While physical wellness programs keep everyone’s heart rate up, various community gatherings help bolster mental and emotional well-being. Team members take advantage of the summer sun while it lasts and bring beanbags out to the parking lot for weekly Friday cookouts. These events lead up to the annual chili cook-off, where competition is particularly fierce. At a company where most have extremely refined palates, the trophy is highly coveted. “We all look forward to the cook-off, because you get to see everybody’s flair and unique talent. We have a lot of good cooks around here,” says Harmon. These combined initiatives keep workers at National Flavors feeling fulfilled and whole, both mentally and physically, ensuring employees can “cook up” the scrumptious flavors they are best known for.



**Upbeat music plays through the corridors as everyone has an opportunity to get out from behind their desks to gather for a much-needed break.**





## Designing a Custom(er) Experience

KAL-BLUE | COMMERCIAL PRINTER

A vision of excellence has enabled Kal-Blue to thrive since opening its doors in 1960, building a large and loyal customer base. Over the years, the print and technology specialist has evolved to meet the changing needs of both its customers and workforce at its Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids locations. “It is important to make sure you come up with ways to make everyone, especially a younger generation of workers, feel like they are part of a team,” says Owner Kip Young.

That’s why each day, no matter how many orders need to be filled, every Kal-Blue employee gathers for a half-hour team-building meeting to share recent developments, exciting upcoming ventures, and daily goals. This ritual serves as a goal-setting tool and a way to improve comraderie by encouraging dialogue between groups of specialized workers that may otherwise have limited contact. No matter the department, everyone can share in the celebration of individual successes in a way that helps the team perform better together when they have to collaborate on complex projects.

“It’s a time where we can informally talk about what we did right and what we can improve, just to make sure everyone is on the same page and starts off the day on the right foot,” adds Young. He has personally seen a marked difference in his company since first implementing this program. Beyond significantly boosting teamwork and morale, it has helped Kal-Blue improve an already impeccable standard of customer service, as the daily meetings provide regular opportunities to focus on areas where team members can learn from the experiences of their colleagues.

And learn they must, as there is no average day at Kal-Blue. The atmosphere is a place where the impossible is made possible for customers. Young describes it as: “It’s never boring here; we’re dedicated, but still have fun. We print for big brands and new local projects every day—we never know what we will be working on next, but when something big is happening in the area, we are usually among the first to know. People come in asking the impossible, and we make it happen for them.”



**People come in asking the impossible, and we make it happen for them.**



**For our space, CSM has adopted a theory of creating a physically and emotionally safe environment.**



## **Forging the Workplace of Tomorrow**

**CSM GROUP | CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT**

When CSM Group, a corporation specializing in revolutionary construction projects, was invited by Kalamazoo-based developer Treyster to reimagine an abandoned plot of land just outside Kalamazoo, it jumped at the chance. What was once an antique metal foundry has been reopened as an open-office hive of operations that melds a vintage industrial aesthetic with cutting-edge office design. Claiming a spot of its own in this urban office space, CSM has developed an optimal workspace

intended to maximize the productivity and overall wellness of its employees.

Rebelling against the traditional, structured cubicle-style arrangement of desks, CSM offers both privacy and opportunity for teamwork. Small, comfortably furnished conference rooms allow for close collaboration, while an open communal kitchen with ample island-style counter space allows for classic “water cooler” conversations. This design gives team members the chance to stand up, walk in and out, and participate in groups. “For our space, CSM has

adopted a theory of creating a physically and emotionally safe environment,” says Jim Felch, divisional president of healthcare and advanced technologies. “This aids in a work-life balance; you can even work outside by the river.”

By providing a more habitable physical space, CSM has seen a large improvement in the emotional well-being of its employees. “These changes promote better relationships, more open conversations, and more real communication,” says Felch. “People can let loose and let down their guard. Then the heart



and soul of the conversation can bare itself.”

CSM looks forward to sharing the new space with other companies and a restaurant as a way to improve interactions even more. “Bonds between people can be created in many ways, but one of them is breaking bread together. Having a restaurant adjacent to our facility gives the opportunity to extend or expand that bond. I think that’s going to be a really big plus for client interaction, customer service interaction, and internal collaboration,” explains Felch. Giving employees the freedom to speak freely in an open workspace, outside on a tastefully appointed veranda, or over a meal, CSM seeks to strengthen the ties that bring people together through innovative design.



## Leadership Opens the Door to Engagement

SPECIAL-LITE | DOOR SUPPLIER

At Special-Lite’s headquarters in Decatur, Michigan, CEO Henry L. Upjohn II is a regular sight on the production floor. A visionary in both leadership and engineering, he has played a pivotal role in the history of this entryway manufacturer. Not only has Upjohn personally designed many of the specialty machines and unique manufacturing methods that give Special-Lite doors their unshakeable quality, but he has also engineered the positive work culture that sustains his staff.

The key to Special-Lite’s success may indeed be Upjohn’s hands-on management style. “He’s really involved in research and development. Typically, he’s out in the tool room, right in there with those guys working on machinery,” says David Glynn, director of administration. Although he still has a hand in inventing mechanical innovations, Henry’s main area of focus is getting to know every employee personally. “I think many people thrive on it. They like being able to talk to him, because he’s down to earth and easy to talk to,” says Glynn. “I think having that presence here for them is just reassuring. Everyone can see that he’s engaged, he’s part of the process and part of us.”

### **The key to Special-Lite’s success may indeed be Upjohn’s hands-on management style.**

This engaged leadership is the driving force behind the palpably positive culture at Special-Lite—every team member knows that management has their best interests in mind. For instance, Upjohn understands the burden that excess rules and regulations can have on his employees: he has done away with the timeclock and entrusts everyone to be responsible for their own work.

Although the company’s leadership works tirelessly to improve the day-to-day experience of every team member, their futures are also taken to heart. By investing in workplace culture and the overall financial well-being of its employees, Special-Lite simultaneously invests in its own future.

**These are simple things  
we can do to show we care.  
They only cost our time.**



## **Building a Climate of Caring**

**CATALYST DEVELOPMENT GROUP | REAL ESTATE  
DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

Catalyst Development Group, responsible for constructing and maintaining many striking structures across Michigan, knows that it takes the whole team to get a project off the ground. They have therefore created a scaffolding of strong values and a positive culture to support every employee. “We build buildings that will be around for 100 years or more,” says Patti Owens, managing director and vice president. “We build our culture in the same way—everything we do is very intentional.”

Working closely together on towering achievements, team members view themselves more as a family than an office. This dynamic was carefully built over time upon an unshakeable foundation of trust. “Trust allows us to rely on each other, but also to make mistakes, because we always have that relationship to fall back on,” says Property Superintendent Morgan Macomber. It’s easiest to see this dynamic come lunch hour, when every employee gathers to share a meal. Regularly sitting around the lunch table together allows the team a time to decompress, share family pictures, or even to talk through a particularly difficult problem.

And just like in any family, there is a fair amount of lighthearted fun going on behind the scenes. Sometimes this means getting caught in the crossfire of a friendly dodgeball game. Other times it might mean celebrating a birthday by filling a workspace from floor to ceiling with colorful balloons, or welcoming an employee back from vacation with an office covered in countless cat photos. “These are simple things we can do to show we care. They only cost our time. What builds our team the most is time plus love. If you do anything with love, the result will be unbelievable. We strive to make sure that every interaction comes from a place of love,” concludes Owens. ▲



It's not just about **looking good**.

Well-designed work environments do more than sit pretty. With thoughtful design, your work space can help you attract and retain talent, support your staff's wellbeing, boost company culture, connect distributed teams, improve workflow, and more. Ready to experience the difference?

**custer**

# 2

## Ski Slopes

### 1

#### BITTERSWEET SKI AREA

Skiers and snowboarders can plummet 350 vertical feet down 20 runs and two terrain parks.

[skibittersweet.com/pages/home.cfm](http://skibittersweet.com/pages/home.cfm)

OTSEGO | (269) 694-2820

### 2

#### TIMBER RIDGE SKI AREA

What began as a single rope-tow powered by an old Chevy is now a fully equipped winter wonderland for experts and young learners alike.

[timberridgeski.com](http://timberridgeski.com)

GOBLES | (269) 694-9449

### 1

#### KIWANIS HILL

A thermos full of hot chocolate, a toboggan, and a brisk afternoon are all you need to have a blast with the kids at Kiwanis Hill.

[facebook.com/pages/Kiwanis-Hill/579455718791178](https://facebook.com/pages/Kiwanis-Hill/579455718791178)

COLDWATER

### 2

#### LEILA ARBORETUM

Don your scarf and mittens before gliding down a hill of glittering snow in this pristine park, gorgeous any time of year.

[lasgarden.org](http://lasgarden.org)

BATTLE CREEK | (269) 969-0270

### 3

#### ECHO VALLEY

After rocketing through the snow of Echo Valley, head to the cozy warming lodge to thaw out around a fireplace with a cup of hot chocolate.

[echovalleyfun.com](http://echovalleyfun.com)

RICHLAND | (269) 349-3017

### 4

#### KINDLEBERGER PARK

There is no better way to spend a snow day than heading to the hills of Kindleberger Park for a day of frosty fun.

[michigan.org/property/kindleberger-park](http://michigan.org/property/kindleberger-park)

PARCHMENT | (269) 349-3785

# 6

## Sledding Hills



### 5

#### MILHAM PARK

Test out that new snowboard or take in the natural beauty of Michigan while cross-country skiing through breathtaking valleys.

[kzooparks.org/parks-and-courses/milham-park](http://kzooparks.org/parks-and-courses/milham-park)

KALAMAZOO | (269) 337-8191

### 6

#### PRAIRIE VIEW COUNTY PARK

Well known among winter outdoorsmen as a hub for ice fishing and cross-country skiing, this park also welcomes children to speed down its slopes.

[kalcounty.com/parks/prairieview](http://kalcounty.com/parks/prairieview)

VICKSBURG | (269) 649-4737

## Bonus!

### SWISS VALLEY SKI AND SNOWBOARD AREA

Bring the whole family and experience the alpine exhilaration known as Southwest Michigan's own "Swiss Alps."

[skiswissvalley.com](http://skiswissvalley.com)

JONES | (269) 244-8016

## 1

### STICKS & STONES

Find just the right gift, and a little something for yourself, at this boutique filled with trendy home décor, kitchenware, and more.

[facebook.com/sticks.stones1](https://facebook.com/sticks.stones1)

PORTAGE | (269) 312-8625

## 2

### UNIQ JEWELRY

Add some sparkle to the season with a ring, bracelet, or necklace custom designed and personally crafted by a local artist.

[uniqjewelry.com](http://uniqjewelry.com)

PORTAGE | (269) 459-1669

## 3

### PERENNIAL ACCENTS

This shop is filled with all the kitchen gadgets and appliances you need to ensure that your figgy pudding is baked to perfection.

[perennialaccents.com](http://perennialaccents.com)

ST. JOSEPH | (269) 983-5791

# 9

## Specialty Shops

## 4

### SERENDIPITY

From rejuvenating bath remedies to locally grown coffees, this emporium of unexpected gifts has something to surprise everyone on your list.

[giftipity.com](http://giftipity.com)

MARSHALL | (269) 781-8144

## 5

### MOLE HOLE

Search for the perfect present for that special someone to festive music played on an antique pipe organ, guaranteed to put you in the holiday spirit.

[moleholemarshall.com](http://moleholemarshall.com)

MARSHALL | (269) 781-5923

## 6

### BELLA'S GIFTS & MEMORIES

Explore elegant styles and fill your sleigh with fashionable purses, jewelry, and kitchenware at this shopping wonderland!

[facebook.com/pg/BellasGiftsAndMemories](https://facebook.com/pg/BellasGiftsAndMemories)

NILES | (269) 684-7177

## 7

### AMY ZANE: STUDIO & STORE

There is no need to head all the way to the North Pole to find the right piece of hand-crafted artwork to go around your wrist, on your wall, or under your Christmas tree when it's at this boutique supporting local artists.

[amyzane.com](http://amyzane.com)

KALAMAZOO | (269) 459-1409

## 8

### LANA'S BOUTIQUE

Friendly fashion experts and the chic local brands found at Lana's Boutique will transform your wardrobe for the coming new year.

[lanafashionboutique.com](http://lanafashionboutique.com)

KALAMAZOO | (269) 345-3302

## 9

### TUDOR HOUSE TEA AND SPICE

Browse through a wide and meticulously curated selection of the finest tea leaves to find the right remedy to stave off winter's chill.

[tudorhousetea.com](http://tudorhousetea.com)

KALAMAZOO | (269) 978-3475

**DID WE MISS SOMETHING?  
TWEET US YOUR FAVORITE  
PLACES @269MAG.**

# AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

TECNIQ PUTS LIGHT RIGHT WHERE YOU NEED IT

BY HEATHER BAKER PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

## A HUMBLE START

Jeff Condon and Mark Pruss started the LED lighting company in their garage with one goal: to create the most efficient and cost-saving LED products available. “We founded TecNiq to provide an answer to the heavy-duty lighting industry other than what [was available]. There were solutions out there that were very expensive. [We found ways] to make the most efficient tail lights in the world, the most efficient side markers in the world, and the most efficient navigation lights in the world. We do it to save costs,” explains Jeff Condon.

## ITS PRODUCTS

TecNiq designs and assembles LED lighting solutions for the vehicular, marine, and home markets, as well as indoor and environmental lighting. Custom configurations can be made to fit the needs of customers. Most products are submersible and incorporate passivated stainless steels, automotive-grade polycarbonates, and polyurethane-sealed circuit boards.

## THE SECRET SAUCE

Condon and Pruss are both engineers—Condon has an aeronautical engineering degree from Western Michigan University, and Pruss graduated from the Milwaukee School of Engineering with an electrical engineering degree. Together, they started developing TecNiq’s optics design technology with “math we developed; you can’t find it in a book anywhere,” according to Condon.

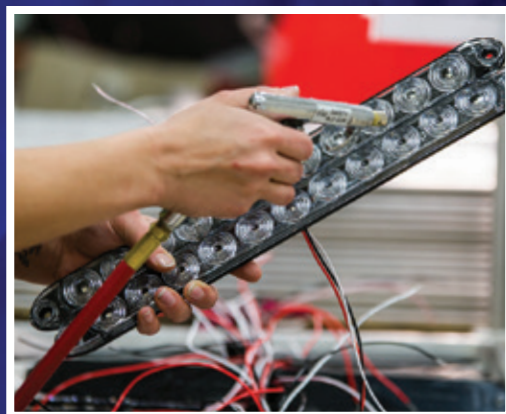
## SHINE THE BAT SIGNAL

“Our tagline is ‘changing the shape of light.’ That’s really what it’s about: putting the light where you need it, not where you don’t,” says Condon. TecNiq’s technologies project and distribute controlled light patterns, and even images, where they need to be. On vehicles, for example, light needs to project certain distances to allow for safe travel for both drivers and oncoming vehicles. TecNiq’s LED lights make that happen.





“OUR TAGLINE IS ‘CHANGING THE SHAPE OF LIGHT.’ THAT’S WHAT IT’S ABOUT: PUTTING THE LIGHT WHERE YOU NEED IT, NOT WHERE YOU DON’T.”



## WORKING HERE

### COMPANY

TecNiq, Inc.

### YEAR FOUNDED

2004

### LOCAL EXECUTIVES

- Jeff Condon, President
- Mark Pruss, CEO

### HEADQUARTERS

9100 E Michigan Avenue  
Galesburg, MI 49053

### REGIONAL FOOTPRINT

120,000 square feet

### NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

More than 110

### WHERE YOU’LL FIND TECNIQ PRODUCTS

About 500,000 lights are shipped monthly from Galesburg—all with a lifetime guarantee. TecNiq distributes directly to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). You’ll notice its products on UPS trucks, Malibu boats, Featherlite trailers, recreational vehicles by Forest River Group, and more.

### NOW HIRING

Open positions are posted on [indeed.com](http://indeed.com) or [ziprecruiter.com](http://ziprecruiter.com). Search “TecNiq” in “Galesburg, MI.”

TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE VISIT [TECNIQINC.COM](http://TECNIQINC.COM)

# THE BEAUTY OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

IT'S MORE THAN JUST SKIN DEEP

BY HEATHER BAKER IMAGE MITCH CONRAD



**WORKPLACE DIVERSITY NO LONGER MERELY DENOTES THE COLOR OF ONE'S SKIN, BUT RATHER IMPLIES THE RANGE OF DIFFERENCES BELONGING TO THE PEOPLE OF AN ORGANIZATION.**

Differences in race, gender, ethnicity, age, education, place of birth, tenure, position within the organization, religion, family background, sexual orientation, cognitive style, and more affect how individuals perceive themselves and others. When individuals come together on a team, these perceptions

influence interactions and pose a challenge to organizational communications, performance, and ability to adapt to change.

While one might assume that a homogeneous team would consistently outperform one filled with diversity, it is quite the opposite. In fact, McKinsey & Company found in their 2015 Diversity Matters project that “companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15 percent more likely to have financial returns that were above their national industry median, and the companies in the top quartile for racial [and] ethnic diversity were 35 percent more likely.”

When workplaces develop and implement diversity and inclusion plans, they find themselves increasingly adaptable problem

solvers in areas that run the gamut from supply chain to financial management. Staff capable of communicating in multiple languages and representing a breadth of experiences can better serve customers on multiple continents. In turn, this access offers employees opportunities for training and promotion in global business centers. A group of people with a variety of viewpoints, experiences, and skill sets tackle strategic issues and develop optimal solutions faster. Conflict resolution improves when employees acknowledge each other's diversity and focus on common production and quality goals. A company's reputation is enhanced when outsiders acknowledge and applaud its dedication to diversity practices.



WITH  
**BETH WASHINGTON**  
DIRECTOR, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION  
BRONSON HEALTHCARE

It becomes a place sought out for employment by top talent, too. Bronson Healthcare is such a place in Southwest Michigan. Its diversity practices contribute to its position as one of the region's largest healthcare providers, with over 8,800 employees delivering services at Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo, Bronson Battle Creek Hospital, Paw Paw's Bronson Lakeview Hospital, Bronson South Haven Hospital, and 90 additional provider practices. The 269 MAGAZINE team connected with Beth Washington, Bronson's director of diversity and inclusion, to dive deeper into the provider's programs.

#### HOW DOES BRONSON HEALTHCARE DEFINE DIVERSITY?

Diversity is what makes each of us unique and can mean something different to everyone. Keeping this in mind helps us deliver on our mission that together—this group of 8,800 employees—we are here to advance the health of our community. We honor diversity as a fact and work to be inclusive. Otherwise, we'll never meet our vision: an exceptional healthcare experience for every person, every time.

#### WHAT ROLE DOES DIVERSITY PLAY IN YOUR RECRUITMENT?

We're always looking to recruit, retain, support, and promote a diverse workforce—diverse meaning not only racially and ethnically, but in thoughts, ideas, and experiences. The more lenses and the more diverse perspectives a team has, the more innovative it is. We want to recognize everyone's differences and the power they bring.

#### ONCE ON BOARD, WHAT DO YOUR EMPLOYEES LEARN THROUGH YOUR CULTURAL COMPETENCE TRAINING?

The Diversity and Inclusion Department offers educational opportunities throughout the system. Sessions are designed for staff to develop intercultural competency. We explore topics like implicit and explicit bias, the history of discrimination and marginalization in the U.S., and equity, inequity, and disparities. Lessons are designed using the key principles for intercultural competency and patient-centered care—self-awareness, understanding of others, and the behavioral skills to build a bridge across cultural differences.

#### NOT ONLY DO YOU EMPLOY A DIVERSE WORKFORCE, BUT YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE DIVERSE TOO.

We service whoever comes to our door, so our language translation and interpretation tools are important. We see the value of bilingual staff members who go through a qualifying process to provide live interpretation services, partner with several local agencies that offer onsite interpreters, and engage a remote video and telephonic service to ensure we have 24-hour, multilingual capabilities. We can meet the need of probably close to 200 different languages.

#### HOW DOES YOUR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COUNCIL ENGAGE EMPLOYEES IN THINGS THEY ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT?

Members of the council lead internal Inclusion Teams that celebrate one aspect of our diversity. For example, teams focus on cultural awareness and appreciation, the Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, veterans' recognition, Pride events, and ways people celebrate important holidays in their ethnic groups around the world. Employees who volunteer to help on these teams are called "Friends of the Council."

**The more lenses and the more diverse perspectives a team has, the more innovative it is.**

We support community events like the Black Arts Festival in Kalamazoo, the Battle Creek Juneteenth Celebration, and events put on by the Hispanic American Council. At these events, we share information about jobs at Bronson, how to get healthcare, available providers, the process for becoming part of our Patient Advisory Council, and how to provide feedback, communicate concerns, and give compliments.

#### SO WHILE SOME COMPANIES HAVE SUMMER BARBECUES, BRONSON HAS BLOCK PARTIES?

The Bronson Human Resources department hosts catered summer celebrations at all our

hospital locations; the Diversity & Inclusion Council hosts the block parties at each of these locations too. Block parties include booths where employees share unique things about themselves. We had one woman share her enthusiasm for roller derby, while another performed baby wrappings. One group offered insight into the Islamic religion, and Indian culture was the message of another. Last year, we had 13 booths in Kalamazoo, another seven in Battle Creek, five in Paw Paw, and three in South Haven. We create awareness about how unique our employees are.

#### TELL US SOME WAYS THAT BRONSON PARTNERS WITH FAITH- AND COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES.

We participate in Project SEARCH, a transition program that prepares young adults with disabilities to perform complex jobs. This is a collaboration with the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (KRESA), Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Bureau of Services for Blind Persons, and the Disability Network of Southwest Michigan. This intensive nine-month program partners the young adults with Bronson employees who teach and coach the interns on specific jobs. At completion, these young adults are able to secure competitive employment in the community.

We also have an internal program that assists those who want to switch careers, yet need to brush up on math and English skills before going back to, let's say, community college. Employees apply to participate, and those selected are released from work and paid for time spent in class. We have quite a few employees who start, for example, in food service and move up into a higher-paying job because they have taken advantage of the program.

As part of the Michigan Minority Supplier Diversity Council, we seek out minority-owned businesses as suppliers. Many minority business owners have found unique ways to be competitive in their markets that help us lower our costs as well. It's a mutually beneficial relationship that ultimately delivers value to the communities we serve.

And then there are ways for employees to get involved with the Bronson Health Foundation, which aims to improve overall health status by promoting physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. Employees can receive four hours of paid time off for the volunteer work they do in the community.

#### DIVERSITY TRULY SEEMS TO BE WOVEN INTO ALL ASPECTS OF BRONSON.

The value of diversity and the behaviors of inclusion are embedded into our Standards for Excellence. We believe in respecting all people, in building trust and partnerships, promoting a healthy workplace, and raising the bar. You can't raise the bar if you're not including a variety of people on your team. We live our values, and because all decisions for our workforce are made locally, it makes it easier to meet the needs of our community. Together, we advance the health of our communities.

# VISUALIZING

## WHAT OTHERS CANNOT SEE

A Q+A WITH **BILL FLUHARTY**

**DIRECTOR OF DESIGN AT STRYKER** BY REGAN DEWAAL | PHOTOS BY STEVE HERPPICH

**It never ceases to amaze me how a talented design team can visualize what others cannot see.**

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## WHAT DOES A DIRECTOR OF DESIGN DO?

At a high level, my job is to build and maintain the competencies of design within the Medical division of Stryker. By developing the talents of our people and leveraging design methods and tools, I assure that the disciplines of design add value to our company.

## WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE?

My day is a mix of strategic and tactical discussions with our R&D leadership team, project teams, and design professionals. Projects are mostly focused on defining our future products and services or making sure the products we are currently developing are going to meet the needs of our customers for the next few decades.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A DESIGNER?

Although early on as a kid (I enjoyed) art, I did not learn about design until high school. Once I started college and entered the art department, I saw many options—including industrial design. Designing products was much more exciting to me than graphics, so I made industrial design my major.

## WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN DESIGN?

In high school, I enjoyed the challenge that design provides. Art projects were fun, and they allowed me to explore my creativity and try different techniques for creating, but I was drawn to the challenges of a design assignment. It was always fun to use my creativity to create something for a purpose.

## EVERYONE STARTS SOMEWHERE. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB?

As a kid, I was always cutting lawns or shoveling snow for neighbors, but my first real job was when I was 14. I worked in an ice cream shop. It was a busy place, and I had a lot of fun serving people.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING A DESIGNER?

Being a part of a team that is charged with defining the future for our company. It never ceases to amaze me how a talented design team can visualize what others cannot see.

## WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION FOR THE DESIGNS THAT YOU CREATE?

Inspiration for our product and service designs comes primarily from our customers. If we can solve a problem for our customers and make them more successful, we are ultimately successful.



Beyond our customers, our design team starts every project with a discovery effort where they research trends in product design, business solutions, and the application of technology.

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

First, a designer needs to be curious and have the skill to be an observer. Second, empathy is critical. A designer advocates for the end user of a product, and it is through empathy that a designer truly understands what is meaningful to the people we design for. Finally, a designer needs to be a storyteller.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CREATION/PROJECT THAT YOU HAVE WORKED ON?

What I am doing currently is the most challenging work I have done to date. In building the competencies of design within Stryker Medical, I am helping to ensure that the business growth of our division is sustainable.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST LESSON THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED SINCE YOU BEGAN YOUR CAREER?

Design is truly a team sport. The designer has unique talents, but they are worthless unless blended with the talents of other product development and business disciplines.

## HOW DO YOU BALANCE CREATIVITY WITH BUSINESS?

Balancing creativity with business is simple for me. The things we create are intended to drive our business forward; therefore, everything we do has to make sense to the business. We create to be of service to our customers, and if we do this well, they reward us by buying our products and keeping us in business.

## WHO DO YOU VIEW AS A MASTER OF YOUR CRAFT?

I have a lot of respect for design leaders who not only create great product, but also create powerful and impactful organizations. I think

the latter is more difficult, because you have to impact talent, business processes, and culture to make design truly impactful.

## WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO WORK WITH?

Hyper creative, talented professionals in design, marketing, engineering, and business development. I want to see young talent develop. My thrill regarding working with others is when a development team clicks through collaboration. This is a tough thing to accomplish, but when it happens, it's magical.

## HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR CREATIVITY SHARP?

First, I am a potter and enjoy creating original pieces of ceramic art. I challenge myself with projects that push my abilities. From a work perspective, through the discovery research of my team, I learn so much about design trends. The purpose and context of every project demands new exploration to prepare the designer.

## IF YOU COULD BE CREATIVE IN ANOTHER 'SPACE,' WHAT WOULD THAT BE?

The social innovation space is compelling to me. I think that business can step up and contribute more socially through facilitated community design projects.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN ASPIRING DESIGNER?

Stay curious, and use your curiosity to constantly learn about the issues of this world, the way people are solving problems, and the tools they are using. The best designers I know never stop learning, and they never feel like they have their profession figured out.

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# NOT JUST ANY TEAM **YOUR TEAM**



*Justin Horn, Bryan Todd, Nancy Turtle, Kim Labadie, and Marcus Brussee*

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the

# Life List

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# 9

## EVERYDAY WAYS TO EXPAND YOUR MIND

269 QUOTES

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**Bob Goff**

@bobgoff

Author of New York Times Bestseller Love Does. Founder, Chief balloon inflator, Love Does Org  
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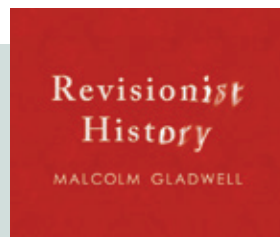
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# LEADER<sup>2</sup>LEADER



**LORI GREEN**  
DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT  
AT CSM GROUP



**JOSH IOCCA**  
MANUFACTURING MANAGER  
AT FLOWSERVE CORPORATION

## DEFINE LEADERSHIP.

**LORI GREEN:** If you don't have self-awareness, you can't lead other people.

**JOSH IOCCA:** Leading multiple people to a desired vision.

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

**LORI:** I've learned great things from the many leaders who I've encountered. I've worked for Kraft and Newell Brands, and I had a short stint at the Kellogg Company. While I was able to take things from great leaders at each of those places, I've learned that I want to manage in my own way, which may be different.

**JOSH:** My wife, a remarkable person [who] gives me honest feedback. Professionally, Mark Welch, director of global systems at Flowserve, is pushing me to look past my limiting beliefs that I've placed on myself and is causing me to think beyond myself.

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

**LORI:** One of the things that I do for business development marketing is to help teams and other executives craft how we're going to market back to somebody, whether it's a proposal, qualification packet, or whatever. I decide where my team is going to spend their time, and that dictates where the whole group is going to be directing their energies.

**JOSH:** How I respond to someone's success is very important. How I respond to someone's failure is extremely important. If someone here at work makes a mistake, how I react to that is going to be pivotal on how they react in the future. If they have a success, it could also be just as bad if I don't celebrate that.

## WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

**LORI:** My husband and I believe our family comes first. My girls are at the age now where just being with them is fun. We play tennis and golf together; we boat together. Wednesday nights are girls' nights, when I do cardio tennis and then have dinner afterwards. One of my other passions is gardening. I love being in my yard.

**JOSH:** I have four kids, so a lot of what we do revolves around the kids, but we enjoy that. Family time, for me, is the best, and spending time watching the kids play sports, coaching the kids—that's what we spend most of our time doing when I'm not working.

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

**LORI:** University Roadhouse. Great food.

**JOSH:** Crow's Nest.

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

**LORI:** The Pope. Marcus Buckingham. Condoleezza Rice.

**JOSH:** Dave Ramsey. John Maxwell. Ron Kitchens.

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

**LORI:** My Microsoft Surface Tablet, flip-flops—got to have flip-flops—and ZonePerfect Nutrition Bars. I always have Zone Bars stashed everywhere; someone's going to be hungry!

**JOSH:** My cellphone, cellphone charger, and a purpose.

## WHO WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

**LORI:** The Pope.

**JOSH:** The apostle Paul. Here's a man who went through just about everything you could possibly think of because he believed in something. [With] the trials and things that he went through, I'd like to understand that passion.

One living person I'd like to meet [is] Warren Buffet. The guy lives pretty modestly with all the success he has, and it seems like family is pretty important to him. It'd be interesting to see how he's done that—managed to keep that focus with all of that success.

## HOW DO YOU GET YOUR MOST CREATIVE IDEAS?

**LORI:** In the shower. It's that one, quiet place where nobody's going to talk to you. If I have to have a crucial conversation with somebody, I have it in the shower first, just talking it out with myself. I don't sing in the shower; I think



in the shower. No one can hear me; they think I'm just singing, but I'm talking it out.

**JOSH:** From other people, ultimately, and [through] hearing people's struggles. When I see passionate people who want to solve a problem [but] don't know how, it makes me want to help them.

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

**LORI:** I try to go on LinkedIn every day and find a quick little article that I can read on something that would help my team, help me, and help the company.

**JOSH:** I spend time in prayer, and I also listen to podcasts as I get ready [in the morning] and make lunches for the kids. I'm constantly listening to different podcasts and reflecting on, "How would that impact me if I did some of those things being presented?"

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

**LORI:** ToDoist. I also am a weather freak, so I don't know what I'd do without the weather app on my phone.

**JOSH:** The calendar, messaging, and mail apps.

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

**LORI:** We have fun. My team works incredibly hard. We're the team that everyone comes to and says: "Make this look good. Make this pretty. Come up with this idea. How should we market this?" We're responsible for so many things that I would say a construction company's management team should not be able to do. We can do so much. Honestly, I'm amazed by my team every single day. The things that they come up with, and their creativity and innovation, honestly, inspires me. It's amazing.

**JOSH:** By reflecting on the past. [In] trying to develop a culture where it's more team oriented, [my] focus is on people, and there isn't a real tangible metric for that. So, I have

to reflect on what the culture was like before and what it is now.

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

**LORI:** Evolving with the culture, and, really, the culture of leadership. I read a lot of leadership books, and in fact have a bin of books that I've read. There's always something to learn.

**JOSH:** My vision for myself is that I need to figure out how I'm going to be a leader in my community as well as at work and at home. I'm doing Leadership Kalamazoo. I'm also getting involved in some of the committees around town, ultimately to help me out with work, but also to make more connections with people in the community.

#### WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

**LORI:** Opportunity, and, in particular, the opportunity for our millennials. I'm a huge proponent of internships and externships and bringing our young people into the workplace to see industry and people working in their environments.

**JOSH:** The energy that is in the community [to make] our community better. We're focusing in on developing leaders, which is exciting for me, because I'm in my thirties and I'm thinking, "I have a long way to go." I want this to be a good community for my kids, and building leaders is going to help us drive the economy in a better direction.

#### WHAT IS YOUR "LIFE QUOTE?"

**LORI:** It's a John Maxwell quote: "A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit."

**JOSH:** From Larry Winget: "If your life sucks, it's because you suck." It's a funny quote, but to me it means a lot. If you don't like what you're doing, do something different.

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



LORI

JOSH

**If I have to have a crucial conversation with somebody, I have it in the shower first, just talking it out with myself.**

LORI GREEN

**When I see passionate people who want to solve a problem (but) don't know how, it makes me want to help them.**

JOSH IOCCA

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# How Did I Get Here?

**JOAN BUDDEN**

PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
PRIORITY HEALTH

STORY BY HEATHER BAKER  
PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

## 1961 | BORN IN DETROIT, MI

I grew up in Detroit in a little bungalow in a Catholic neighborhood where all the families were very tight-knit. It was a place where your mom didn't have to see you do it, because any mom on the block could see you do it and you were in trouble. It was a great working-class area. My parents both worked. I had three siblings.

## 1979 | ENTERED UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

My parents were very old-school. My dad didn't believe in women going to college, because [women] would get married and never work again, so it would be a total waste of time. I had an uncle that helped me talk my dad into letting me go. I worked hard and put myself through school. I had a hard curriculum, with classes from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, five days a week. Friday nights, I waitressed at a popular restaurant.


## 1983 | GRADUATED WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AND WORKED AS A DENTAL HYGIENIST

I went to school to be a dental hygienist. After I got a job, I went on for my master's. I worked during the day, and then I went to school at night at Wayne State. I also worked a second job on the weekend.

## ADVICE TO MY 20-YEAR-OLD SELF

Be authentic. It's so much more work when you're trying to be somebody you're not. Growing up with little money and not knowing much about business, I think I tried to be somebody else a lot because I was so ambitious. I just wanted to break out of that bubble. It's so much better

when you're yourself. And enjoy the journey. It's not a sprint; it is a marathon. Appreciate all the things along the way, and value the moments you have at the time. Do not always look for the next thing or the next change, challenge, or conquest.



**I was risk averse. I was afraid. And you shouldn't be. You shouldn't take chances. Go with the ebb and flow of it.**

**1984 | BEGAN A 25-YEAR SPAN IN PUBLIC POLICY AT BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MICHIGAN**

I had been working in hygiene for one year when a patient who worked at Blue Cross [indicated that I could make more money there] reading X-rays. Sure enough, they were right.

In the beginning, when I reviewed X-rays, I had literally a thousand recommendations of what they could do differently to make it better: how to do it more efficiently, why we did this at all, and why it cost us money while we never saved anything.

All of those things were about the job I had and caused people to wonder, “Who is that? She’s always trying to make it better.” I’ve seen some talented people who spend a big part of their day networking to be ready for the next opportunity. They would be so much more productive if they just focused on their job. That’s a better way to get your next opportunity than just always shopping for the next [job].

But the next job at Blue Cross that I applied for, I didn’t get. I was a level three, this was a level four and going to be a big promotion for me. I was crushed. Thinking back, if I had I gotten that job, I never would have gotten into strategic planning. I never would have been on the focus of health policy and the things I really love. It was the best thing in the world that I didn’t get that [job].

**GOOD ADVICE FROM OTHERS**

The advice that people have given me and I think is true is that, after one year [on the job], the fog comes up. After three years, you think you know the job. After five years, you actually do know the job. And after five years, it is probably time to move on or time to think about [the job] differently. Now the higher up you get, I think [the time] might elongate a little bit—but [you must] reinvent.

**1985 | RECEIVED A MASTER’S DEGREE FROM WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY**

After I got my master’s degree, I applied for a job that was twice the level—a level six. The HR department was up in arms that I would get that big of a jump. That’s what education does for you!

I did end up getting the job. Someone worked hard to allow me to make that big of a jump. I spent most of my career after that, about 15 years, in strategic planning, which was a lot of public policy around healthcare reform during the Clinton administration.

**2001 | PROMOTED TO VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIVIDUAL BUSINESS IN 2006**

One of the most important mentors I had was outside of my own company. We’d sit and talk after work, and I would tell her these stories. Just articulating the stories would put a different light on them. Someone with a little bit of distance could see things entirely differently. I think mentors are critical. The most important thing is to mentor young people.

**2009 | MOVED TO PRIORITY HEALTH AS ITS CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER**

I came to Priority Health because there was a female CEO, Kim Horn, and she was a tremendous leader. I loved the company too because it had a very diverse population.

I believe in Patrick Lencioni’s *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*; it was a game changer for me. The brightest spots in my career have been when I’ve had an awesome team to work with. Now that could be a team I’m on or a team I’m leading. Either way, when there is real trust and support and a great symbiotic relationship, there’s nothing like it. If you’re not on a great team and you can’t fix it, I would find another team. And if you’re in charge of a team, look at your team. Make it hugely successful. One of the things I did right when I started was spend a lot of time as a team defining roles, clarifying responsibilities, [and identifying] what we need from each other.

**2016 | NAMED PRESIDENT AND CEO**

By the time I was interviewing for this job, I had done almost every job in a health plan. I’m never going to go out and process a claim, but [I know] what it is about. There’s knowledge there.

I’m a fate person. I believe that there are some things that are a little bit destiny. Luck is more of a matter of when [something] will happen, but it was going to happen [anyway]. Many times in life, after you’ve had a huge challenge, you think, “If I knew it was going to work out that way, it would have been so much more

**I think if we believe a little bit more in fate and what’s meant to happen, we’d probably all be a little better off.**

enjoyable.” When I was interviewing, it was so painful. If I knew it was all going to work out, I could have really enjoyed the interview process. I think if we believe a little bit more in fate and what’s meant to happen, we’d probably all be a little better off.

Careers take journeys. The biggest mistake I made was staying in a job too long. I stayed in strategic planning for 15 years because I thought being a strategic planner was just who I was. As soon as I left, I loved my next job, and I thought, “Why did I stay there for so long?” I was risk averse. I was afraid. And you shouldn’t be. You should take chances. Go with the ebb and flow of it.

# Retail Therapy

FOR SUSAN DIFFENDERFER, OWNING A STORE IS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN BUSINESS



BY ANDREA PRATT | IMAGES BY STEVE HERPPICH

**S**usan Diffenderfer decided to open a store on a whim.

“I had worked for twenty years in the restaurant industry,” Diffenderfer says. “One night at work, I had a wild thought: ‘I’m going to open a store.’”

Just two months later, in October of 2007, she did. Her shop, Sticks & Stones, has grown since then but is still known for offering funky-yet-functional homewares.

Despite her initial lack of experience, retail has been a natural fit for Diffenderfer.

“I had never worked a day of retail in my entire life, so it was pretty overwhelming at first,” she laughs. “But it’s similar to being in the restaurant business; you’ve got to have style and flair and be able to build relationships to make it work.”

And according to Diffenderfer, relationships are what it’s all about.

“My favorite part of owning a small business has been the connections,” she emphasizes. “Some days I play counselor, therapist, and friend more than I do store owner.”

Diffenderfer’s outgoing personality and the inviting, inclusive atmosphere she has cultivated in her store encourage a lot of good conversation between patrons as well.

“Sometimes it even turns into a sewing circle where everybody’s talking to each other,” she says, adding, “It’s not uncommon to have wine brought out!”

While conversation in the store tends to be lighthearted, Diffenderfer doesn’t shy from the serious topics.

“You never know what’s going to happen when you walk in here,” she says. “There’s been a lot of healing in the store through the years for people going through hard times.”

## CURATING CONNECTIONS

When Diffenderfer opened the original location of Sticks & Stones in downtown Kalamazoo, she focused on small home accessories. Over time, she’s expanded the store’s product line, and now carries

seasonal and non-seasonal décor, artwork, kitchen gadgets, specialty products such as Nora Fleming entertainment pieces, Caldrea homekeeping products, Fustini’s oils and vinegars, and much more.

“I try to keep a wide base of items to make sure there’s something to entertain everybody,” Diffenderfer says. “It’s definitely the place to go if you ever need a gift.”

There are enough personality-filled products that anyone who enters can pick up something they like, and Diffenderfer is happy to personally help customers find the right item at the right price.

“We have good-quality products at a fair price. I always look at items and think, ‘Would I pay for that in a store?’ If not, I’m not going to have it in mine,” Diffenderfer explains.

But that can be dangerous, she says.

**Some days I play counselor, therapist, and friend more than I do store owner.**





“It’s hard to not take absolutely everything home that I want to!”

In 2014, Diffenderfer, finding that the items she curated were in high demand, opened a second Sticks & Stones location in Portage.

“I used to think I was going to open 20 different stores and be the queen of décor,” she laughs. “But, after doing two stores, I realized that I wanted to dial back.”

Wanting to focus on her kids, Alex, 19, and Rachael, 15, Diffenderfer made the difficult decision not to renew her lease on her downtown location in 2017.

“My heart and soul are in downtown Kalamazoo, and I miss the connections I had there,” Diffenderfer says. “But I’m still very connected here in Portage. I’m surrounded by great businesses, and my downtown customers have absolutely followed me here.”

Since moving to the Kalamazoo area in 1987, Diffenderfer has held a deep appreciation for the supportive, connected nature of the community. That appreciation has only been strengthened by 10 years of business ownership.

“Kalamazoo’s special. I love the energy and the vibe. I love our community and how

we are all truly entwined. I can’t see being anywhere else!”

#### LOCAL LEANING

As the daughter of a local banker in Coldwater, Michigan, Diffenderfer was raised with a “local first” mentality that has stayed with her and affected the way she does business.

“When I was growing up, I’d ask my dad if we could go to the mall, and he’d say ‘No, you’re going to support your local merchants.’ Now, I think it’s more important than ever, with online shopping being so popular.”

She adds, “I do think people are going to suddenly realize that they missed the connection of going into the store, touching the product, and talking to people.”

Along with carrying local products, such as candles from Kalamazoo Candle Company, Diffenderfer uses the store to give back to the local community.

“Some of my favorite charities are Kalamazoo Animal Rescue, First Day Shoe Fund, and Pretty Lake Camp. I feel the need to give back to the community. We’re neighbors; we’re all in this together.”

#### ONGOING OPTIMISM

At one time, Diffenderfer had as many as 13 employees. Now that she has scaled back, she runs the day-to-day operations of the store mainly by herself.

“I do all the buying. I clean the toilets. I do everything,” she says. But that hasn’t dulled her enthusiasm.

“When running a small business, you really have to enjoy what you do. And I still enjoy turning my key every day, and a lot of times I’m kind of sad to leave at night.”

She’s enthusiastic about the future, too, especially the upcoming launch of Sticks & Stones’ online store, which will feature the larger items, like furniture, that she doesn’t have room for in the physical store.

While she’s faced her share of challenges, Diffenderfer is glad that she jumped headfirst into business ownership 10 years ago.

“It’s very fulfilling to look back at the relationships I’ve built and the customers that have become good friends of mine through the years, and to realize that what I do is so much more than bringing good product to people.”



## The Importance of Thriving in the Workplace

FROM PAGE 13

“I think as teams, we have to do the same thing,” he continued. “But then you have to make sure you’re investing in the proper facilities for those members, you’re investing in the proper kind of personal development, you’re building teams that work together, and you’re constantly focused on culture. If you get the culture correct, everything else will take care of itself. But if you blow the cultural piece, then you’re absolutely never going to perform and get the outcomes you expect for the organization.”

After hiring the right people, it’s also important to keep them engaged in the workplace, Kitchens said. At Southwest Michigan First, employees take part in a variety of off-site social activities. They try to have something for everyone. “We’re intentional about it, but everybody doesn’t need to eat their favorite food at every meal,” Kitchens said. “We’ve gone bowling several times. I hate bowling. The only thing I like about bowling is you can drink beer while you do it. But we have several people on our team who love to do group bowling.”

As workforces continue to contract and companies face continued worker shortages, getting and keeping good, engaged employees is only going to become more crucial. Kitchens says, “As an employer, I’ve got to make sure that my people are as productive as possible. That means I’ve got to make sure that I have the right horses, the right barn, the right feed, and the right training development for them. I give them the time and the pasture to play in that they need, and then if I do all those things right, they will perform at a much higher level than they would at organizations that don’t do these things.”

And workplace culture is no soft science. “Having a highly engaged and highly productive workforce isn’t a softy-touchy-feely thing,”

Kitchens said. “It’s not about having a sticker on your door or an icon on your email. It’s about understanding that amazing people who work in an amazing environment are going to do incredible things. As an organization leader, it’s our job to make sure we have all the right team members, we’re fully engaging them, and let them run, because they will deliver in incredible ways to our organizational bottom line, however you measure it.”

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PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

## NEWELL BRANDS DESIGNS A LARGER PRESENCE IN KALAMAZOO

Newell Brands Inc. is expanding its 40,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art design center in Western Michigan University's Business Technology and Research Park in the city of Kalamazoo, investing \$7.3 million and creating 87 highly paid design jobs.

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Individuals interested in careers with Newell should visit <https://jobs.newellbrands.com/>.

## Where the New Jobs Are

AS REPORTED BY THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS BATTLE CREEK UNLIMITED, CITY OF PORTAGE, AND SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST.

### Newell Brands

KALAMAZOO, MI  
KALAMAZOO COUNTY  
[newellbrands.com](http://newellbrands.com)

NEW JOBS: **87**

### FEMA Corporation

PORTAGE, MI  
KALAMAZOO COUNTY  
[fema-corp.com](http://fema-corp.com)

NEW JOBS: **14**

### Bowers Manufacturing Company

BATTLE CREEK, MI  
CALHOUN COUNTY  
[bowers-mfg.com](http://bowers-mfg.com)

NEW JOBS: **94**

### Clark Logic

THREE RIVERS & STURGIS, MI  
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY  
[clarklogic.com](http://clarklogic.com)

NEW JOBS: **5**

### Global Composites dba Xcel Painting

WHITE PIGEON, MI  
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY  
[globalcompositesinc.com](http://globalcompositesinc.com)

NEW JOBS: **50**

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BY RON KITCHENS  
PUBLISHER

PHOTO STEVE HERPPICH



## Creating the Workplace of Tomorrow

WHEN IT COMES TO CULTURE, CHANGE STARTS AT THE TOP

**UNTIL ABOUT 10 YEARS AGO, AMERICAN BUSINESS CULTURE HAS REMAINED MOSTLY THE SAME SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II.**

During the war, men and women from across the country grew accustomed to the systematic, rigid approaches of the military. When the fighting was over, these same strategies followed people back into the workplace, creating a highly regimented business environment for decades to come.

I had an opportunity to experience this kind of atmosphere for myself when I started my first job out of college. My manager instituted a culture of what he called “maximum anxiety.” He believed that he had to squeeze the effort out of people to get their best performance. He saw employees not as people, but as tools that serve only to make him money, and many leaders of the time shared his view.

Today, things are entirely different. These days, efficient workplaces are less restricted and more reflective of life. People want to work on teams; they want to know that other team members value them and that the work they do is essential. No one wants to be a lone ranger, working alone in a cubicle with overbearing superiors—no one wants added anxiety.

The first step towards forming a positive culture is finding the right people. In addition to reviewing experience and educational backgrounds, it takes an investment of time and energy to identify which individual best exemplifies the culture you wish to project. It’s one thing to have qualified employees, but it’s another to have a team of qualified employees whose principles and passions are aligned with the organization.

After assembling a great team, the leadership needs to establish conditions that will allow employees to thrive. This means throwing out the old post-World War II playbook and tailoring the environment to meet the basic needs of each team member. It can be as

**People want to be a part of something beyond just dollars and cents—they are driven by a shared mission.**

simple as offering the choice between a stand-up desk today and a sit-down desk tomorrow. The reality is that flexible work hours and flexible workspaces are quickly becoming the new standard. Businesses are seeing that open communication and open offices pave the way for increased trust, accountability, and performance.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of workplace culture is a unified vision. Profits don’t motivate the average employee; their purpose must be more profound. People want to be a part of something beyond just dollars and cents—they are driven by a shared mission.

At the best companies in the world, everyone knows what they aim to achieve together as an organization. It’s human nature to want to make a difference, not just in a quarterly report, but on a team and in a community.

Once a year, I host a team barbecue at my home. Everyone brings their families, and the kids have a chance to splash in the lake. To see all our team members playing with each other’s children and engaging outside the office shows what can be possible with the right team, environment, and mission. When every team member appreciates and loves each other, how could anyone ask for a better place to work?

**ALWAYS FORWARD,**

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



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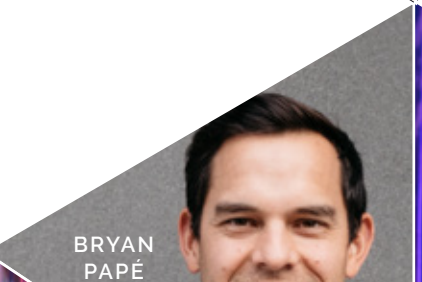
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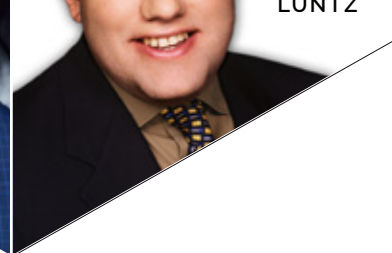
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