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inside:

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The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails.
— John Maxwell



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WHAT'S IN OUR CULTURAL DNA?
Great teams that we once played for or currently roster on serve up inspiration.

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I am blessed that I get to spend every day working on a great team at Southwest Michigan First, where people truly love and appreciate each other.
@ronkitchens

One of my first jobs was working as a line cook at a small Italian restaurant. We were a staff of four serving dinner for hundreds of people, so we learned to trust each other absolutely.
@JakeFredericks1

In the newsroom on the Kalamazoo College campus, my favorite time was at the beginning of the week when the entire team gathered together to brainstorm content and share contacts. Afterward, the fast-paced, high-energy rush to organize interviews and finish layouts was exhilarating.

My high school golf team taught me a lot about the power of positivity. When other team members believe in you, it rubs off, and you believe in yourself even more!
@NickRiashi626

It's amazing what people will do if asked. New to a company that had never participated in the local United Way campaign, I chaired an internal drive. Our generous team went from zero contributions to nearly \$10,000.

| @269MAG

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 build a home, go to work, and bring dreams to reality.

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BY HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR IN CHIEF

PHOTO PRETTYVECTORS (ISTOCK)



Everybody Loves An Underdog

SIX LESSONS FROM HEROES WHO RISE FROM FAILURE

UNDERDOG IS HERE!

Underdog is here! It could be because of that lovable cartoon character of the same name who debuted in 1964, but everybody loves an underdog. Who wouldn't love that cute beagle who was not only able to shout, "There's no need to fear, Underdog is here!" but could fly and, with the greatest of ease, fight off villains named Riff Raff and Overcat?

If you're too young to have watched Underdog or reruns of it, you are still undoubtedly familiar with the underdog concept that I'm talking about. I'm betting that, surely, you've watched "The Bad News Bears," "Rudy," "Hoosiers," "Miracle," or "Rocky" on a Sunday afternoon on TV or Netflix. A few tell stories that are fictional, like the boxing saga of Rocky Balboa. Some are true, such as the one about the 1980 Team U.S.A. Olympic hockey team. No matter the tale, the underlying concept is the same. An individual or group of people, seemingly incapable in more ways than one, overcome major obstacles to become champions.

While we all experience exhilaration when the final scene of the movie plays out, when team members are raised up on shoulders and all the naysayers suddenly cheer, there's one thing that always stands out: The ultimate winners came together as a team. (If you're thinking that Rocky wasn't on a team, I'd argue with you that he relied heavily on his team of Adrian, Paulie, and Mickey.) Each embraced weakness and relied on individual strengths. Superstars flipped the chip off their shoulder and became "one

of the guys," and the last player selected figured out how to beat the buzzer. In the end, outcome outweighed ego.

Maybe you've been on one underdog team or another in your lifetime or witnessed an experience like this. For me, it was my middle school cheerleading squad. Out of a group of 14 girls, we had two who would ultimately be

While we all experience exhilaration when the final scene of the movie plays out, when team members are raised up on shoulders and all the naysayers suddenly cheer, there's one thing that always stands out: The ultimate winners came together as a team.

good enough to go on to cheer in college; the rest could be described as having two left pom poms (or feet). Yet, through careful choreography and team bonding, we went on to surprise everyone we would ever compete against and win competition after competition. We didn't focus on what we couldn't do; rather, we perfected what we could. We were underdogs.

In my role as a parent, I got to view this scenario from the bleachers when my then 11-year-old son's Little League team won the state baseball tournament. The teams from the Detroit area perennially dominated Michigan's tournament, but that year, the

seemingly shorter, mischievous scalawags from West Portage surprised everyone. While the team did have a few boys more skilled on the field than others, it wasn't those boys who made the difference in the end. Instead, it was the one who nobody expected to hit a double at the bottom of the order and the slowest pitcher of the group

who were the playmakers in the end. They were the underdogs.

In this issue of 269 MAGAZINE, we share expert insight on the future of teams and culture. Beyond their expertise, I hope you can learn a little about how to take an underdog team to the next level.

READ ON,

Heather

Tell us about your underdog story @269Mag with #269Underdog!



In this issue of 269 MAGAZINE, we share expert insight on the future of teams and culture. Beyond their expertise, I hope you can learn a little about how to take an underdog team to the next level.

6 TIPS FOR UNDERDOG SUCCESS

1. BE INSPIRED BY YOUR MISSION.

Find confidence in your passion. Rely on the gifts you were born with to succeed. Get fired up when others underestimate you.

2. HUNKER DOWN ON HARD WORK, TENACITY, AND A WILL TO WIN.

While pedigree and status might give someone a leg up on you, they offer no more than hollow advantages. Long hours and creativity can beat resources with a little “elbow grease.”

3. FACE DOWN FEAR.

Great teams may seem “great” on paper, but underdogs focus on the game they are currently playing. It’s alright to be afraid when facing a bigger opponent. Acknowledge that fear and what is triggering it. Then, disregard the fear and address shortcomings.

4. FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU DO WELL (AND WHAT YOU DON’T DO WELL).

Doing one thing really well is more productive than doing three things inadequately. Less is more. Once you’ve mastered what you are good at, you can move on to the next thing.

5. COME TOGETHER.

Lift up team members after they make an error. Share what you know. Find joy in small wins and build on what you learned.

6. TAKE ON ADVERSITY.

Maybe the experts have it all wrong. They might not know what you are bringing to the table. So, bring it! Being an underdog is what you make of it. Great teams own their underdog status and build a “pack” culture. Once they do, they can take on the “top dog” and win!



What advice would you give to your mid-leader self?

USE YOUR VOICE @269MAG WITH #COMMUNITYCOMMENT



AARON ZEIGLER
PRESIDENT
ZEIGLER AUTO GROUP

FIND PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

Seek them out. Sit down, spend time with them, and ask them to help mentor you. Not just one or two people, but eight or ten people. You pick up different things from different people, and it really can accelerate your learning curve.

If you had a podcast, what would you name it?

AARON: "Helping Others."



ASHLEY KLETKE
SENIOR MANAGER OF
HUMAN RESOURCES
STRYKER

ASK YOURSELF "WHAT DO I THINK WE SHOULD DO?"

I tend to be one who can get caught in analysis. When I launch into that mode of gathering inputs and over-thinking, asking myself that simple question pulls me out of paralysis by analysis. I wish I would have known that a long time ago.

ASHLEY: "Try to Be Like Yourself."



DR. ED MONTGOMERY
PRESIDENT
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE.

I'm personally rather shy, so networking with people was not something that I thought a lot about when I was a mid-level leader. One of the things I would tell myself is that you really need to put yourself out there. Do more of that; do some more networking and get known by other people. It's really a key to succeeding.

ED: "Ed's Hour of Power."



One of the things I would tell myself is that you really need to put yourself out there. Do more of that; do some more networking and get known by other people.

DR. ED MONTGOMERY



KARIANNE THOMAS

CHIEF OF PUBLIC SAFETY
KALAMAZOO DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC SAFETY

BE PATIENT.

I marry every project. I jump into everything, and I want to do it now! I've learned over the years that, if I can get people as interested or at least 50 percent as interested as I get in stuff, we can accomplish great things. It's fabulous!



SOPHIA QUINN

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER
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IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.

It's really about the team that I'm overseeing and its success. As I advanced in my career and leadership, I realized that I'm successful when my team is successful. I need to help them attain their goals because when they attain their goals, I attain my goals.

KARIANNE: "Here's the Answer."

SOPHIA: "The Diary of a Fiery Greek Woman."



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DISCOVER YOUR CULTURAL DNA:

*How Values Are
Fundamental to Company
Growth and Development*

BY JAKE FREDERICKS ILLUSTRATIONS VECTORIKART (ISTOCK)





DR. RANDY ROSS
AUTHOR AND COACH

“CULTURE CAN BE DEFINED AS A COLLECTIVE EXPRESSION OF SHARED VALUES, BELIEFS, AND BEHAVIORS. WHEREVER PEOPLE GET TOGETHER, YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE A CULTURE. IT JUST HAPPENS. THE QUESTION IS, **WILL THAT CULTURE BE BY DESIGN? OR BY DEFAULT?**”



Regarded as history’s first anthropologist, the ancient Greek thinker Herodotus was fascinated by the various peoples of the Persian Empire.

He lived at around 450 B.C., a time when outside civilizations and societies were usually the subjects only of legend and wild conjecture, not study. But as the Greek and Persian armies clashed for dominance across the Mediterranean, Herodotus, unlike most of his contemporaries, was more interested in the clash of cultures. His detailed account of the ancient Persians set the standard for anthropological study for centuries to come. Though scientific methods have evolved over the two thousand years since, the field we now call anthropology, the study of human behavior and beliefs across societies, remains much the same.

Dr. Randy Ross may not consider himself an anthropologist, but the bestselling author and executive coach is urging today’s leaders to study the cultural makeup of their own organizations a bit more closely. After publishing the book “Remarkable!: Maximizing Results through Value Creation” alongside Vice President of Marketing for Chick-fil-A David Salyers, Dr. Ross has traveled the country as a speaker and culture consultant. He works in both the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds, helping to build teams that outperform.

Speaking before an audience of business leaders gathered in the Southwest Michigan First Catalyst Center for the first installment of this year’s First Leaders Speakers Series, Dr.

Ross explained that every company has a culture, even if it is left unspoken or unexplored.

“Culture can be defined as a collective expression of shared values, beliefs, and behaviors,” he explained. “Wherever people get together, you’re going to have a culture. It just happens. The question is, will that culture be by design? Or by default?”

“If you want to build a business, you have to have a business plan—everyone understands that,” Dr. Ross continued. “But when I ask [leaders], ‘What’s your plan for culture? How are you going to hire the right people? How are you going to build better relationships on your team?’ Usually, all I get in response are blank stares.”

“If you’re a business owner, or if you’re involved in helping a business grow, it’s not that hard,” Dr. Ross revealed. “It’s actually pretty easy. And there are only two things you have to do: Lay the groundwork for a remarkable culture, and hire remarkable people.”

Indeed, today’s top organizations know that better employee engagement results in profit. Gallup’s® Q12 survey shows that there is 21 percent higher profitability and 24 percent lower turnover rates for teams that are engaged. Improving your employee engagement rates cannot be done overnight, though. The only effective way to increase these metrics is by integrating strategies into your organization’s culture and business strategy.

However, as the nation’s unemployment continues to shrink, so does its labor pool, making it more and more difficult for organizations who rely on skilled workers to continue to grow. Companies are in a relentless race for talent that is almost impossible to win. The



Pew Research Center confirms that “while the Millennial labor force is still growing, partly due to immigration, it is unlikely that the Millennial labor force will reach the peak size of the Boomer labor force (which reached 66 million in 1997).” The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the Millennial population will peak at 75 million. At that number, a high rate of labor force participation would be needed to reach a labor force of 66 million.

CLARIFY YOUR “WHY”

Hoping to outshine the competition in this race for talent, businesses like Kalamazoo, Michigan-based Stryker have been turning their focus inward to rediscover and fine-tune their cultures. Brad Saar, president of Stryker’s medical division, explained, “Folks can steal your talent; they can even hire [away] your people every once in a while, but culture is very hard to replace. Culture is a sustaining organism, but it demands constant focus.”

“I think it’s critically important first to identify the DNA of your organization,” Saar said. “How do you describe yourself, and what is your mission? What are your values? How do you even begin to look for talent without addressing that first?”

Since Stryker’s mission of pushing the boundaries in the field of medicine is based on the values of corporate responsibility, global wellness, and improving the lives of both caregivers

and patients, the organization decided to align itself with like-minded philanthropic efforts. In the early 1990s, Stryker partnered with the nonprofit Operation Smile to help increase the capacity of health care professionals and transform the lives of children across the globe.

Its initiative, Stryker Smiles, matches donations from employees—as well as their friends and family—to help Operation Smile provide life-altering surgeries to children around the world who are born with facial deformities like cleft palate. Stryker also sponsors various education and training programs in coordination with Operation Smile to improve surgical training in the developing world.

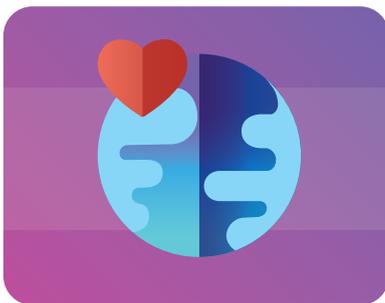
After three decades, Operation Smile has provided over 200,000 free surgeries to children who would otherwise have no access to safe medical care. And if that weren’t incentive enough, Stryker’s work with Operation Smile helps its team keep their mission and impact in constant focus. “The best people these days want profit with purpose and mission with profit,” Saar observed. “And we definitely want to attract team members who are motivated by values, not a paycheck.”

In “Redefining the C-Suite: Business the Millennial Way,” American Express confirms Saar’s observation. The report confirmed that it’s a priority for Millennials—those born between 1980 and 1996—in the U.S., U.K., France, and Germany for

“I think it’s critically important first to identify the DNA of your organization. How do you describe yourself, and what is your mission? What are your values?”

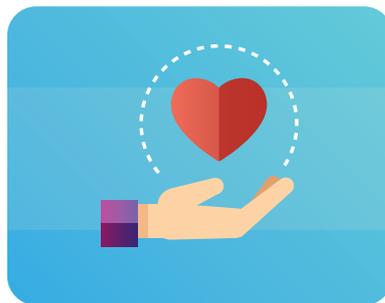


Millennials in Today’s U.S. Workforce



69%

WANT TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD



81%

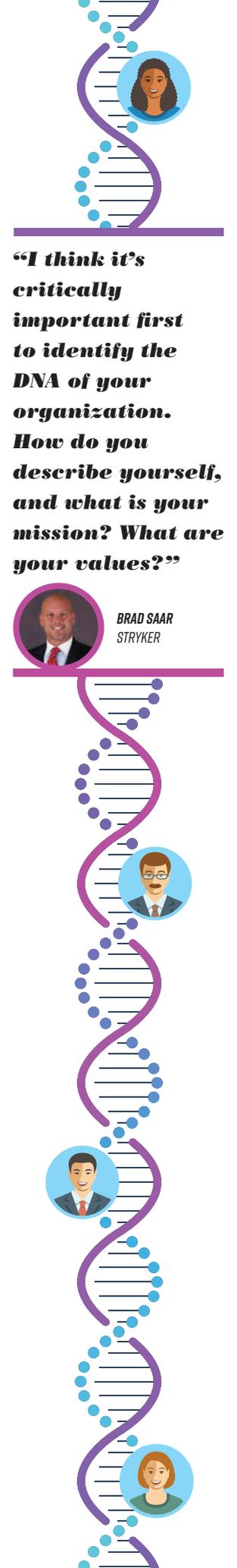
SAY A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS NEEDS TO HAVE A GENUINE PURPOSE



78%

BELIEVE THAT THE VALUES OF THEIR EMPLOYER SHOULD MATCH THEIR OWN

Source: American Express, “Redefining the C-Suite: Business the Millennial Way.” Researched by Kanter Futures, November 29, 2017



If you want to build a business, you have to have a business plan—everyone understands that. But when I ask [leaders], ‘What’s your plan for culture? How are you going to hire the right people? How are you going to build better relationships on your team?’ Usually, all I get in response are blank stares.

businesses to have a double bottom line. For those calling the U.S. home, 69 percent want to make a positive difference in the world, 81 percent said a successful business needs to have a genuine purpose, and 78 percent believed that the values of their employer should match their own. More than one-third defined success as doing work that has a positive impact on society.

FIND THE RIGHT FIT

Keri McCarthy, a talent solutions business lead for DISHER Talent Solutions, a product development, talent attraction, and business consulting firm headquartered in Zeeland, Michigan, also understands that a potential teammate’s personal values outweigh even the most amply-padded resume. McCarthy is an expert in staffing management, having spent over 21 years helping companies acquire top talent and develop a robust cultural infrastructure. McCarthy stresses that the most effective way to curate an organization’s culture is to be extremely selective about which people make it on the team.

“We always hire for culture first,” she said. “One of the very first things we look for is attitude, not necessarily experience. You can’t teach attitude. Our strategy is to find the best people early on and then help them grow. Since we started with that strategy seven years ago, some of those people are now leaders in our organization.”

McCarthy explained that, sometimes, it’s better to keep a position unfilled for months than hire the wrong person. “We have been tested with this lately,” she remembered. “Not long ago, we had a candidate who was technically fabulous, but just from an attitude perspective, wasn’t a good fit for us. Initially,

the hiring team was enamored. But after inviting him to the office and showing him around, we realized that he just didn’t get us. And we had to say no. It was a hard decision to make.”

CALIBRATE YOUR CULTURE

After doing the legwork to assemble their dream team, how do business leaders maintain culture while, at the same time, dealing with daily demands? Many experts agree that even for the most talented teams, culture requires constant attention and that the most edifying way to keep a finger on the pulse of your organization’s culture is not to hire a resident anthropologist, but to simply ask.

For instance, team surveys measuring engagement have been leveraged at DISHER. McCarthy explained that her organization got started doing so by participating in workplace competitions like the National Association for Business Resources’ “Best and Brightest Places to Work,” making use of the competition’s in-depth and anonymous team canvassing to determine how engaged its employees were.

Engagement remains one of the most revealing metrics by which to assess the health of an organization’s team and culture, but the DISHER team has moved towards a different approach. “We are now partnered with a company called Denison Consulting,” said McCarthy. “We wanted to measure more than just how engaged the employees were, but how aligned with our mission [as an organization]. Also, because it’s not part of a competition, we don’t feel pressured to chase numbers; we can chase the things that are hindering us from being a high-performance organization.”



“Our of the very first things we look for is attitude, not necessarily experience. You can’t teach attitude. Our strategy is to find the best people early on and then help them grow.”



KERI MCCARTHY
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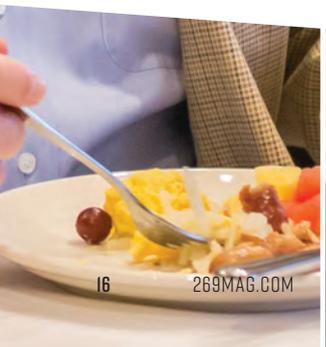
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“As organizations, we can be so [fickle]. We say we want people who are collaborative. We focus on hiring culture-builders one moment, and then we switch and say, ‘No, no, it’s all about results.’ I’d say that we don’t have to make it a dichotomy between the two.”

JIM MARSHALL
LANDSCAPE FORMS



Kristine Cunningham, who serves as the human resource director of Kalamazoo County, faces the same culture challenges, but in a very different office milieu. Because Cunningham works for the local government, she doesn’t have the resources of a large organization. However, she remains emphatic that close attention to culture is critical and that slight adjustments to right the ship are necessary to steer any team towards success.

“We can’t spend your taxpayer dollars on the little things like buying employee surveys,” she explained. “So, I created our own employee engagement survey based on research and looking at what our municipalities and universities were doing.”

Cunningham explained that she uses the survey to conduct “cultural checkups” with her team. After each survey, she compiles the anonymous answers and then works to implement the new ideas. Cunningham remembered that many members of her team chose not to participate in the survey at first, but after seeing that their suggestions and comments were actually being listened to and acted upon, more and more people chose to engage.

This has given Cunningham the opportunity to fine-tune her team’s culture constantly. With a limited budget, the solutions require creativity. “Because we are not allowed to spend our budget on free snacks and perks, we read our survey suggestions and focus on person-based, feelings-based solutions,” she explained.

“For example, we changed the way we bring people into our organization. We did away with our old orientation process and started celebrating new team members to help them understand how great our work community can be.”

BALANCE RELATIONSHIPS AND RESULTS

Some leaders may feel put off by the “touchy-feely” nature of creating a culture of community, favoring instead the old method of team motivation: stressing results, results, results. However, Jim Marshall of Landscape Forms cautions leaders against this approach, strongly stating that, in his experience, sustained success demands a best-of-both-worlds approach.

As Vice President of Culture at Landscape Forms, Marshall manages a diverse team of welders, graphic designers, accountants, and everything in between. His task is to maintain the agile and vibrant culture that allows Landscape Forms to stay at the forefront of outdoor living and design.

Marshall understands the need for results but says that dismissing the human aspect of the workplace can be detrimental to team performance. “As organizations, we can be so [fickle],” he commented. “We say we want people who are collaborative. We focus on hiring culture-builders one moment, and then we switch and say, ‘No, no, it’s all about results.’ I’d say that we don’t have to make it a dichotomy between the two.”

“There are so many times in my organization where this comes into clear focus. On the manufacturing floor, I don’t only care that someone can weld 10 benches in an hour and nobody else can do that many—it’s really about attitude as well. If they are always discontent, nobody else will want to work with them; their attitude will kill learning for everyone else and drive everything underground. That doesn’t work. Even if the employee is high-performing, that’s not the only thing we value.”

This is a strategy Dr. Randy Ross supports wholeheartedly. His philosophy for building a great team is to hire for attitude, train for skill, and focus on creating a compassionate and emotionally-stable work environment. And while this approach may sacrifice speed-to-hire, Dr. Ross does not think that leaders have to sacrifice accountability and results.

“I don’t want you to think this is just warm and fluffy kind of stuff because it’s not,” emphasized Dr. Ross. “You can have a relationally rich environment while still being results-oriented, with the discipline to execute well. If you can manage the balance, it’s a powerful combination.”

The self-described “craftsman of culture” explained that in today’s world, there is a real hunger for human connection. Despite a plethora of online avenues of communication, people are starved for what Dr. Ross calls genuine, face-to-face “Relationomics.” He contends that genuine compassion is the missing piece in many workplaces which, on paper, should be outpacing the competition.

“A high-performance team is built on relationships and trust,” Dr. Ross explained. “Can you work well with people you don’t trust? The answer is no. A culture that exceeds expectations is one where people believe the best in one another, want the best for one another, and, consequently, expect the best from one another. This blend creates an unstoppable environment with high trust, high connectivity, and high accountability.”



REGIONAL WORKPLACE

Cultures DRIVE EMPLOYMENT

BY HEATHER BAKER
PHOTOS FIZKES (ISTOCK)

Company culture matters a lot. When employees enjoy their workplace and understand the value of the work that they are doing, they tend to arrive at work every day and give it their all. Gallup reports that “engaged employees make it a point to show up to work and do more work—highly engaged business units realize a 41% reduction in absenteeism and a 17% increase in productivity.”

Source: Gallup® State of the American Workplace Report, 2017

People want to work in places where companies boast great workplace cultures. Southwest Michigan’s fourth-quarter jobless rate trends indicate that we’re one such place! People really do enjoy going to work here every day, as the region continues to outperform state and national data.

Over the past year, the region has outdone itself in comparison to the fourth quarter of 2017, as jobless

rates continued to decline substantially in regional metro and non-metro labor markets. In general, when looking at fourth-quarter data, keep seasonality in mind; it reflects trickling seasonal cuts in agriculture, construction and mining, and leisure and hospitality. While December enjoys an increase in retail and trade hiring, it is balanced by temporary layoffs of support staff in local schools for the winter break.

JOBLESS RATE

The jobless rate is the portion of the labor force that is jobless, expressed as a percentage. It is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed who are actively looking for work by the total labor force.

It is a lagging indicator, meaning that it generally rises or falls in the wake of changing economic conditions (rather than anticipating market changes).

	OCTOBER 2018		NOVEMBER 2018		DECEMBER 2018
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN	3.4%	NO CHANGE	3.4%	▲+0.5%	3.9%
STATE	3.8%		3.6%		4.0%
U.S.	3.5%		3.5%		3.7%

	OCTOBER 2017		NOVEMBER 2017		DECEMBER 2017
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN	4.3%	▼-0.2%	4.1%	▲+0.4%	4.5%
STATE	4.2%		4.0%		4.4%
U.S.	3.9%		3.9%		3.9%

LABOR FORCE

The labor force is the actual number of people available for work in a defined geographic area. It is the sum of those who are employed and unemployed.

	OCTOBER 2018		NOVEMBER 2018		DECEMBER 2018
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN	375,273	▲+1,563	376,836	▼-2,080	374,756

	OCTOBER 2017		NOVEMBER 2017		DECEMBER 2017
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN	379,028	▲+1,570	380,598	▼-1,898	378,700

EMPLOYMENT

Employment represents the total number of employed persons aged 16 years and over on established payrolls who received full- or part-time pay during a defined period of time.

	OCTOBER 2018		NOVEMBER 2018		DECEMBER 2018
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN	362,608	▲+1,563	364,145	▼-4,119	360,026

	OCTOBER 2017		NOVEMBER 2017		DECEMBER 2017
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN	362,879	▲+2,079	364,958	▼-3,309	361,649

Source: Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget, Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS). Data is not seasonally adjusted.

GREAT CULTURES DO GREAT WORK

These 53 great companies were recognized on regional and national “best lists” in 2018. All enjoy a strong regional presence.

ABBOTT ^{4,8}	KSS ENTERPRISES ¹
ADVIA CREDIT UNION ^{1,2}	LAKE MICHIGAN CREDIT UNION ¹
AEROTEK ³	MERCANTILE BANK OF MICHIGAN ¹
AMERIFIRST HOME MORTGAGE ¹	MICHIGAN OFFICE SOLUTIONS ¹
ANDY J. EGAN COMPANY ¹	NORTHPOINTE BANK ¹
APPLIED IMAGING ¹	OMNI COMMUNITY CREDIT UNION ¹
ARBOR FINANCIAL CREDIT UNION ¹	OPTIMED HEALTH PARTNERS ¹
ARMSTRONG INTERNATIONAL ¹	OSBORNE KLEIN ¹
BDO ^{1,4}	PLANTE MORAN ^{1,5}
BELL'S BREWERY ¹	PNC FINANCIAL SERVICES GROUP ⁴
BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MICHIGAN ¹	SCHUPAN & SONS ¹
BRINK, KEY & CHLUDZINSKI, P.C. ¹	SME ²
BUIST ELECTRIC ¹	SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST ¹
CONSUMERS CREDIT UNION ¹	STRYKER ^{5,6,7}
CTS TELECOM ¹	THE KENDALL GROUP ¹
EXPRESS EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS ¹	THE WISER FINANCIAL GROUP ¹
FLEIS & VANDENBRINK ¹	TOWERPINKSTER ^{1,2}
GAZELLE SPORTS ³	TRILLIUM STAFFING ¹
GREENLEAF HOSPITALITY ¹	WARNER NORCROSS + JUDD ²
GREENLEAF TRUST ^{1,2}	WHIRLPOOL ⁶
HERITAGE COMMUNITY OF KALAMAZOO ¹	WILLIS LAW ¹
HONIGMAN ¹	WINDEMULLER ¹
HUB INTERNATIONAL ¹	WSI ¹
HUMANEX VENTURES ¹	YEO & YEO CPAS & BUSINESS CONSULTANTS ¹
IMPERIAL BEVERAGE ¹	ZEIGLER AUTO GROUP ¹
KALAMAZOO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION ¹	ZOETIS ⁴
KNIGHT WATCH ¹	

¹ Best and Brightest Companies to Work for in West Michigan, National Association of Business Resources, 2018

² Cool Places to Work in Michigan, Best Companies Group, 2018

³ Top Workplaces, Detroit Free Press, 2018

⁴ 100 Best Companies, Working Mother, 2018

⁵ 100 Best Companies to Work For, Fortune, 2018

⁶ World's Most Admired Companies, Fortune, 2018

⁷ Great Workplace Award, Gallup, 2018

⁸ Where the World Wants to Work Now, LinkedIn Top Companies, 2018



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GET FIRED UP!

KALAMAZOO OUTDOOR GOURMET'S LUXURY KITCHENS COOK UP THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE

BY
HEATHER BAKER

PHOTOS
HANNAH ZIEGLER
AND KALAMAZOO
OUTDOOR GOURMET

COMPANY

Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet

PHILOSOPHY

To design and build the best outdoor cooking and entertaining equipment in the world.

LOCAL ROOTS

The company traces its lineage back to 1906, when the Kalamazoo Sheet Metal Company was founded to make stainless steel equipment for the dairy industry. Though heralded for its seamless welds, which reduced bacteria to ensure food safety, the company faced a challenge when the local dairy

industry declined in the 1990s. Looking for ways to repurpose employees' welding skills, the founder's great-grandson got the game-changing idea to make grills. In 2005, the company came under new ownership and was rebranded as Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet. Its headquarters moved to Chicago.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet's attention to detail jumps out at you from the moment you effortlessly lift the 60-pound hood of one of its grills. You'll experience a work of art, where separate pieces of stainless steel become a seamless whole using a hand-rubbed finish. In making its outdoor kitchen cabinets, the company is the only manufacturer to use

stainless steel slides on drawers and shelves to prevent rusting. Cabinet bodies are welded by hand to guarantee a lifetime of durability and service. Pizza ovens can bake a Neapolitan-style pizza in less than three minutes, and its refrigerators keep ice cream frozen even when the air on the other side of the door reaches 110 degrees.

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

Each outdoor kitchen product is built-to-order and shipped direct from its Kalamazoo workshop to homes around the globe. The company is committed to purchasing every raw material possible from U.S. sources. When Scott Kohler, vice president of operations, joined the team nine years ago, he tightened supply sourcing. “I started [identifying] vendors from Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids to Benton Harbor to get [our supplies] closer and closer for better control. Plus, it keeps [investment] in the region,” said Kohler.

SO, WHAT’S COOKED UP IN KALAMAZOO?

Premium grills, pizza ovens, cabinets, and luxury cooking equipment for residential outdoor kitchens.

REPUTATION AND INNOVATION

The company is best known for its Hybrid Fire Grills that cook with charcoal, wood, and gas. Its product line also includes weather-tight cabinetry, forced-air refrigeration, and a powerful countertop pizza oven that have all raised the bar for design and performance in outdoor kitchens.

SIGNING OFF

Team members who make each custom-ordered grill sign their work before packaging it up for delivery. These signatures have come to represent the company’s quality and pride in a job well done.

ABOUT THE KALAMAZOO HYBRID FIRE GRILL

The Kalamazoo Hybrid Fire Grill earned the nickname “The Rolls Royce of Barbecue Grills” from a Forbes writer. The product’s performance is responsible for winning it that distinction, rather than its price, which ranges from \$15,795 to \$28,995. The grill allows you to cook with gas like you would do on a normal grill but also offers a charcoal or wood experience on a hybrid drawer. Grillers can cook interchangeably in any combination and at different temperatures—at the same time.

CUSTOMERS

The patios of celebrity grilling enthusiasts like Gwyneth Paltrow, Jimmy Fallon, and chef Rick Bayless house Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet’s products. “Our customers are people who love to cook and who will do everything they can to have the best gear in their backyard. Then, there are others who crave a piece to show off during parties,” said Kohler. “You can find our products from the Hamptons to Los Angeles, Dubai to Australia.”

The Kalamazoo Hybrid Fire Grill, a bestseller, earned the nickname “The Rolls Royce of Barbecue Grills.”

RESIDENT GRILLMASTER

Russ Faulk is Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet’s resident grillmaster, barbecue cookbook author, and chief designer. When he’s not grilling or designing products, Russ develops and teaches programs on outdoor kitchen design and helps customers with their own kitchen designs. His favorite things to cook on a custom Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet grill are Kalamazoo Sliders topped with German Cambozola, a triple cream blue brie, and Grilled Croissant S’mores.





Each outdoor kitchen product is built-to-order and shipped direct from its Kalamazoo workshop to homes around the globe.



LOCATIONS

Kalamazoo, MI
Chicago, IL

LAST EXPANSION

In September 2018, the company announced a doubling of its manufacturing footprint in Southwest Michigan by investing \$3.1 million in its Kalamazoo facility. Additionally, it planned to boost its workforce by creating 31 jobs.

LOCAL EXECUTIVE

Scott Kohler
Vice President, Operations

WHO WORKS THERE

- Metal Fabricators
- Welders
- Finishers
- Assemblers
- Product Engineers
- Quality Engineers
- Purchasers
- Production Schedulers

WANTED!

“Someone who is passionate, driven, and has lots of pride in their work. Tons of it,” said Kohler. “Sometimes it takes eight to nine people to find the one.”

If you think that you have what it takes, email careers@kalamazoogourmet.com.

SHISH KABOB, ANYONE? DOWNLOAD THE COMPLETE PRODUCT CATALOG OR FIND A DEALER NEAR YOU AT KALAMAZOOGOURMET.COM

THE STORY
BEHIND

THE VISUAL STORYTELLER

A Q+A WITH MICHAEL BETZ

PRESIDENT AND CO-OWNER
OF IMAGESTREAM

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTOS BY HANNAH ZIEGLER

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HOW DO YOU APPROACH DESIGN AT IMAGESTREAM?

My business partner Tom Brooks and I started this company 20 years ago, in 1999.

We were working for Pharmacia & Upjohn, handling its media center here in Kalamazoo. But when the company started moving its jobs to New Jersey [after it was acquired by Pfizer], we were offered new jobs. We had kids in school at the time, and we didn't want to uproot our lives. So, Tom and I prepared a business plan and decided to buy the company and start ImageStream. It was a leap of faith, but, over the years, ImageStream has grown. We have a team of experts in live event production, lighting, staging, sound projection, technology, videography—you name it. Essentially, we are visual storytellers. What our team does involves music, images, critical editing decisions, and writing. Every single one of those is its own creative pursuit, and we're lucky to get to play in those fields every day. It's wonderful in that way.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE WORK YOU DO?

What I like best is the variety of projects that come through our door. One day, I could be over at Pfizer, gowned up in a bunny suit, shooting pharmaceutical vials racing down a production line in a sterile environment. But the next day, I could be out at a farm in Richland in hip boots, videoing a dairy facility. I love that I am always learning new things while helping tell the story of my community.

If something goes wrong and all of a sudden the lights go out, that's all anyone will remember. We pride ourselves on absolutely flawless execution.

WHICH PROJECTS ARE THE MOST REWARDING?

It's exhilarating to do live events because they're terrifying and fun at the same time. There are no do-overs in a live event. Everything has to be 100 percent, or you failed. If something goes wrong and all of a sudden the lights go out, that's all anyone will remember. We pride ourselves on absolutely flawless execution. It's a lot of pressure, but it's thrilling to be at the heart of the action.



HOW DO YOU DRIVE CREATIVITY?

It's all about collaboration. The group will always come up with a better result than any individual. When my team is working on a project, we sit together in our creative suite and get comfortable. We get together and kick around ideas. No idea is too silly or stupid to bring up. More often than not, it's the dumbest ideas that have the potential to branch off in a new direction that we would never have considered.

WHERE DID YOUR INTEREST IN VISUAL ARTS BEGIN?

I have been doing this sort of stuff for over 45 years. In the early 1970s, my dad wanted my brother and me to stay out of trouble, so he bought a camera and built a darkroom in the basement. I took to it right away. I got my first photography gig at a jazz concert held by a local high school. They had invited all the jazz greats, like Count Basie, Maynard Ferguson, and Duke Ellington. One of my favorite memories came after I sold Dave Brubeck a package of shots from that day. About a month later, I got an envelope in the mail. It was one of my close-up shots, signed, "Thanks, Michael. Awesome photography. Dave Brubeck." After that, I was hooked.

HOW HAS YOUR FIELD CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

Back when I was selling photos to jazz artists, Sony had just come out with a new camera. It was called the Sony Rover Portapak. It had a backpack video recorder with reel-to-reel tape a half-inch wide: black and white. But at the time, it was the most impressive piece of equipment in the world. Today, everyone is

walking around carrying a 4K video recorder in the palm of their hand. We've experienced a huge change in technology even in the 20 years that ImageStream has been in existence. Tom and I started with cutting-edge Sony Betacam camcorders, which now look like huge, outdated behemoths that still use videotapes. It's tremendous what we can accomplish with today's technology.

WHAT SKILLS ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR A CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL?

The same skills that lead to success in every other field: the soft skills, the people skills. We just bought a brand-new camera that we could teach you to operate. You might be pretty good at it with some practice. But if you show up on the set and you can't interact with the client, it's over. Relationship-building is critical. The skills that can't be taught are the most important.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO AN ASPIRING CREATIVE?

The joke is: Don't do it. But the reality is that the creative field is no different from any other—it's going to take a lot of hard work no matter what, and there will always be a whole lot of people going after the same job you are. But working in any artistic profession is wonderful and rewarding. If you've got the talent and the right mindset, this is a great field to be in.

CLEAR MISSION DRIVES DAIRY COOPERATIVE GROWTH

**MICHIGAN MILK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION
BOTTLES UP RELATIONSHIPS IN FOUR STATES**

BY CATHY KNAPP PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHIGAN MILK PRODUCERS AND UPIXA (ISTOCK)





We've gone from processing a half-million pounds of milk per day here to 3 million pounds per day now.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

JOBS CREATION IS NEVER BLACK AND WHITE

Regional economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First helped to support the creation of 11 new jobs and the retention of 65 positions at MMPA. But how?

It all started with onsite company consultations to build an ongoing relationship. When appropriate, the economic development group brought in partners from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), Michigan Works!, and the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC). These entities have business-growth assistance programs in areas such as incentives for capital and infrastructure investments, training funds and workforce recruitment services, food safety certification offerings, exporting consultation, and more.

To bring this expansion project to completion, Southwest Michigan First helped assemble a package that included a \$122,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant from the MEDC, a \$200,000 MDARD performance-based grant from the Food and Agriculture Investment Fund, and a village of Constantine 12-year property tax abatement valued at approximately \$600,000 on the new investment in real property. As the cost of doing business factors into decisions on choosing expansion locales, these incentives can help make this region more competitive and give a company a reason to expand locally.

MICHIGAN MILK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION (MMPA) HAS A SIMPLE MISSION STATEMENT: TO MARKET MMPA MEMBERS' MILK TO THE GREATEST ADVANTAGE POSSIBLE. THE SUCCINCT DIRECTIVE HAS PROVEN TO BE SUCCESSFUL.

Founded over 100 years ago, the dairy farmer-owned cooperative has grown to represent nearly 1,600 dairy farmers in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The cooperative supplies over 1 billion pounds of milk per year to local bottlers who fill the milk jugs found on grocery store shelves. It also produces dairy products such as butter, nonfat dry milk, cream, and condensed skim milk.

MMPA operates dairy processing plants in Constantine and Ovid, Michigan, as well as a specialty cheese facility in Middlebury, Indiana. The Constantine facility recently underwent a \$24 million expansion project, creating 11 new jobs, adding a 7,500-square-foot processing area, and purchasing equipment to enhance the existing facility.

Constantine Plant Manager and 37-year employee Dave Davis has seen impressive changes over the years. "We've gone from processing a half-million pounds of milk per day here to 3 million pounds per day now," said Davis. "It's all to better serve our owner-members."

One way member service has been improved is through automation improvements. "Thirty years ago, controls were more manual, and we adjusted weights to open steam valves," Davis said. "Now computers control it all on an HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) screen."

When filling job openings, this automation has led the organization to seek individuals with mechanical aptitudes.

To ensure employee success, MMPA then provides customized, on-the-job training on the highly-technical and plant-specific evaporator, filtration, and separation equipment.

MMPA also emphasizes safety in the workplace, a fact in which Davis takes great pride. "This plant has had a near five-year record of no lost-time accidents."

Another source of pride is the organization's generosity. For the fourth year in a row, MMPA has donated fresh milk to the state's food bank network. It contributed 150 gallons of milk per day this year, amounting to 54,750 gallons of milk going to Michigan area food banks. Over the last few years, it has donated a total of 2.6 million servings of milk, reaching communities in every corner of the state.

Davis sums up his experience with MMPA by saying: "I feel good to support agriculture and to produce a wholesome quality food ingredient that feeds America. It's great knowing we support that industry."

For information on career opportunities with MMPA, visit mimilk.com/about-the-cooperative/career-opportunities/.

CHOOSING A PATH

CHRISTIAN MERASCO
EXPLORES CAREER OPTIONS
AT SALESPAGE TECHNOLOGIES

BY JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGLER

MEET CHRISTIAN

HOMETOWN

Portage, MI

EDUCATION

Michigan State University (MSU)

Marketing Major; Retail Management Minor

Expected Graduation: May 2020

POSITION

Sales Operations Intern at SalesPage Technologies



To run a marketing campaign like we did, with all the emailing and calling, we needed to know we were reaching out to the right people, in the right way.

TESTING THE WATERS

When I started college, I knew I wanted to study business, but I didn't want a career that would confine me to a desk. Since then, I've narrowed it down. Now my dilemma is deciding between a career in sales and a career in marketing. Marketing allows me to go out, meet people, talk, and be creative—but so does sales. Luckily, this internship lets me try a bit of both.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

SalesPage is a client data platform that works with asset management companies as a distribution partner. We provide software solutions and services that help these businesses use data more proactively. My responsibility is to assist SalesPage's sales and marketing campaigns. One of our goals was to promote an educational webinar for financial professionals in the asset management industry. I helped Ana [Evans], our director of marketing, run the campaign from start to finish. First, I did in-depth market research. Leading up to the event, we sent out no less than a thousand emails and were on the phone constantly making calls and leaving voicemails. I also learned how to generate a Google Analytics report for the sales and marketing team to track website activity.

LESSONS LEARNED

This internship is teaching me that details matter. SalesPage converted to a new CRM (Customer-Relationship Management) system recently, and I was responsible for data cleanup. We had thousands of contacts to migrate to the new system. I had to verify each one, see if the information was accurate, and update everything in the new system. The project showed me how important it is to pay attention to the small, tedious details that don't seem that significant. Because in the long run, those details are critical. To run a marketing campaign like we did, with all the emailing and calling, we needed to know we were reaching out to the right people, in the right way.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Although I work primarily in the marketing department, I am grateful to be able to observe the sales process at SalesPage as well. Early on, I told my mentor that sales was an interest of mine, and she put me in touch with the company's director of sales. I haven't had the chance to make many direct sales myself yet, but I sat in on several calls with him and did some one-on-one training. Sales takes a deep understanding of the products and services, not to mention the ability to speak comfortably with high-level people, but that's what I like about it. I still haven't quite decided in which direction to take my career, but I'm excited about the possibilities.



YEAH, YOU KNOW ME!
 BY CHARLOTTE YOUNG
 PHOTOS COURTESY OF IMPERIAL BEVERAGE

CANNED COCKTAILS ARE EXPLODING ON THE SCENE, TRANSFORMING THE CATEGORY'S REPUTATION.

Ready-to-drink, aka “RTD,” refers to packaged beverages that are sold in a prepared form and are ready for consumption. Unlike traditional beverage mixes or brew-it-yourself products, ready-to-drink beverages can be immediately enjoyed upon purchase.

According to Mintel, the world’s leading market intelligence agency, RTD cocktails are having their moment. Mintel predicts a 9 percent rise in RTD cocktail sales by volume by 2021. Many factors are working in harmony to spur on this age of ready-to-drink cocktails. RTDs appeal to a younger generation and have the right buzz to succeed in the current cocktail market.

Appearing at a wide array of venues, from restaurants, bars, grocery stores, and event venues to airlines, hotels, and pop-ups, this new generation of cocktails fit the bill of quality, taste, and convenience.

A 2017 report from Mintel confirms that 45 percent of U.S. adults drink RTD alcoholic beverages. The cocktail market now includes a younger crowd of discerning millennials and Gen Z members. They have a taste for products that are authentic, unique, premium, and handcrafted. These consumers have a focused eye on ingredient transparency and presentation, and ready-to-drink cocktail companies have obliged. Perhaps the most key selling point is the product’s convenience, appealing to the busy lifestyle of many consumers.



Whether experimental or classic in style, the cocktails have to taste good—plain and simple. These canned cocktails are enormously ahead of the category’s earlier adaptations, overcoming the stigma of the overly sweet malt beverages of barbeques past. No longer just a portable booze device, these cans do in fact contain a well-crafted cocktail. With product ingredients that read like a farmer’s market shopping list, this new generation of RTD cocktails is made with real spirits combined with handcrafted mixers. Just chill, open, and pour, and you’ve got yourself a party!

West Michigan distillery Coppercraft Distillery has a gin and tonic mixed with its famous 13-botanical gin. Quoted by trendsources.com, the Holland-based distiller says, “Our

ready-to-drink canned cocktails deliver the same level of quality and first-class drinking experience that our consumers expect from a freshly prepared gin and tonic, but without having to go to a bar or mix it themselves.” Another single cocktail brand available across the mitten is The Copper Can, hailing from sunny California. Each copper-colored can of Moscow Mule is made with six-times distilled vodka, handcrafted ginger beer, and real, fresh lime juice.

Maybe the biggest player in the RTD game is Cutwater Distillery. Cutwater has over ten different canned cocktails available in Michigan year-round. “Whiskey, vodka, gin, rum, liqueur, and mixers are all made at our distillery in San Diego, California. Innovation is in our DNA, and we’ve combined our

No longer just a portable booze device, these cans do in fact contain a well-crafted cocktail... just chill, open, and pour, and you’ve got yourself a party!

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

Ron Jackson Insurance was founded in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1962 by a former Chicago White Sox and Boston Red Sox player. This family-led personal and business insurance provider has proudly been fielding new business there ever since!

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At Southwest Michigan First, we appreciate all you do to serve our communities. **Let us serve you.**

Contact Sarah Weishaar to learn more about Southwest Michigan First's small business division.
sweishaar@southwestmichiganfirst.com | (269) 553-9588
www.southwestmichiganfirst.com/small-business/



Each copper-colored can of Moscow Mule is made with six-times distilled vodka, handcrafted ginger beer, and real, fresh lime juice.



award-winning spirits and house-made mixers to create ready-to-enjoy canned cocktails perfect for any adventure ahead," claims cutwaterspirits.com. From classics like vodka soda with lime and rum and cola to trendy favorites like a tequila paloma, spicy Bloody Mary, or bourbon highball, Cutwater is stocked with crowd-pleasing craft cocktails perfect for any event.

More brands of RTD cocktails are arriving on the scene all the time in the rapidly developing, increasingly competitive cocktail market. Detroit's own McClure's, known for its handcrafted pickles and Bloody Mary mix, is set to release an RTD Bloody Mary in a can this spring. If you consider yourself a craft beer aficionado and like your favorite craft beer from a can, enjoying your favorite cocktail from one should be a no-brainer.

Pack a bag. Prep some garnishes. Ready-to-drink cocktails are available all over West Michigan, and they're ready to go wherever you go in 2019!

Charlotte Young is Creative & PR Manager at Imperial Beverage. Imperial Beverage is a long-standing member of the Michigan beverage distribution community. Established in 1933 after the repeal of prohibition and purchased by Kalamazoo's Cekola family in 1984, Imperial has grown from a one-county beer distributor to a top 10 statewide beer, wine & spirits wholesaler. With 390 employees and four locations in Kalamazoo, Livonia, Ishpeming, and Traverse City, Imperial provides statewide coverage that serves every Michigan County, every week, all year long.

**Pack a bag.
Prep some
garnishes.
Ready-to-drink
cocktails are
available all
over West
Michigan, and
they're ready
to go wherever
you go in 2019!**



Practical Application

CLASS IS IN SESSION AT LOCAL BUSINESSES

BY
LORA PAINTER
PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
WWMT (CBS) | CW7T

DREAM JOBS DON'T JUST FALL FROM THE SKY.

More often than not, making them a reality takes a lot of planning, networking, and coordination. For students like Western Michigan University (WMU) senior Katherine Collier, putting in that effort at a young age is paying off.

"I've grown tremendously since I've started work here at Flowserve. Everything from my professional development to my supply chain knowledge has just blossomed," Collier said.

Collier is one of many West Michigan students interning at area businesses while balancing schoolwork as they complete their college degrees. She studies integrated supply chain management and currently interns at Flowserve Corporation, a

company that manufactures industrial and environmental flow control products used in numerous industries around the world. Combining her academic studies at WMU with her real-world, on-the-job training at Flowserve has made her a much more well-rounded person and valuable employee, Collier said.

"It's so different to read a textbook than to be actually doing the job. Now that I'm sitting here doing the job every day, I truly feel that I understand what I am going to school for, and everything I'm studying at WMU suddenly makes sense."

George Owens, a manufacturing planning and process engineer manager at Flowserve, who helped connect Collier with her internship, agrees. Owens believes that internships can

spark a student's love for a career and help them launch that career before they graduate. Internships can be a symbiotic relationship; not only do students get to learn from working professionals, but businesses like Flowserve can cultivate and train potential employees from their crop of interns.

Owens said, "It's very important because the interns, a lot of times, have already been with us for a year, so they know our business, they know our processes, they know the people, and they've already determined they're a good fit. So [the transition from intern to employee] has been very good because it is very seamless."

I know right where I'm going [after graduation]. My parents are excited too because they know I love it here and I'm happy.

In just a few months, Collier will start a new, full-time job at Flowserve, doing what she has been studying and working in: integrated supply chain management.

"It feels great," Collier said. "I see so many students panicking when graduation time comes around, saying, 'I don't have a job. I don't know what I'm going to do. You know, student loans are coming in. I don't know where I want to go in my life.' And it's so great not having that feeling."

Just down the hall from Collier's cubical at Flowserve is fellow intern and WMU senior Caleb Kudary. Like Collier, Kudary also accepted a full-time position with Flowserve. He will start the new job after he graduates this spring.

Kudary said, "I didn't hesitate, I was like, 'Yeah, I'll take it!' It's a great opportunity."

Kudary is a finance major at WMU and interns as an order management specialist. He will continue in this field in his upcoming role at Flowserve. Beyond teaching him new and necessary professional skills, he said his internship also helped him with a personal transformation.

"Everything you learn in school, you see it here in the real world, and it all comes together," Kudary said. "I used to be a pretty shy person, but after working here, I'm always talking to everyone. [It has] helped me come out of my shell."

That maturity and growth is not going unnoticed by employers. Owens said motivation, communication, and professionalism are some of the major skills he is looking for when he helps hire new workers.

"We want to see people willing to take initiative and risks. Also, leadership—wanting to step up and lead a team or a project. Those are two big things."

Southwest Michigan First works with West Michigan schools and educational institutions, such as WMU, to help connect students with internships. Part of that partnership between WMU and Southwest Michigan First is Internship 101, a workshop designed to teach employers what they need to know to set up or refine their own internship program. Kim Weishaar, chief financial officer at Southwest Michigan First, explained that it is a great way for businesses to learn how they can create internships at their company.

Weishaar said, "Giving the students opportunities to see what they can do with all that they've learned in school [during an] internship is a great way to help them figure out what they like and what they don't like."

Having seemingly figured it out, Collier agreed: "I know right where I'm going [after graduation]. My parents are excited too because they know I love it here and I'm happy."

Now that I'm sitting here doing the job every day, I truly feel that I understand what I am going to school for, and everything I'm studying at WMU suddenly makes sense.



AS SEEN LIVE ON WWMT (CBS) | CW7.



LEADER²LEADER

We sat down with two local leaders to get their insights on success, development, motivation, and more.

BY JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGLER AND TRISHA DUNHAM

TARA VANDESTREEK

ACCOUNTING SUPERVISOR AT GETMAN CORPORATION

ALAN SMAKA

KALAMAZOO OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR WIGHTMAN AND ASSOCIATES

DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

TARA: Success for my team is the ability to stay on top of volume. We process all the accounting documentations, so I set milestones and checkpoints along the way that ensure we're still on target to meet our longer-term objectives as well.

ALAN: I think the most fundamental answer is growth and improvement. Success is being better today than you were yesterday. There's a lot of different areas that you can improve upon, whether it be financial, emotional, professional, or spiritual. I am trying to be a better person all around and master the art of living in balance between work and leisure, love and religion.

DECISION-MAKING

TARA: I'm a very black-and-white person, which lends itself to accounting. The hardest decisions for me are the ones shrouded by a high level of uncertainty. When I was forming my career, the most difficult questions to answer were questions like, "Where should I go?" and "Who do I want to be?" In leadership, it's much the same. Deciding on a new next step when the future is uncertain is always the most challenging.

ALAN: The people decisions. As a leader, you're in a position where you need to both admonish and praise at the same time. You need to be timely and impactful to do that. At Wightman, we're a really happy company, but it's my job to make sure that it stays that way. Part of leadership is making sure everybody feels comfortable and safe.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

TARA: I make sure that I set aside time for myself. So as long I know that I've got time set aside, then I can work through the stress so I can get to that time of relief and rest. I love horseback riding; I make sure that I go to the barn once a week to ride my horse. For me, it's emotionally rewarding and stress relieving.

ALAN: If I feel I need to rest, I go rest. If I feel I have too much going on, I'll ask for help. My Achilles heel, as well as my blessing, is that I have no problem working. When the rubber hits the road, I work. Even so, I am learning to take time off for myself.

GETTING CREATIVE

TARA: When I outline an objective, I sit down with my team, and we talk. Afterward, I always allow space and time for them to ask questions and come up with creative new ideas. Maybe my objective prompts something that they've been thinking about, but they are too afraid to bring it up in a meeting. Leaving that space lets ideas form, but also allows everyone to contribute.

ALAN: There are a variety of different things. One is that you have to be the example. Never ask anybody something you wouldn't be willing to do yourself. Also, provide the freedom and flexibility for your team to make mistakes and even fail. Always be there for support, but then get out the way. The other thing is to ask atypical questions that spark critical thinking. If you ask a cliché question, you'll get a cliché answer.

THE MOTIVATION

TARA: I'm a list-maker. Being able to put things on a list and check them off is motivating, but it's more inspiring to look to the big picture. Keeping in mind where I'm going in life and where we are headed as an organization gives me the motivation to attack my to-do list. Looking to the big picture helps keep every bullet point on my list in perspective.

ALAN: I want people to have the best life they can have. Seeing the pain in people makes you want to do whatever you can each day to

FIRST THINGS FIRST



FIRST JOB?

TARA: Summer Camp Counselor

ALAN: Street Sweeper



FIRST APP YOU CHECK IN THE MORNING?

TARA: Email and Calendar

ALAN: Texts and Missed Calls



FIRST CONCERT YOU ATTENDED?

TARA: John Mayer

ALAN: MC Hammer

help. The hard part is that you may want to save the whole world, but you can't. All you can do is invest the time you have each day. You are given 84,000 seconds in a day—after you spend them, you'll never get them back. The first part of my life was about getting myself established, but now I am in a unique position to give back.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

TARA: I have a 45-minute commute every day, in both directions, so I'm on the road a lot. In the morning, I listen to some developmental material, whether that's an audiobook or a podcast. I try to derive some practical application from everything I read so I can share what I learned with my team. Recently I read the book "Atomic Habits" [by James Clear], which is all about habit formation.

ALAN: More than anything, I have been encouraging the staff and myself to develop critical thinking skills. I try to pull information from as many different thought leaders as possible, see what the commonalities are, and then bring them into perspective to find out what it all means to me. If you copy-paste whatever is popular now, it won't be authentic. You have to think critically and synthesize your own meaning.

THE MENTOR

TARA: My mom. As I've been going through my career, I can go to her, and we can have a conversation about what's next. She can draw upon the huge variety of her experiences, and how they translate to my life. One thing that she's taught me is to tune out the naysayers and never stop going after what you want.

ALAN: It's undoubtedly my dad. I rely on his steadfast guidance and frank advice. But broadly, it's hard to name a single individual. I believe that if you listen closely, you can learn from everyone. I've been playing in a dance band since I was 12 years old. We play the music of the Greatest Generation, and over time, I have had thousands of grandparents tell me about their life stories. I am fascinated by every one. Hearing their stories has given me a greater perspective of what life really is.



TARA VANDESTREEK

The hardest decisions for me are the ones shrouded by a high level of uncertainty. When I was forming my career, the most difficult questions to answer were questions like, "Where should I go?" and "Who do I want to be?"

TARA VANDESTREEK



ALAN SMAKA

As a leader, you're in a position where you need to both admonish and praise at the same time. You need to be timely and impactful to do that.

ALAN SMAKA

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SHERRILL MOSEE

Our editorial team sat down with the entrepreneur, handbag designer, and founder of MinkeeBlue to talk about overcoming fear, startup challenges, and bag overload syndrome.



What inspired you to become an entrepreneur and self-starter? Growing up, my mom was a single mom; she had a tough time caring for my siblings and me. She always wanted to go to college, but she couldn't afford childcare. Instead, she worked hard to give me the opportunity to get a master's degree in engineering. That inspired me not just to achieve my own dream of being an entrepreneur, but to give back and help others get their dreams off the ground as well. **How did you get the idea for your business?** My business, MinkeeBlue, started as just that—an idea. At the time, I was working with student moms at a non-profit I started called Family Care Solutions, helping them cover the cost of childcare so they could attend college. I would notice these women struggling to carry a diaper bag, a book bag, a lunch bag, and a purse all at once. That made me realize that I was doing the same thing. I call it "bag overload syndrome." I was carrying two or three bags to work, and in a big city like Philadelphia where you have to take the train, trying to finagle in a tight space was a constant struggle. That made me start thinking—how can I design a handbag that could organize everything at once? I set out and eventually found a solution. **What emotions were going through your head at that point?** I saw the need for my product, but fear set in.

I started my business without having a background in the fashion industry. I didn't know anything about designing bags, let alone manufacturing. I didn't know where to start, but I refused to let that paralyze me. **How did you overcome that fear?** Fear is natural to us. As humans, we're supposed to be somewhat fearful. It keeps us out of harm's way. It prevents us from touching a hot stove or walking into traffic. But when we approach a big change in life, fear of the unknown can hold us back. For me, the idea of launching a business by myself all at once was overwhelming at first. **What would you tell others looking to make a change in their lives?** I get emails from people who want to start a business but are weighed down by concerns like, "Is there a market for my product?" I started another business called StartUp by Faith to help others overcome these obstacles. My approach is twofold. I interview other female entrepreneurs to talk about their challenges and their best practices. I also teach courses and share business ideas designed to help people jumpstart their businesses. Then I support them through the process of bringing their product to market. **What is the best advice you've ever heard?** To accomplish anything, you first have to believe that you can do it. ✨

DESPERATE FOR GREAT WORK PARTNERS?

PUBLISH YOUR UNWRITTEN RULES

BY SARAH MANSBERGER | PHOTO MIROSLAV _ I (ISTOCK)

TO THRIVE ON THE JOB, YOU HAVE TO DO A LITTLE WORK TO FIGURE OUT WHAT MAKES YOUR PEERS AND ESPECIALLY YOUR POINT LEADER TICK. EACH OF US GOES ABOUT IT IN OUR OWN WAY.

- Are you the one who asks direct questions to figure out work styles? If so, you're not afraid to make inquiries of your co-workers, like "How do you prefer we check in on this project? Via scheduled meetings or informal pop-ins?"
- Do you make mental notes to self as you learn from experiences partnering together? If so, you're the one who hears herself thinking: "Note to self! Make sure to ask for creative input before we get this far down the road next time."
- Or, are you the type who observes subtle cues? After you pass your boss at the coffee machine at 8:10 a.m., you ponder, "Hmm, two cups of black coffee already? I'll wait until tomorrow to break the news that we're going to come in over budget."

Through months and years of togetherness at work, we squirrel away insights and evolve our behaviors together to get great things done—or so we hope. Sometimes, despite best efforts, it's hard to learn just what version of the leader/follower dance we're expected to do on a specific project or in a key relationship. If that's the case in your office, you might need to do a little work to sleuth out others' unwritten rules—and publish your own.

We all have them, those things we expect of others but never really say out loud. Maybe positivity is your thing, and you want your people and your partners to radiate energy for what they are doing. Maybe proactive communication is what you are seeking. You expect others to keep you up to speed up to the minute. Maybe it's ethics, and you have clear lines in the sand when it comes to right and

wrong. Whatever the case, how often do you articulate your unwritten rules? How often do others? How might your partnerships improve, and the pace of business accelerate, if you got clearer about your needs and expectations?

During one of our cohort-based leadership development programs at Southwest Michigan First, Managing from the Middle, we ask people during a learning exercise to list the top five unwritten rules that they expect others to follow when they walk through the door. We hear things like, "Focus on the facts," "Leave emotion at the door," or a personal favorite, "That's showbiz, baby!" These unwritten rules are mantras that animate our expectations of others, yet far too often are kept to ourselves. Especially for those of us who serve as leaders of others, it behooves us all to make our most subtle expectations clear.



The next time someone approaches you, think of an unwritten rule you are expecting them to follow. Jot it down. Keep a list for a week or so, and see what you come up with. What do you notice? More importantly, what do you need to share with others?

“Publish” your rules to others. You’ll deepen dialogue and leave a better partner and leader.



Sarah Mansberger is a partner at Southwest Michigan First tasked with curriculum development behind leadership programs like FIRST Up, Managing From the Middle, Catalytic Cultures, First 50, and Leadership Kalamazoo. Learn more at catalystuniversity.me/programs.



MY FIVE UNWRITTEN RULES ARE...

1

2

3

4

5

How Did I Get Here?

MIKE ROEDER

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
OPERATING OFFICER,
FABRI-KAL

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

1963 | BORN IN CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND

My family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, when I was too young to remember. I had four brothers and sisters, so there was a lot of sharing. We shared toys, cars, bathrooms—you name it. Growing up, we were always in the street playing some sort of sport, whether it was going to the baseball field or making up our own sport using whatever we had on hand. Nowadays, it seems like everything's much more structured.

1975 | FIRST JOB AT VCT ELECTRIC

When I was in middle school, I played guitar in a church folk group. As fate would have it, the head of that folk group was a master electrician who started his own company called VCT Electric. When I was twelve, he took me on as his gofer. He would tell me, "Go for this," or "Go for that." During the summers, I worked five or six days a week. Over the years, I started to build a good working knowledge of the trade. I eventually became an electrician for the company and continued to work there all through high school and college.



1985 | RECEIVED A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING FROM VIRGINIA TECH

I like to joke that my initial college plan was to play baseball, and when that didn't work, I studied electrical engineering. The truth is that, while I had the advantage of hands-on electrician experience, Virginia Tech's electrical engineering program truly made me a better thinker. Throughout college, I was still working at VCT on weekends and in the summer, so I would take what I was learning at school and apply it to design work. I specifically

People saw me as someone who could tie together technical ability with people-skills. That's why I went back and got my MBA instead of studying electrical engineering further.

remember doing drawings for conveyor system controls. Having experience on both the more theoretical side of engineering and the hands-on side of being an electrician would turn out to be extremely helpful for my career.

1985 | ELECTRICAL PROJECT ENGINEER AT REYNOLDS FOOD PACKAGING

After college, I started out on the shop floor at Reynolds. I was responsible for all the equipment and installations on site, including their maintenance.

It was a pretty large plant—about 500 people covering about 10 acres under one roof—so it was a fair amount of equipment for me to learn. I was lucky to have had some experience, so I wasn't a fresh-out-of-college engineer the company had to train. It also helped that I was curious about everything, and I just like people, so I couldn't help but talk to all the machine operators when I was out there.

1986 TO 1988 | RECEIVED AN MBA FROM VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH BCU

After about a year in the electrical engineering field, I knew I didn't want to work in a pool of fifty other engineers at a huge corporation like IBM or Westinghouse working on a circuit board.

I loved doing all that math, but I liked people more. I realized that my talent was

being able to talk to the operators and listen to what their needs were. It turns out that was unique among the other engineers. People saw me as someone who could tie together technical ability with people-skills. That's why I went back and got my MBA instead of studying electrical engineering further.

2000 TO 2005 | FOOD SERVICE BUSINESS UNION PRESIDENT AT ALCOA REYNOLDS FOOD PACKAGING

After I got my MBA, I came up through the plant, [moving] from engineering to plant manager. At that point, I had become very familiar with both the manufacturing side and the people side of our operations, so when Alcoa bought Reynolds in 2000, I became Business Union President for the Food Service Division. As the business union president, my responsibilities broadened my perspective. I made it a point to embrace change. Whenever the company needed a guinea pig, I volunteered my division to be the first in line to learn new principles about re-organizing the shop floor, for instance.

2005-PRESENT | PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER OF FABRI-KAL CORPORATION

After working for large corporations for so long, I was so grateful to be able to come to a family-owned business. Being a true people-person, I feel like I can focus even more on our customers, the product, our impact, and employees. It is now my fourteenth year at Fabri-Kal. You'll probably know us best by our Chobani, Yoplait, and Dannon yogurt cups—if it's yogurt, we probably

make a good portion of the cups. But that's only about a third of our business, and about two-thirds is other food service products. So, around town, you drink out of our Greenware plant-based cups when you go to a local brewery, and you take your food home in our fiber clamshell take-out containers.

THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF FABRI-KAL

As a leader in sustainable food packaging, our focus going forward is on the beginning-of-life and end-of-life scenario for our products. The future of the industry lies in being responsible about where our packaging materials are sourced

The future of the industry lies in being responsible about where our packaging materials are sourced and where they will end up after use.

and where they will end up after use. About five years ago, we began making products out of Miscanthus grass instead of petroleum. That material has a negative carbon footprint and actually absorbs carbon out of the air. Honestly, we did it because we wanted to do the right thing for packaging, not just because it's become vogue. That way, we know the cup came from the earth, and, since it's renewably sourced, we're not depleting the petroleum resources. Plus, after use, it can be composted. So in 90 days, it's going to go back to the earth.



A COMMUNITY ON THE MOVE

THIS YEAR'S KALAMAZOO MARATHON IS OFF TO A RUNNING START

BY JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTOS MINDY WOOD AND TRISHA DUNHAM



CHERYL PICKETT

Operations Manager for the Kalamazoo Marathon at Borgess Run for the Health of It

EVENT

Kalamazoo Marathon

DATE AND TIME

Sunday, May 5, 2019
8:00 a.m.

LOCATION

3427 Gull Road,
Kalamazoo, MI 49048



READY, SET, GO! AND, THEY'RE OFF!

We are so excited to be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Borgess Run this year. We've grown over the past four decades to include even more events. This will be the ninth year for our main attraction, the Kalamazoo Marathon, but we also have 10K and 5K runs, plus a kid's fun run and motivational mile.

My favorite thing to watch is the takeoff of the 5K because those are all people who could be out there for the first time. That's where it all starts—with that first run. Three miles to run is a long way if you've never done it before. I have done two marathons, but I still remember my first 5K.

Altogether, we expect 7,500 runners. And for the marathon, we have around 500 participants. To make an event of this scale possible, we're lucky to have the support of 17,000 volunteers from all over the community. They help people get parked, hand out medals for all our running events, and man

the spirit and water stations along the course. Our focus is always participant experience, from our super soft shirts to the fact that we have medals in all of our running events.

ALONG THE ROUTE

Without giving too much away about the race itself, at the halfway point in the marathon we will have a bacon station, and yes, there will be bacon. It's more for the spectators than the runners, but they can partake too if they want. In Kindleberger Park, there's also a popsicle hill. Imagine conquering this big hill and seeing someone there to greet you with a popsicle! Then, in the final miles of the race, Kalamazoo Central High School's Honor Society has

started a tradition of making a gummy bear trail through the woods to keep spirits high.

A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Not only does the Kalamazoo Marathon draw people to our area, but it gives the Kalamazoo community a chance to celebrate health together. Whether you are out there running, you're one of the volunteers, or a spectator, we're all celebrating the same thing—we're getting out there being active and moving together as a community. Hopefully, that will have a trickle effect. It's all for the greater health of our community.

TO REGISTER OR VOLUNTEER:
VISIT BORGESSRUN.COM



BY RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO FLAMINGOIMAGES (ISTOCK)



Don't Hold Your Applause

GREAT ORGANIZATIONS AND CULTURES CELEBRATE TOGETHER

IF YOU'RE ON A HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM, YOU SPEND EACH DAY RACING TOWARD SUCCESS.

An organization of type-A high achievers falls into a fast-paced rhythm, striving every day to reach that next finish line. But the problem for highly driven organizations is that they have the tendency to forget. They forget to take the time to celebrate moments together.

Imagine you're sitting in the stands at a football game. You don't wait until the end of the game to cheer. You automatically rise to your feet in applause as players enter the field! The crowd roars when your team advances the ball and erupts when they score points. You even clap in support when a player gets injured, but especially when they get back up!

Somehow, leaders forget to do that for their teams in the workplace. In most organizations across the country, employees wait six months before they are ever evaluated, and then, much of the time, they are only told what they did wrong. In the future, organizations that operate that way will have zero people working for them. Dr. Gary Chapman, author of "The Five Love Languages," reports that "64 percent of Americans who leave their jobs say they do so because they don't feel appreciated." At a time of full employment, people are going to choose to spend their time in a workplace where they are loved and valued as human beings.

Great teams and great cultures never forget to take time to celebrate. They don't just think positive thoughts, they share them. They understand that Thanksgiving shouldn't be the only day of the year on which we share our gratitude; we have to celebrate the joyful little moments happening each day before they become

humdrum, workaday expectations. When you see something great, pat your teammate on the back. Acknowledge small and great acts in private and in front of their coworkers and supervisors. And while this practice might be the key to a great team and culture, it benefits you too. It's nearly impossible to lift others up and stay in a bad mood yourself.

Oprah Winfrey said, "The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate." At Southwest Michigan First, we create moments throughout the year to celebrate together. On Fat Tuesday, I gather my team around and serve them gumbo that I cooked the previous Sunday. We all enjoy the dark brown goodness of roux mixed with andouille sausage, chicken, and Balmoral Duck served with Arkansas Delta rice, and king cake direct from Manny Randazzo's in New Orleans. Our tradition has grown each year and now includes friends and family who drop in for a bowl.

These traditions help us bridge the gap between work and life; we know we can be more engaged if we can live and work together as a connected community. Southwest Michigan First's team engagement scores hover between 95 and 100 percent, for which we've been recognized by the Wall Street Journal, Outside Magazine, and Best and Brightest as one of the best places

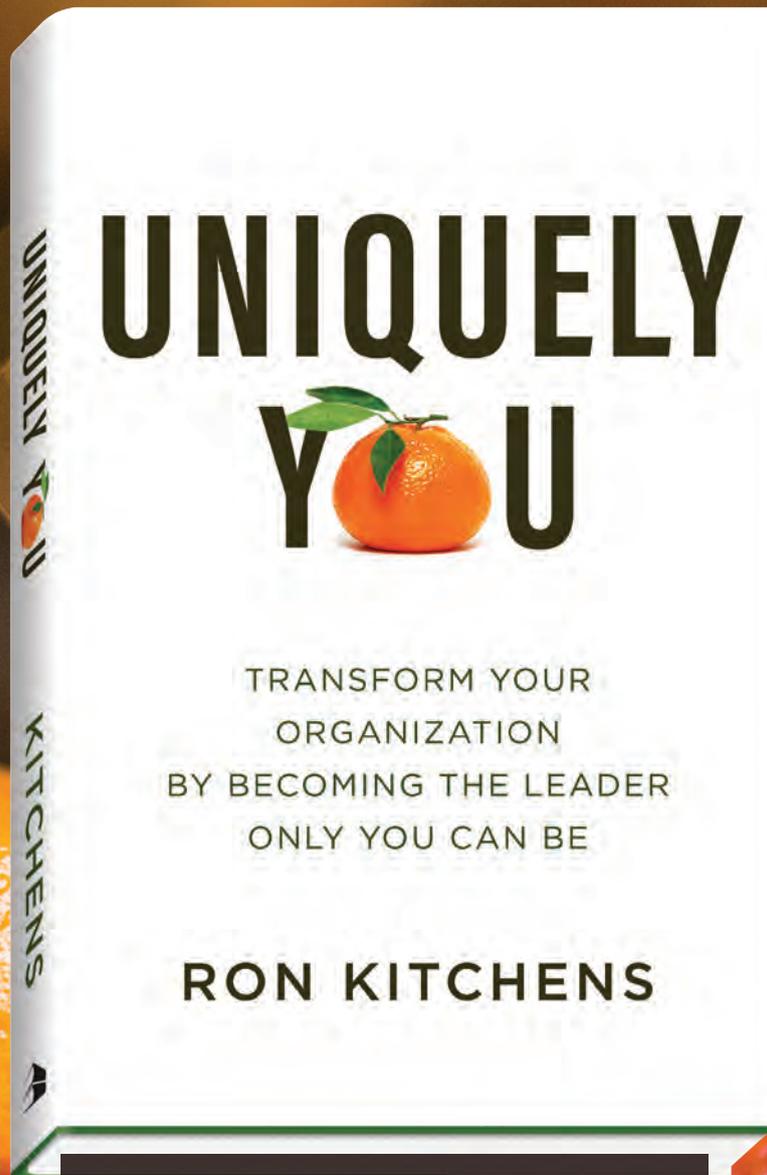
to work in America. This has created not only a happier workplace but also tremendous customer satisfaction and higher margins.

When asked what makes their organization great, people don't point to salary or financial perks, as you might expect. Most important are the love, support, and nurturing they and their families receive. All people want to be embraced for who and where they are and allowed to own their life balance.

In today's economic climate, our Southwest Michigan community is in constant competition for new talent. And the fact that we are experiencing historically low unemployment and a shrinking labor pool does not make things any easier. But we know that as a region we are at the forefront of curating the workplace of the future. Our organizations are driven by the best people and the most stimulating workplace cultures. For us, the future of team and culture is one where managing work and life is no longer a precarious balancing act, but a more integrated and fulfilling whole.

ALWAYS FORWARD,

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



UNIQUELYYOUBOOK.COM

**A LEADER'S PAST
CAN HELP CREATE A
ONE-OF-A-KIND FUTURE.**

Young and experienced professionals alike grow exhausted and disenchanted from chasing business gurus and quick-fix formulas. Rather than becoming knock-offs, we must learn to listen to the leadership lessons our lives have been trying to teach us. In "Uniquely You," coming in 2019, Ron Kitchens will share his personal journey, and how it led him to lead uniquely, with you.

AVAILABLE FOR PREORDER NOW! **AMAZON | BARNES & NOBLE | BAM | BAKER BOOK HOUSE**

Let's go places, specifically high places.
Let's keep minds open, especially to new ideas.

MAIN STREET EAST

Amazing things happen in high places and open spaces spark innovation. "Main Street East is open, collaborative and historically meaningful," said Fritz Brown, Office Leasing and Development, Treystar. "Plus, it's located in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo."

Home to a variety of thriving businesses, Main Street East offers flexibility and affordability, beautifully maintained common areas, comprehensive facility care services, dedicated parking, and much more. Treystar's approach to managing this one-of-a-kind property goes well beyond signing paperwork and handing over keys.

"You're not just a business transaction," said Main Street East client Jack Pell, Vice President of Sapa Group for the Americas. "These guys are your friends."

For more on Main Street East, contact Fritz Brown at **269.488.1716** or **fbrown@treystar.com**.



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