

269

MAGAZINE

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inside:

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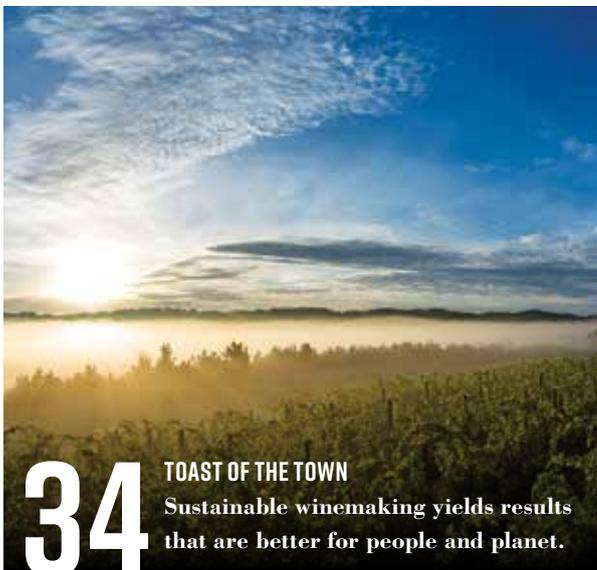
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BY HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PHOTO RAWPIXEL (ISTOCK)

Confessions of a Box Checker

WHY HAVING AN AGENDA IS A GOOD THING

I'M A BOX CHECKER.

I wake up each morning to my alarm, ready to check the boxes on my daily agenda, Outlook calendar, and personal planner. If I had a cat calendar (which I do not), I would check that too. There are things on all of my schedules that I put there twelve months ago, last month, even just yesterday.

Why?

You might say that I'm obsessive about knowing where I'm headed. I don't like to leave much to chance, and I relish getting as much done as possible. I am deeply committed to caring for my employer, fellow teammates, husband, kids, and two dogs. I freak out when things go awry. To combat this, I like things that I can control to go smoothly so that I can better handle the things that don't. I like to accomplish things the right way for myself and others, on time, and to the best of my ability. And, I want some "me" time. The reasons are varied and numerous.

Don't get me wrong; I know that my obsession with planning sounds a bit scary to some. But in reality, this structure doesn't limit my creativity, flexibility, or ability to laugh and have fun. It enhances it.

In reality, this structure doesn't limit my creativity, flexibility, or ability to laugh and have some fun. It enhances it.

I've found that being a slave to a schedule actually saves time. If you don't believe me, believe professional leadership guru Dale Carnegie, who said, "An hour of planning can save you 10 hours of doing." Because I have a plan, I know what I'm going to do next.

There's no wasted time flipping through papers on my desk, wondering what I should tackle next. And I can skip pulling all-nighters to finish things that snuck up on me.

Planning helps me to improve daily. Because I've saved 10 hours of doing, as Carnegie suggests, I have time to let creativity infuse my work. I find myself with time to think of new solutions to problems and even to dream of who I want to be or what I want my future to hold. And that's good because, as Gloria Steinem, the great American feminist, journalist, and activist, puts it: "Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning."

I share this not to let you know that, as I write this, I've already put in nine hours at the office and am about to take off to watch my son's four-hour baseball doubleheader, get in my elliptical workout, wash two loads of laundry, and then dive into bed. It's because, over time, my planning has made me a better person and helped me to improve the places where I've hung my hat. Fifteen years ago, if you had asked me if I would learn how to program websites and databases, edit a magazine, swing dance, or counsel a child on her college decision, I would have said, "No, I'll never need to know how to do that." But, over time, my planning has allowed for personal and professional growth.

In this issue of 269 MAGAZINE, our editorial team hopes to open your mind to new possibilities—for your communities and yourself.

Everyone reading this lives someplace. Does your "place" have a plan for its future? Do its leaders, like those profiled starting on page 12, have ideas for what its tomorrow looks like? Will your Main Street have potholes or treetop parking for drones? Is your ZIP code checking the right boxes to ensure your children's future residency?

And, how about you? Whether you are 18, 32, or 59, there is still much to be done. Are you ready to be promoted to team lead? What about that book you've been meaning to write? What about that idea for a new product or company?

As you read on, keep a pad and pencil (or the Notes app) by your side to jot down what's important to you. Add what you'll need to do to get there. Put a column next to that with reasonable due dates.

Guess what? You've just started your own agenda for the future.

READ ON,

Heather



DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO MONDAY MORNINGS?

WE'RE LOOKING FOR YOU.

We want everyone to know why where you work is wonderful. And we'll tell them! 269 MAGAZINE will be featuring the Wonderful Workplaces of Southwest Michigan in the pages of its Holiday 2019 issue.

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What is something that you wish our community had for residents to take advantage of?

USE YOUR VOICE @269MAG WITH #COMMUNITYCOMMENT

Data projections show that in the next 10 years, the Southwest Michigan region will face a talent shortage of 35,000 people. An important part of making sure our community both retains its current emerging leader population and becomes the magnetic region it deserves to be is ensuring that our local community has a dynamic and accessible culture.



DREW RAKLOVITS

CO-OWNER, FOUNDER, AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
OVERNEATH CREATIVE COLLECTIVE

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT I NOTICE, ESPECIALLY AS I GET TO TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD and the U.S., is not just how [the availability of various forms of mobility] improves accessibility, but how it's also easy and attractive. It's fun to go on the underground in London; it's fun to hop on a tram in Chicago. If Kalamazoo had a variety of mobility options, especially for the 42,000 college students that [study here], we could get them downtown in a way where they don't have to Uber, ask a friend who has a car, or take a bus. There could be an electric tram that ran down Stadium Drive, and all you would have to do is hop on and hop off at different stops. Or, certain cities have found success with bike shares and electric scooters. Downtown is fun once you're in the business and entertainment districts. Let's just get the younger crowd there.



ALONA WOOD

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I WISH THAT OUR COMMUNITY HAD MORE BUSINESSES or low-cost programs aimed at teaching children the skills that are in high demand. Skills like STEM, construction, and manufacturing, to name a few. Exposing our youth to the industries where we are losing talent will encourage them to, one day, fill the gaps and sustain our local economy.



SARAH PRATT OLSZOWY

VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING,
GREENLEAF HOSPITALITY GROUP

I WISH DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO HAD MORE EVENTS and festivals for Southwest Michigan residents to enjoy. The events would help energize downtown Kalamazoo as a community hub for socialization, connection, and entertainment. These events would expand the existing community calendar by adding new experiences and reimagined ones. As we select what these experiences should look like, we need to understand what our community members desire and the current friction points for people coming downtown.



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TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

LOCAL LEADERS IMAGINE THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

BY KATHRYN DAVIS IMAGES SUAT GÜRSÖZLÜ (ISTOCK) PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGLER



THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN WILL BE DEFINED BY IDEAS THAT ARE TRANSLATED INTO ACTION. IT WILL LOOK A LOT LIKE ALL THREE OF THE CRANES WORKING ALONG KALAMAZOO'S SKYLINE TODAY.

JIM RITSEMA, CITY MANAGER OF KALAMAZOO

In 1929, the Swiss-born architect and urban planner known as Le Corbusier published a book titled “The City of Tomorrow.” It details the importance of supporting a city across each of its many sectors—from infrastructure to greenspace to technologies to social opportunity—to enable it to thrive.

In the book, Le Corbusier discusses “the right angle” for assessing practically any city. He encourages readers to step back and form a full perception of an area, considering how it existed in the past, how it’s changing now, and what might become of the place as the future turns to present.

From the ground in Southwest Michigan, it’s easy to look to the future and see the 35,000 jobs that will be left unfilled as masses of our current workforce reach retirement age over the next decade. This perspective becomes productive if, while we’re looking to the future, we also manage to form a vision for it—an agenda for growth. It’s productive if we look for the ways in which Southwest Michigan is poised for evolution and adaptation in terms of housing, technology, entertainment, education, and beyond—if we recognize how Southwest Michigan is being built for tomorrow.

“The future of Southwest Michigan will be defined by ideas that are translated into action,” says Jim Ritsema, city manager of Kalamazoo. “It will look like all three of the cranes working along Kalamazoo’s skyline today.”

TO A NEW MILLENNIUM

Ken Miller, CEO and principal partner of Millennium Restaurant Group, looks out his office window and smiles at the realization that his company—established in Kalamazoo just days before the turn of the century—is now nearly two decades old. He smiles still as he says, “Downtown Kalamazoo was truly struggling in 1999. But now, we look into the city and see a life that didn’t exist there 20 years ago.”



KEN MILLER,
MILLENNIUM RESTAURANT GROUP

In 1999, Southwest Michigan’s economy took several hits that resulted in steady decline for years thereafter. In the manufacturing sector alone, the region experienced an annual loss of 1,100 jobs—or 4.2 percent of the total market—for years, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

“It killed me to watch what was happening, so I took a chance back then,” Miller says. “I started Epic Bistro, which was fairly upscale—a pretty edgy move at the time, considering the state of downtown [Kalamazoo].” Miller fielded criticism from what seemed like every direction. But all the same, Millennium Restaurant Group held on, and more developments began slowly popping up across Southwest Michigan.

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MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION





The future of Southwest Michigan became steadily brighter across the board. The region began establishing one of the very first community-wide fiber networks in the nation. Activists worked toward the launch of the Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative in the late '90s, just as Western Michigan University (WMU) began its expansion into what would become its Parkview Campus. Soon, the region arrived at the early days of the Kalamazoo Promise.

However, growth is never without risk.

“Two years after Epic Bistro opened, we started the Union [Cabaret and Grille] down the street,” Miller reflects. “And today, I could hand you a list of probably 25 longstanding restaurants that exist—ones most people would never have dreamed of back in '99. Looking back, I see that what [Millennium] did then was a risk. I can say that today because it's all worked out pretty well; there's life in the city again.”

WORKING ON IT

Today's developments continue to build off of the risks taken at the turn of the century.



JULIE ROGERS,
KALAMAZOO COUNTY

Julie Rogers, a Kalamazoo county commissioner, spends much of her time working to breathe even more life into Southwest Michigan—especially through her deep involvement with the region's Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative. The movement aims to rehabilitate existing problem areas, including waste sites, vacant lots, and other properties throughout the region that are in need of improvement. These projects work to both eradicate contamination across our communities and optimize the areas for attracting young professionals and new developments.

Although there is most certainly risk involved at every turn, there must be an inherent level of trust in the potential outcome of the investment. Rogers cites a current

project of the Initiative's—the Vicksburg Mill—and notes a major target for this particular project: young people.

“The Vicksburg Mill Redevelopment is a \$60 million project that's really quite visionary. We're working to take this old, abandoned mill with various types of contamination and create not only a brewery but an outdoor music venue. Lots of college-educated people are leaving our region. But it's projects like this—new, creative things, solutions for old problems—that will ultimately draw and keep people in our [region].”

The work done by the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority is similar to that of Imagine Kalamazoo 2025, an initiative that works to improve neighborhoods throughout our communities. Jim Ritsema explains the Foundation for Excellence-funded movement further, saying, “We're working to pave roads, plant trees, improve greenspaces—make our neighborhoods cleaner and safer. Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 hopes to enhance the existing areas, shaping them into places where people really want to live, work, and play.”

Rogers and Ritsema both hope that the projects underway through Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 and the Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative will help foster a culture and physical region that attracts young people naturally. They need not only a reason to come, but also a reason to stay long-term.

AN INTEGRATED PLACE

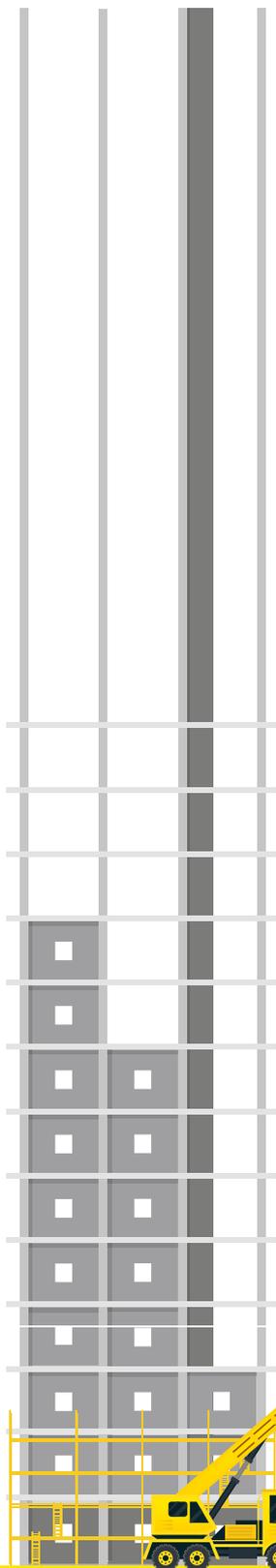
Perhaps no one spends more time considering our region's relationship to its young professionals than Dr. Jennifer Bott, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Western Michigan University.



DR. JENNIFER BOTT,
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

“This region—this place—is what draws students [to WMU],” she says. “We talk a lot at WMU about our engagement with the community because Kalamazoo is the reason it's possible for us to exist. Most universities are situated in towns where

WE'RE WORKING TO PAVE ROADS, PLANT TREES, IMPROVE GREENSPACES—MAKE OUR NEIGHBORHOODS CLEANER AND SAFER. IMAGINE KALAMAZOO 2025 HOPES TO ENHANCE THE EXISTING AREAS, SHAPING THEM INTO PLACES WHERE PEOPLE REALLY WANT TO LIVE, WORK, AND PLAY.



the industrial and organizational components are less-than-robust—where the university itself is the biggest employer in the area. But Kalamazoo, even without the universities, would be an incredible town. That's such an opportunity for students and young professionals to step into."

Through its Think Big Initiative, the university will adapt its branding to further integrate the school into the fabric of Southwest Michigan's communities. "My wildest dream would be that the relationship that exists [between WMU and the community] would be so close that we'd be seen as a simple extension of one another," says Bott. "For many of our students, their dream job is right here with one of the region's dozens of thriving companies. It's my hope that our students choose to stay in Kalamazoo and support the region that supported them."

What we have here in Southwest Michigan is a booming economy and continued growth. Young people see that. They realize that, when it comes to life in our region, they'll move forward with a return on their investment."

AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF STABILITY

Where Bott leaves off, CTS Telecom President and CEO Stacey Hamlin picks up. Southwest Michigan's technological infrastructure serves as a backbone of sorts for the region's growth trajectory.

As of 2019, only around 25 percent of communities in the country support community-wide fiber networks. In 1999, Southwest Michigan started on its way to becoming one of the first. "We've been building a fiber infrastructure [in Southwest Michigan] for over 20 years," says Hamlin. "Not a lot of areas have a fiber network, although fiber is extremely powerful and creates an amazing foundation for growth, especially for large companies and municipalities."

Hamlin looks forward to widespread use of drones, technologically-advanced municipal practices, and more benefits from this investment. "Southwest Michigan was among the first to take that plunge, and it's proven to be a highly lucrative investment already—plus, the payoff is still gaining."



STACEY HAMLIN,
CTS TELECOM

The greatest value that Gibson brings to the Marana Group is their ability to see the whole board. I often tell customers we are playing chess, not checkers. Every piece on our board has a special function — it requires special attention. Gibson has the ability to see all the pieces on my board, and know how each piece works, and how each piece works towards the goals that we have as a company.

David Rhoa, Marana Group (Formerly Lake Michigan Mailers)

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Due to this effort—this calculated risk—Southwest Michigan has positioned itself as an elite area capable of drawing the attention of foreign investors. Companies in Germany, Japan, and elsewhere looking to outsource production commonly have a simple question: “What [technological] infrastructure do you have?” Southwest Michigan’s answer often pays off in the form of jobs—which means even more growth throughout the region.

A NEW KIND OF PLAN

When charged with the concept of envisioning an “agenda for growth” in the region, Dan Jaqua, owner and president of Jaqua Realtors, muses, “I struggle with what comes first; I do know that every bit of progress tends to spur on the next. If we create more jobs in the region, we boost quality of life. If we improve quality of life, we’ll create more housing to accommodate the people who have come to experience it—and so on. Everything tends to move in this cyclical manner because everyone is working to up their game along with [the sector] beside them.”



DAN JAQUA,
JAQUA REALTORS

Many people—both within and beyond Southwest Michigan—hear talk of the impending addition of around 300 residential units to the downtown Kalamazoo area and perceive the movement as something of a gamble. Jaqua, however, counters, “These are calculated things. Sure, at face value, it’s a risk—but it’s also something we’ve needed for years in order to make Southwest Michigan into a place where people can and want to be.”

Jaqua explains, “The perception is that if we build it, they will come—and that will leave something else vacant. But that’s not what we’ve seen in our market. Instead, we see the primary market starting to grow. We’ve started to see people coming in, diversifying the demographic, upping the demand for housing as a whole.”

If there is to be an agenda for growth in our communities, as a region, we need to be willing to risk,” Jaqua says. “Without risk, there’s no reward. Without risk, there won’t be growth. In terms of housing, this means responding to the demands of the market. It means working toward things like lower building costs, taking calculated risks to allow for the desired changes that go well beyond housing.”

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

As Southwest Michigan pulls still farther away from where it was in 1999, local leaders look to the future and see a region characterized by risks that paid off.

The Southwest Michigan of tomorrow is a more physically beautiful area than ever, where, in Rogers’ mind, Brownfield sites have been rehabilitated and contamination has been largely eradicated.

It’s a place with fresh buildings, including, in Miller’s tomorrow, several boutique restaurants in the style of 600 Kitchen and Bar that appeal to foodies and lovers of drink from far and wide.

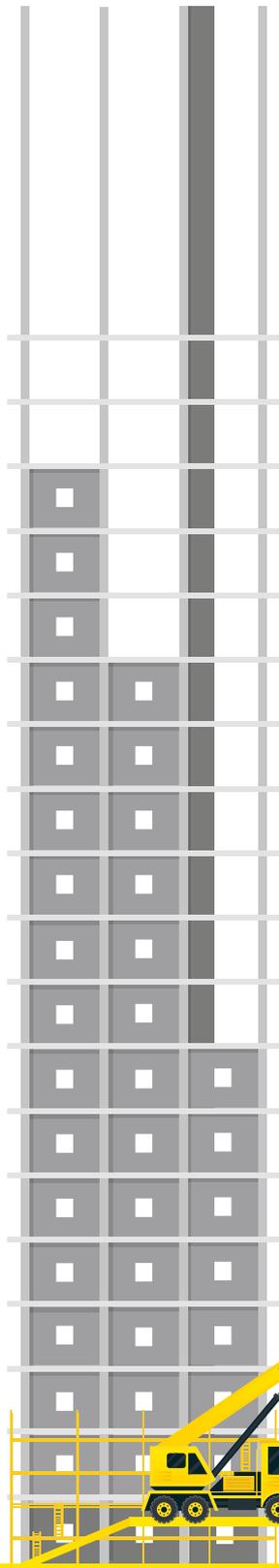
Jaqua anticipates a rush to the cities in response to new housing developments throughout the area, which will “fill major gaps in the market.”

The region will enjoy “an economy in which current corporations continue to invest and new investors flock to take advantage of cutting-edge technology and overall quality of life,” Hamlin believes.

In Bott’s mind, higher education students will come for an education but stay for the ample opportunities for growth and leadership that the region’s communities offer.

By paying close attention to the needs of its people, and taking some risks, the Southwest Michigan region will continue to thrive.

“At the end of the day, this is the community that created the Foundation for Excellence and the Kalamazoo Promise—wild dreams that have already come true,” says Ritsema. “This region is a community that can act boldly and wisely in order to shape the best future possible.”



PERCEPTION
THE **IS THAT IF WE BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME—AND THAT WILL LEAVE SOMETHING ELSE**
VACANT. BUT THAT’S NOT WHAT WE’VE SEEN IN OUR MARKET. INSTEAD, WE SEE THE PRIMARY MARKET
STARTING TO GROW. WE’VE STARTED TO SEE PEOPLE COMING IN, DIVERSIFYING THE DEMOGRAPHIC,
UPPING THE DEMAND FOR HOUSING AS A WHOLE.

DESTINATION: THE FUTURE

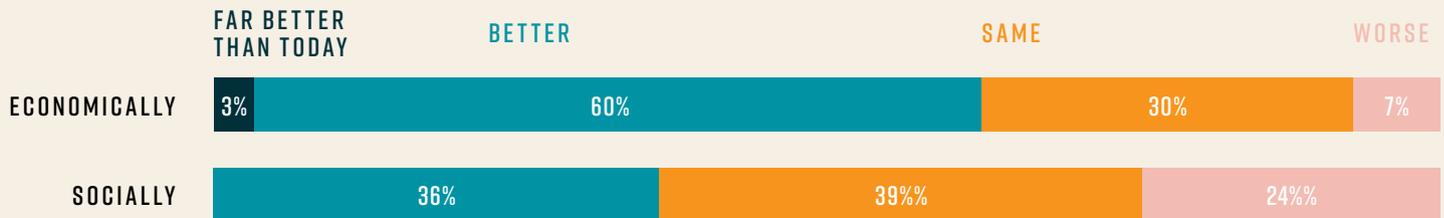
BY
HEATHER BAKER

IF YOU HAD THE POWER AND RESOURCES TO SOLVE SOME OF THE REGION'S— AND WORLD'S— MOST CRITICAL ISSUES, HOW WOULD YOU SPARK CHANGE OUTSIDE YOUR FRONT DOOR?

269 MAGAZINE posed this question to more than 100 community leaders throughout Southwest Michigan. They hail from industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, real estate, and education and represent a variety of demographic backgrounds. Their concerns, predictions, and creative ideas could serve as the foundation for future community agendas.

Based on what is happening in the region today, what is your forecast for the future?

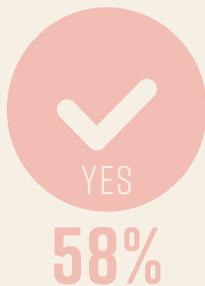
There is optimism about the region's economic outlook. As for society and how we relate to one another, many express some level of concern about how we will get along.



STOP WORRYING ABOUT MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND START LOOKING FOR NEW ONES.

I.M. PEI CHINESE AMERICAN ARCHITECT

Have trade tariffs impacted your business?



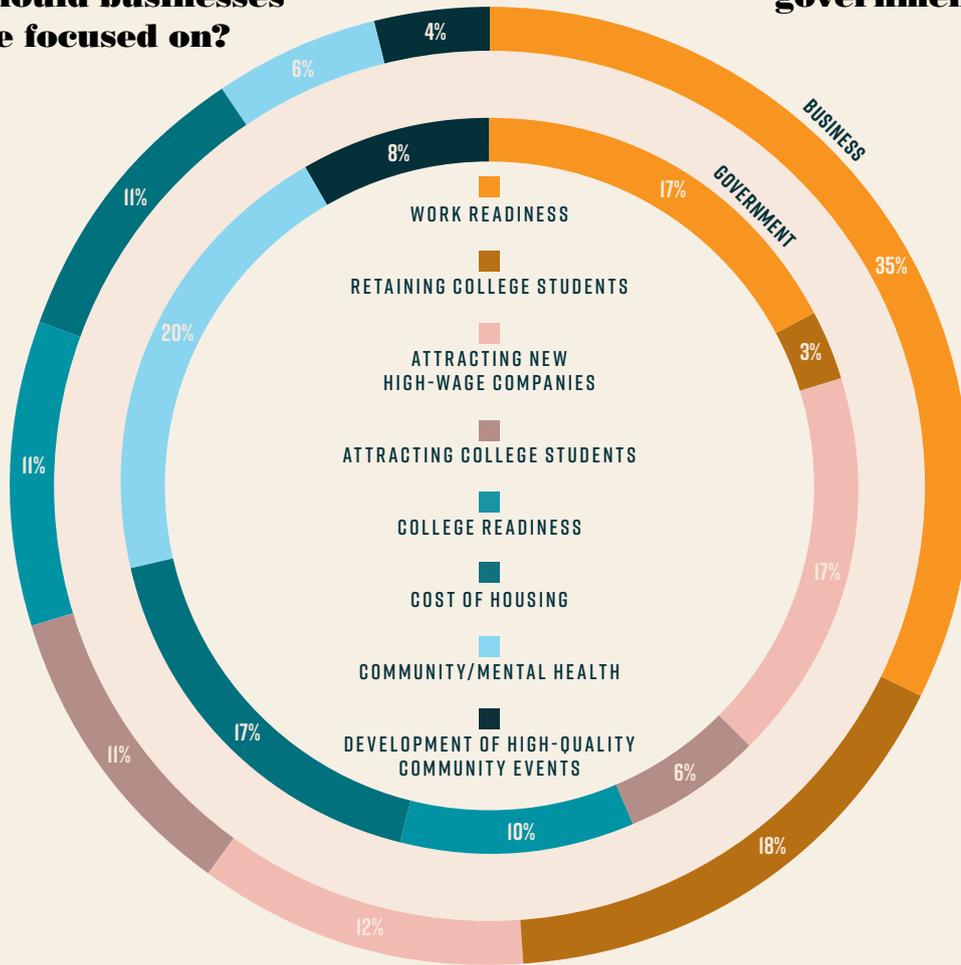
Economic inequality is a growing concern in the region, throughout the U.S., and abroad as the gap between the rich and poor appears to be widening.

Which is the single most important way to close this gap?



Which issues should businesses be focused on?

How about local government?



WHEN PHILANTHROPY AND BUSINESS INVESTMENT OCCUR TOGETHER, THERE'S A MULTIPLIER EFFECT, AND IF IT IS FOCUSED AND ORGANIZED, IT IS COMMUNITY CAPITALISM.

WILLIAM D. JOHNSTON CHAIRMAN OF GREENLEAF COMPANIES

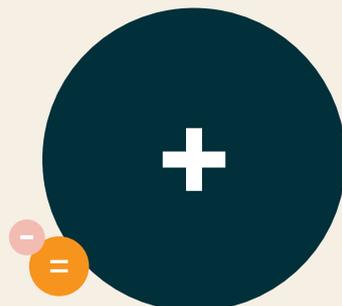
In order for children to be competitive in tomorrow's job market, what skills should educators focus on?

While many would bet that math and science would top the list, leaders place value on a holistic approach and out-of-the-box reasoning skills.

What is holding the economy back?

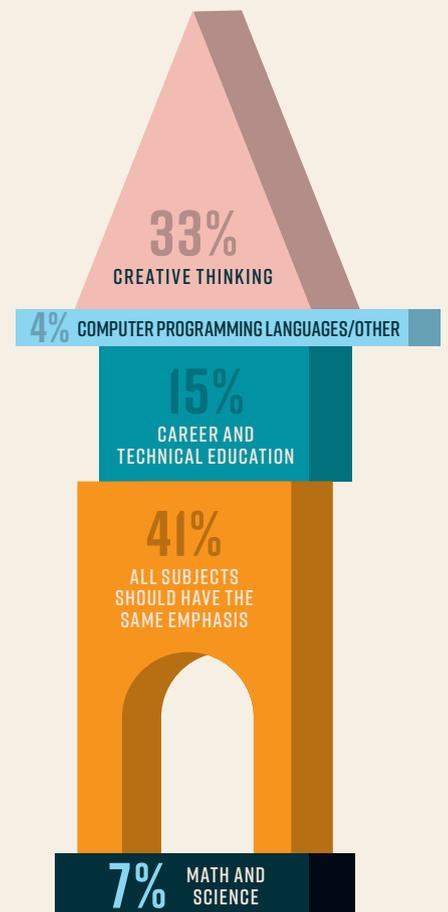


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Makers'
MART

MAKING BIG MOVES IN SMALL BUSINESS

*LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS CAN
MAKE IT BIG THROUGH THE 2019
MAKERS' MART COMPETITION*

BY KATHRYN DAVIS PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

WHEN IT COMES TO THE MICHIGAN ECONOMY, THE IMPACT OF SMALL BUSINESS IS ANYTHING BUT SMALL.

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, the 870,301 small businesses located across the state are responsible for 49.2 percent of the private workforce in Michigan. That's almost two million jobs!

It's clear: what's good for Michigan's small businesses is good for Michigan as a whole. Southwest Michigan First and the Haworth College of Business at Western Michigan University (WMU) developed Makers' Mart, an entrepreneurial competition that operates with the goal of supporting young small businesses, with this in mind.

Each year, Makers' Mart competition finalists are selected from a pool of applicants, each of whom owns and operates a business in

Southwest Michigan with an annual revenue of less than \$500,000. Each of this year's four makers has the opportunity to sell their products on June 20, 2019, at Catalyst University, an annual leadership conference curated by Southwest Michigan First and held at Wings Event Center. One will be voted Makers' Mart champion by the attendees of the conference and receive a \$2,500 cash prize awarded by WMU's Haworth College of Business, as well as MiSpringboard legal services courtesy of Varnum LLP and marketing support from Newhall Klein.

"Michigan is a fertile ground [for small business]," says Dr. Satish Deshpande, Dean of the Haworth College of Business. "Innovation, creativity, and work ethic pour [out of this area]."

Of the Haworth College's support of Makers' Mart, Deshpande says, "The Haworth College and Southwest Michigan First are natural allies in creating jobs in Southwest Michigan. We're [both] committed to supporting entrepreneurs within the community as they reach milestones in their business journeys. That's what Makers' Mart is all about."

Past Makers' Mart winners include Handmade Kalamazoo, Confections with Convictions, Midwest Opener Company, and Kalamazoo Candle Company. This year's winner will be announced live on the Catalyst University stage and post-event at catalystuniversity.me/recognition.

MEET THIS YEAR'S MAKERS >>

MEREDITH GANTON
COFOUNDER

DANIELLE FISKARS-BYERS
COFOUNDER



PHYSIC WOULD USE THE COMPETITION'S PLATFORM AND WINNINGS TO GROW EVEN MORE, IMPROVING THE GUT HEALTH OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT MICHIGAN.



PHYSIC KOMBUCHA

PHYSICKOMBUCHA.COM | [@PHYSICKOMBUCHA](#)

BOTTOMS UP

PHYSIC Kombucha puts a fresh spin on the fermented tea drink. All PHYSIC Kombucha is fermented with the addition of juices pressed from local produce, giving the beverage a delicious boost in the taste department.

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

The brainchild of Meredith Ganton, a health coach and exercise specialist, and Danielle Fiskars-Byers, a registered dietitian, PHYSIC Kombucha is made with the health of its drinkers in mind. Every recipe Ganton and Fiskars-Byers produce is informed by their professions. According to the pair, the goal is to get people to think, "Drinking this kombucha was an easy step in the direction of health. What else can I do to live a healthier life?"

Looking back to the beginning of PHYSIC's journey, Ganton notes, "[Kombucha] wasn't always my favorite thing. I thought I could get used to the taste, but then I realized we could work to sweeten the flavors, to balance the pH. And one day, we'd made something that tastes good and has loads of health benefits. That's what we wanted."

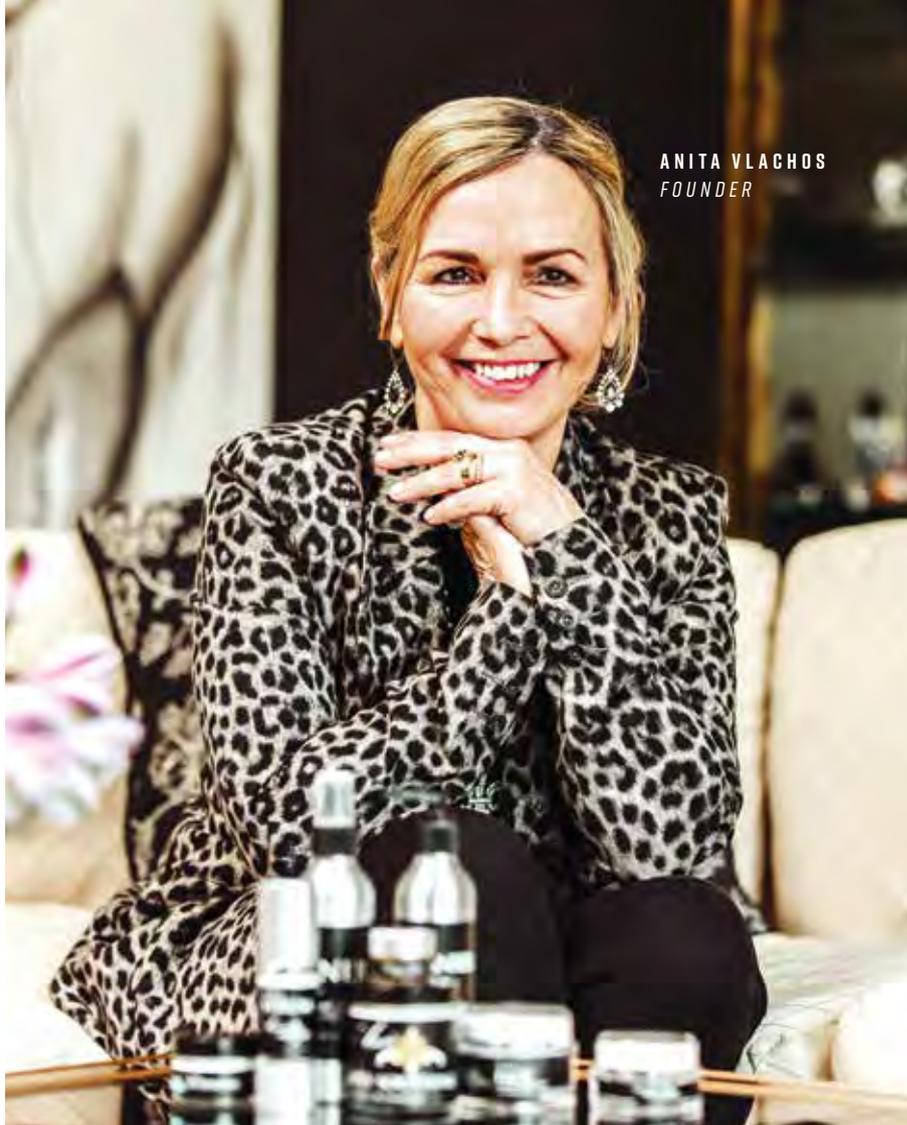
A JACK OF ALL TRADES

One of the most unique things about PHYSIC Kombucha is its versatility. It's not just a vinegary drink that's good for digestive health—PHYSIC Kombucha is sweet and fruity and can be used in tons of different ways. You can drink it on its own, of course, but you can also use it as a marinade, a cocktail mixer, a base for a smoothie, or frozen with chunks of fruit for healthy popsicles—the possibilities are as endless as they are yummy.

AS MAKERS' MART CHAMPION...

PHYSIC Kombucha would expand. Although it's distributing widely on a local level—with over a dozen locations and \$19,000 in revenue over its first nine months of sales—PHYSIC would use the competition's platform and winnings to grow even more, improving the gut health of people throughout Michigan. Ganton and Fiskars-Byers would bring on a few more employees and start to distribute to Lansing, St. Joseph, Ann Arbor, and beyond.

ANITA VLACHOS
FOUNDER



THE THING ABOUT ANII IS THAT THE MARKET FOR THE SKIN CARE LINE IS, WELL, EVERYONE.



ANII SKIN CARE

ANIISKINCARE.COM | [@ANIISKINCARE](#)

MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

Anii Skin Care has a complete skin care line in which each product is handmade with wholly organic materials. Anii products can be used for a wide range of purposes, including the treatment of skin damaged from burns or radiation treatment, or as a simple and wholesome skin care regimen.

THE MAGIC POTION

It wasn't until years after she'd begun formulating and making skin care products for her own family that Anita Vlachos launched Anii. Anii began when a friend of Vlachos was sent to the pharmacy following a permanent eyeliner treatment and was told to pick up a tiny tube of petroleum-based eye cream for healing. Vlachos was skeptical and told her friend, "Wait. I can make you something better."

When Vlachos's friend returned six weeks later for a touch-up by the aesthetician who'd administered her treatment, the aesthetician was

amazed. The area had healed exceptionally; the pigment had been retained better than the technician had ever seen.

Later that same day, the aesthetician called Vlachos herself and asked, "Can you make this cream for me to sell to patients?"

TAPPING THE MARKET

"The thing about Anii is that the market for the skin care line is, well, everyone," says Vlachos. From younger generations to older ones, from individuals with skin damage from burns and radiation to anyone who's hoping to take better care of their skin—Anii is for them. "The people who have been using [my products], especially those undergoing radiation treatments, say, 'This needs to be available to everybody receiving radiation—and to everyone else!'"

AS MAKERS' MART CHAMPION...

Lots would change for Anii. If Vlachos were to win Makers' Mart, she sees the business expanding to include employees. As of now, Anii is distributed only in wholesale and online ordering capacities. More efficient equipment and a couple of employees would allow Vlachos to sell her products through local shops and to individual customers.



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BEE JOYFUL SHOP

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WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

Bee Joyful Shop is a boutique that offers a handmade, reusable, antimicrobial, and biodegradable alternative to single-use plastics commonly used for food storage.

STARTING OFF THE GRID

Although raised in an environmentally-conscious home, Jessica VanderVere found that life as a single mom was jam-packed with responsibilities, and, as a result, sustainability had become somewhat of an afterthought.

But one day, VanderVere did a little math. She realized something alarming: Her family was using 3,600 plastic baggies—none of which could be recycled—every single school year. It wouldn't be so hard, VanderVere finally decided, to make a small change and cut down on the single-use plastics.

VanderVere began to hand-make food wraps from fabric and wax so she could store her family's food in a sustainable way. Bee Joyful Shop was born. VanderVere says that every three-piece set of wraps "cut[s] down on about 1,000 pieces of plastic per year."

BUSY AS A BEE

It wasn't long before a friend of VanderVere's urged her to start a shop on Etsy. Hours after she'd launched her Etsy shop, VanderVere had received orders for her wraps from all around the globe. Bee Joyful food wraps can now be found in 17 brick-and-mortar stores in five states. The shop's Etsy presence has expanded to reach 79 countries.

AS MAKERS' MART CHAMPION...

VanderVere would use her earnings to invest in equipment that would speed up her manufacturing process. As of now, she uses large open pans of wax to coat the wraps and cuts every single wrap with office scissors. Winning the competition, she says, would mean streamlined production and an even greater global impact.



JESSICA VANDERVE
FOUNDER

HOURS AFTER SHE'D LAUNCHED HER ETSY SHOP, VANDERVE HAD RECEIVED ORDERS FOR HER WRAPS FROM ALL AROUND THE GLOBE.



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GREAT SCOTT ICE CREAM

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THE SCOOP

Great Scott Ice Cream is an artisanal ice cream and ice pop company that focuses on flavor, service, and smile-making.

BOUNCING AROUND

Although based out of Southwest Michigan, Great Scott Ice Cream has a well-traveled background. It wasn't until founder Ken Harshman (given name, Scott) had bounced around from Fort Wayne to Southwest Michigan to Jackson

ONE DAY, HE FINALLY WENT OUT AND BOUGHT A BOOK ON THE ART OF CONCOCTING FROZEN CONFECTIONS. THE REST IS DELICIOUS HISTORY.

Hole to Memphis and back to Michigan that the idea for the shop was really solidified. Harshman had always had an interest in the business, and one day, he finally went out and bought a book on the art of concocting frozen confections.

The rest is delicious history.

LOOKING FORWARD TO NOSTALGIA

Since 2018, Harshman has acquired two 1960s paneled delivery vans, and his imagination has hardly run out of fuel. He sees these vans as one element of a huge expansion project that will push the product line to include sodas, milkshakes, malts, and more and increase the company's means of delivery.

Today, Great Scott mainly distributes at farmers markets and other events, but Harshman has big dreams for a more consistent, broader impact. Although the paneled vans will no doubt take Great Scott on down the road, Harshman also looks to the possibility of establishing a brick-and-mortar shop in the coming years.

AS MAKERS' MART CHAMPION...

"When I started the company, my title was 'Smile-Maker,'" Harshman says. "Now smile-making is our whole mission." As Makers' Mart Champion, Harshman would work to make a whole lot more smiles. At the top of his to-do list is a refresh of the company's branding. This would enable Great Scott to get its brand in front of more people by investing in wrapping freezers, which would allow the company to sell its products in shops.



KEN (SCOTT) HARSHMAN
FOUNDER

INSTRUCTING ON THE ARTSY SIDE OF ENGINEERING

A Q+A WITH MIKE ELWELL

DIRECTOR OF WESTERN
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY (WMU)'S
RICHMOND INSTITUTE FOR
DESIGN AND INNOVATION

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

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WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT WMU'S PRODUCT DESIGN PROGRAM?

The Richmond Institute for Design and Innovation is two years old now, so our students are freshmen and sophomores. I believe that we have one of the best facilities in the country.

In our fabrication lab for rapid prototyping, we have six 3D printers, a laser cutter, table saws, planers, band saws—everything that students need to get an idea out of their head and into production. Students doing early iterations of a project can go in, grab a chunk of foam, and start prototyping. In their material and processes course last semester, one class created rotationally molded pieces of outdoor furniture that could be sent to a manufacturer.

WHAT WAS YOUR INITIAL VISION FOR THE PROGRAM?

In the past, there was a product design program here at WMU, but it shut down about 10 years ago. After that, several community companies banded together and petitioned the university to bring the program back. These businesses were having trouble recruiting designers to the area and argued that there were local, well-paying, design-related jobs going unfilled. Their idea was to grow designers right here in Southwest Michigan. People aren't generally aware that there are more product design jobs in Michigan than there are in many parts of the country.

HOW HAS COMMUNITY SUPPORT IMPACTED THE PROGRAM?

WMU's donor community and level of corporate support have been unbelievable. We've had a lot of corporate partners, and that allows us to get professional designers in the classroom working with students. In our design drawing course, we had designers from Stryker in the classroom drawing with students. And in our design seminar, we bring a different professional designer in to speak to the students once a week. The institute is meant to interact with industry, bringing together people from across WMU to work on difficult challenges and solve problems together through the lens of design.

WHAT FIRST SPARKED YOUR PASSION FOR DESIGN?

I loved Legos as a kid. In one of my earliest memories, a letter came in the mail asking if I would like to join the Boy Scouts. I remember telling my mom something like, "I think I'd rather stay at home and play with Legos." She seemed to think I was being ridiculous and antisocial, but it worked out in the end. In high school, I had a high GPA, was doing fine in my math and science courses, and was also decent at art. I found out that when you're a good student who can understand math, but also draws well, everyone will tell you that you should be an architect. So, that's what I set out to become. At the time, I had no idea the industrial design profession even existed.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO PURSUE INDUSTRIAL DESIGN SPECIFICALLY?

I did my undergrad at [the University of] Notre Dame. I could tell you the exact moment I knew I was an industrial designer at heart. In a drawing lab, my professor was teaching us how to draw ellipses in perspective—they're very difficult to draw. We were drawing coffee pots for practice, and I put a button on my coffee pot. During the critique, my professor asked, "What does this button right here do?" That's when I realized that design isn't about creating a piece of art that's going in a gallery, it's about designing products with a purpose, products that improve quality of life. I switched to industrial design immediately.

At WMU, we try to instill that mindset in our students. We teach that a designer aspires to create products that don't end up in landfills. Our job is to meet authentic human needs. It starts with a thorough understanding of what the customer needs, and then there's an integrative process where designers,

engineers, and marketers come up with many custom ideas as quickly as possible, discarding the ones that don't work and refining the ones that do.

WHAT OTHER ASPECTS OF DESIGN ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUR STUDENTS TO LEARN?

We believe that with this institute's structure—and with the support from the community—graduates of this program will be highly employable. But we try to empower them with leadership and entrepreneurial skills. I would love to see students realize some of the great ideas and projects they come up with while they're here. When I was studying at Notre Dame, I designed a prescription bottle that's easier to open for people with arthritis. It was simple to get a utility patent on that idea, so I licensed it to a company that now manufactures and distributes it. That got me interested in entrepreneurship. Today, most people assume launching a business is impossible. That's unfortunate because it's never been easier to launch an idea, using a platform like Kickstarter.

WHAT QUALITIES ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN PROGRAM APPLICANTS?

We're running through product design interviews right now, looking for our next troupe of students. I'm searching for someone who is a solid student and who can communicate visually. More than that, I'm looking for someone who's a maker—maybe they did well at a science fair, or maybe they like to build stuff with their dad in the garage. I often describe industrial design as the "artsy side of engineering."

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COLLABORATION DRIVES BUSINESS AND TALENT GROWTH

CLARK LOGIC FORGES ONGOING PARTNERSHIP WITH WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY'S BRONCO FORCE

BY CATHY KNAPP PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

START WITH AN ENERGETIC ENTREPRENEUR AND THREE COMPANY DIVISIONS ENCOMPASSING TRUCKING, REAL ESTATE, AND STORAGE.

Add a skilled team, an out-of-the-box thinker, and seven Broncos. What is the result? Clark Logic and its formula for cultivating business and talent growth.

When it was founded as Central Manufacturing Systems in 1969, the corporation predominantly served one customer. An evolution began when the founder's grandson, Jamie Clark, became president and set a new path for growth. Clark Logic now boasts a 50-truck delivery fleet, over 2.5 million square feet of leasable building space, 2,500 storage rental trailers, and a team of 72 members fulfilling roles in delivery, dispatch, warehousing, maintenance, and more.

In light of the continued influx of business opportunities, the Clark team enlisted a new vice president of business development, Greg Diloné, to strategize a course of action. Diloné forged a partnership with Western Michigan University (WMU)'s Bronco Force, comprised of faculty and students from the university's Integrated Supply Management program.

Bronco Force collaborates with companies to address challenges supply chain managers face, identify opportunities, and determine the best workplace solutions. It's an ideal system for assisting companies, giving students hands-on experience, and developing relationships for future employment. A six-student team managed by senior Justin Mielke began working with Clark Logic in January and completed its project in April.

"We wanted to set up an ongoing partnership with WMU," Diloné said. "Our team was made up of students from the Six Sigma Problem Solving course. So, we started by looking at our company's DMAIC process—Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control."

"This first student team focused on the Define/Measure/Analyze part of the process and did a final presentation with recommendations," Diloné explained. "They teed up the next semester's team to work on the Improve/Control strategy. Justin defined the role of the team leader and was responsible for the next semester's scope to begin after he graduated in April."

It's a partnership that Clark Logic plans to continue each semester, with new student teams picking up and continuing the progress where the previous team left off. Diloné crafted the program, which pays the student team lead as an intern and includes bi-weekly team meetings and industry insight days where students spend time in warehouse locations and with the company's dispatch and driver teams.

Students also conduct research to gauge business opportunities, utilizing tools such as SWOT analyses, comparative pricing, industry and competitive analyses, and market trends.

"It's real world [experience]," Mielke said. "You don't learn it in a classroom. You can't read it in a book. They appreciate me. Greg gives me a spec but also gives me the freedom to make suggestions."

Is Clark Logic hiring? "We are always looking to hire additional talent that can make a positive impact on our company and culture," Diloné said.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

PARTNERSHIPS PAY OFF

Regional economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First and Clark Logic have forged a deep relationship over the past seven years, resulting in multiple expansions of the logistics solutions company throughout Southwest Michigan.

The agency has guided Clark Logic through Brownfield program assessment grant funding and tax increment financing to help offset development costs, support leadership development, and increase prospective lessee referrals. The result? Thirty-six new jobs and investment totaling over \$7.3 million across locations in Kalamazoo, Schoolcraft, Sturgis, Three Rivers, Vicksburg, and White Pigeon.

NOTHING TO WINE ABOUT: SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE WINEMAKING YIELDS WINE THAT'S BETTER FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

BY
CHARLOTTE YOUNG

PHOTOS
COURTESY OF 45
NORTH VINEYARD
& WINERY

SHOPPERS ARE INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON HOW THEIR PURCHASING DECISIONS AFFECT THEIR HEALTH AND THAT OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

The terms “organic,” “natural,” and “sustainable” have surpassed buzzword status, becoming a way of life for many. Discerning consumers, particularly millennials and members of Gen Z, look for these terms when making decisions about any purchase, down to a glass of wine.

The organic wine category has been growing for several years, and the trend continues in 2019. “Organic wine is still a relatively small sector: accounting for around 3.6 percent of global consumption. But with more than one billion bottles of organic wine set to be consumed around the world every year by 2022, it’s becoming increasingly significant,” said Rachel Arthur in Beverage Daily’s “The organic wine world is in full expansion mode—and shows no signs of stopping!”

“At Imperial Beverage, we recognize that this trend continues to be significant in grocery and retail,” said Larry Cekola, vice president of sales at Imperial Beverage. Imperial distributes more than 100 wine brands from around the world that have natural, sustainable, organic, or biodynamic designations statewide. “It is important to us to help our customers and wine consumers know just how many wines also carry organic designations. Informed consumers know what they are looking for, and it’s our job to supply it.”

UNCORKING THE TERMINOLOGY

There are two types of organic designations that consumers might see on wine labels: “organically-grown grapes” or “organic.” Organically-grown grapes have been farmed without

any synthetic pesticides or additives. To be certified “organic,” wine must be produced from organically-grown grapes and be free of any added sulfites.

The U.S. government regulates the use of the term “organic,” but “biodynamic” and “sustainable” have no legal definitions.

Biodynamic production is similar to organic farming in that both take place without synthetic chemicals. However, biodynamic farming incorporates ideas about a vineyard as an entire ecosystem and also takes into account astrological influences and lunar cycles. When producing a biodynamic wine, the winemaker does not make the wine with any common manipulations such as yeast additions or acidity adjustments.

Sustainability refers to a range of practices that are not only ecologically sound but also economically viable and socially responsible. There may also be a focus on energy and water conservation and use of renewable resources. Some third-party agencies offer sustainability certifications for winemakers, and many regional industry associations are working on developing clearer standards.

IN SUPPORT OF BETTER PRACTICES

A nonprofit organization called the Michigan Wine Collaborative (MWC) has brought people and resources together to help further natural winemaking practices throughout the state. The MWC’s mission is to enhance the sustainability and profitability of the Michigan wine industry by supporting wineries, growers, and businesses and individuals connected to the industry. It partners with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 5 Lakes Energy, Michigan State University, and more to provide resources that are helpful to members as they continue their sustainability journey.





MWC has a lot in store for 2019, including several marketing and promotional activities to spread the good word about Michigan wine across the country. One such activity was a trip to the National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago in May. There, members' wines were shared with buyers from all over the country. The MWC also plays a key role in planning the Michigan Wine Competition, which will celebrate its 42nd year in 2019.

The collaborative has also developed the Great Lakes Sustainable Wine Alliance (GLSWA), a group for Michigan wine industry

The U.S. government regulates the use of the term “organic,” but “biodynamic” and “sustainable” have no legal definitions.

members who have demonstrated their commitment to sustainability practices. More than a dozen wineries in the mitten are part of the alliance. To be a member of GLSWA, one must join the MWC and also be Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) certified. MAEAP is an innovative, proactive program that helps farms of all sizes and commodities to voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks.

LABELS TO LOOK FOR

The GLSWA and its members are setting the standard for sustainable grape growing and wine production in the Great Lakes states. Members to note and look out for the next time you would like to enjoy some Michigan wine include Bowers Harbor Vineyards of Michigan's Old Mission Peninsula and 45 North Vineyard & Winery of Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula.

Northern Michigan's wine growing regions are located on or very near the 45th parallel, exactly halfway between the equator and the North Pole. The internationally-recognized wine regions of Bordeaux in southwestern France, Italy's Piedmont, and Oregon's Willamette Valley are located on the same parallel. The microclimates created by the surrounding waters have made these regions great for producing a wide range of vegetables and fruits, including grapes. These large bodies of water stay warmer into the fall, which prolongs the growing season.

Wineries and other businesses around the world are focused on increasing the sustainability of their business practices to maximize the triple bottom line—people, planet, and profit. The concept of “natural” is not a new one, but it is currently at the forefront of retail space in stores and online. If you are someone who reads labels and checks for transparency of production, you likely don't need further advice on the matter of choosing natural wine. For those newer to the concept, look for something with organic or sustainable production methods noted on the label. Better for the environment, better for you, better wine!

Charlotte Young is the graphic design and social media specialist at Imperial Beverage, 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, and 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.



It is important to us to help our customers and wine consumers know just how many wines also carry organic designations.



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ON THE JOB EXPERIENCE PAYS DIVIDENDS

WYATT COUNTERMAN LEARNS THE INS AND OUTS OF FINANCE AT LVM CAPITAL MANAGEMENT

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Financial planning is a myriad of things. When I first started at LVM Capital, I thought it was going to entail a lot of investor research, but the job is really about relationship-building. Sometimes we give tax planning or life insurance advice. Sometimes people come to us with a goal, like buying a house or preserving capital. We have to tailor our approach to each client and their financial goal. The biggest thing I'm working on now is a client review project. I have about 350 clients, and my job is to update client dossiers, making sure that they're in keeping with SEC regulations.

BALANCING SCHOOL AND WORK

My classes at WMU and this internship have complemented each other really well. I remember learning things in some of my finance classes that I would immediately use here. I had a financial markets class that gave me an understanding of the terminology we use at LVM Capital every day. I was already a big spreadsheet nerd, but my Computer Applications in Finance class helped me take my [Microsoft] Excel skills to another level. In my work here, I learned that different types of investments—whether they be equities, bonds, or mutual funds—are right for different people. We touched on that at WMU, but it was eye-opening to get a firsthand experience, interacting with real clients to determine which investments work best for them.

A CRASH COURSE

This internship is unique because it's a year-long internship. Actually, it lasts for 13 months—in the final month, I will be training the next intern. When I started, the previous intern also stayed and trained me. In addition, I have been getting on-the-job training every Friday. Chuck Prudhomme, our intern coordinator, takes about an hour out of his week to touch base with me and answer any questions I may have. Today, Chuck asked me to put together a tax analysis for one of our clients by using software that I had never used before. He sat down with me and gave me the whole rundown. It was a lot of information to understand all at once, but now I feel comfortable enough to be able to use it on my own.

SAGE ADVICE FOR OTHER INTERNS

Be prepared to not know things. You will be humbled by how much you don't know. I remember that our previous intern, the one who trained me, said the same thing. I felt like I had a good educational background in finance, but when I sat in on my first portfolio manager meeting, I was blown away by how much I didn't know or understand. I was furiously scribbling notes like, "Look this up! Look this up! What does this mean?" My advice would be to not get discouraged. It's all a learning process that will prepare you for a future full-time job.

MEET WYATT

HOMETOWN

Kalamazoo, MI

POSITION

Financial Planning Intern at
LVM Capital Management

EDUCATION

Western Michigan University (WMU)
Finance Major; Music Minor
Graduation Date: May 2020



NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN

THE WISER FINANCIAL GROUP CONTINUES
TO INVEST IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN
HEADING INTO ITS 60TH YEAR

We are answering questions that may not have to do with anything in terms of your investments, but we're here to help take the big picture into consideration.

MOST OF US CAN VAGUELY IMAGINE HOW OUR LIVES MIGHT LOOK AT 60 YEARS OLD.

For some of us, it's hard to visualize what our days will consist of when we intentionally slow down our daily routine after years in the workforce. Others who are much closer to retirement can vividly explain what life will be like: "Holding a frozen piña colada on a remote sandy beach, with toes in the water and Jimmy Buffet music playing in the background...without a 'worry or care.'" For many, when we envision ourselves at 60 years old, the biggest priority for our daily routine is when being "fully present" works hand-in-hand with the concept of living out our big picture for life.

The Wiser Financial Group's daily commitment to advising clients revolves around ensuring that working professionals in Southwest Michigan can see their personal vision of retirement as they approach their individual 60-year mark. This firm's daily grind is built on the knowledge that "slowing down"

will eventually happen for every individual in the Southwest Michigan workforce. About to hit 60 itself in 2020, The Wiser Financial Group is just starting to ramp up and is more focused than ever on helping to create a legacy in Southwest Michigan.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Founded as a long-term investment vehicle for working professionals in its community, The Wiser Financial Group continues to yield extraordinary results for individuals in Southwest Michigan who are looking to invest in their own futures.

The Wiser Financial Group was founded over 59 years ago, with the mission of helping individuals and families create wealth, maintain that wealth, and preserve a legacy for the next generation. Since 1960, The Wiser Financial Group has been an exceptional role model in financial advising, retirement, and legacy planning for individuals throughout the region. While most

With the depth of professionals we have here, we can really change with the times and help each client be successful for what their changing times are.

financial firms can celebrate being in the area for a few decades, one of the many layers of the “Wiser Advantage” is that the group has been a part of the Southwest Michigan community for over half a century.

ADVISORS FOR ANY AGE, ANY STAGE

The Wiser Financial Group team is well-versed in helping individuals who live and work in Southwest Michigan at all stages of their career. From advising corporate executives headquartered locally to aiding in succession planning for locally-owned small-to-medium-sized family businesses, the group’s financial advising experience is well-matched to the needs of the working professionals in the region.

Throughout a professional’s career, there are many financial deliberations and critical conversations that can and do arise. For example, these financial topics can include:

- How do I transition financially during a significant corporate lay-off?
- How do I maximize corporate stock opportunities with 401K investments?
- How do I financially transition and plan for the opportunity of working abroad?
- When should I seriously consider an early retirement option from a current employer?

The real lagniappe of engaging with The Wiser Financial Group is its ability to connect multiple financial perspectives and provide thoughtful, carefully considered advice from a regional and local economic viewpoint as well as from a domestic and global perspective. Its ability to connect the dots and provide personalized advice for working professionals takes financial advising to a whole different level when it comes to caring about the success and legacy of individuals in our local workforce. With no

million-dollar minimums, the group continues to help plan and support local Generation X business leaders and shape future planning for our elder millennials who are becoming aggressive about investing in their futures in Southwest Michigan.

THE WISER ADVANTAGE

With a full team of professionals with long-standing experience, it’s impossible not to recognize what a competitive advantage it is to be a Wiser client living, working, and building a future in Southwest Michigan.

Partner and Financial Advisor Robert Campbell describes what is called the “Wiser Advantage” as seeing the individual from a holistic approach: “When you come to an independent firm like The Wiser Financial Group, we’re not only looking at the investment side of things—stocks, bonds, mutual funds, etc.—what we are looking at is the entire picture. We are looking at your insurance needs. We are looking at your estate planning needs. We’re looking at your tax planning. We are answering questions that may not have to do with anything in terms of your investments, but we’re here to help take the big picture into consideration for you personally.”

The “Wiser Advantage” is the firm’s dedicated and experienced team approach, confirms Partner and Financial Advisor Clinton VanLinder. “I think one of the real advantages of working with our financial group is that we have a full team of professionals here. We have CPAs, an attorney, and a lot of investment experience. We can put all that together, and with the depth of professionals we have here, we can really change with the times and help each client be successful for what their changing times are.”

SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION PLANNING

With succession and legacy planning as a core element of retirement planning, it’s no surprise that The Wiser Financial Group has already managed a smooth leadership transition itself over this past decade. Over ten years ago, Ron Wiser, the founder of The Wiser Financial Group, saw the need to transition ownership and managing leadership to preserve the success of the firm and the long-term well-being of the firm’s clients. Since the group’s transition to a partnership, Campbell, VanLinder, Robert Amberg, and Wesley Lentz have continued to double down on the firm’s community investments by impressively growing the firm to help more individuals and businesses create growth and succession right here in Southwest Michigan.

With a “work hard, play hard” mentality, the managing partners continue to support their team and clients with a highly engaged approach while maintaining a consistent vision of the firm’s mission and commitment to clients and their local community.

Within the last year, The Wiser Financial Group has been recognized as a 2018 Top 101 Best and Brightest Business in the Nation by National Association of Business Resources and awarded Kestra Financial’s 2018 Outstanding Business of the Year by their broker-dealer. With the affirmation that accompanies these awards, it is apparent that, at almost 60, The Wiser Financial Group is not slowing down anytime soon.

The
WISER FINANCIAL GROUP

FEATURE BROUGHT TO YOU BY
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Navigate to the Front of the Line

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS PLOT THEIR OWN COURSE AT FIRST UP

BY
LORA PAINTER
PHOTO
HANNAH ZIEGELER

STARTING A NEW CAREER CAN SEEM DAUNTING, BUT IT HELPS TO HAVE A SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYER THAT ENCOURAGES LEARNING.

West Michigan is full of young professionals and businesses eager to hire them. One of these young professionals is Jeff Clay. One of those businesses is Wightman, a full-service consulting firm with locations in Kalamazoo, Allegan, and Benton Harbor.

Clay works as a Reality Capture Technical Lead at Wightman. He knows a lot about changes—personally and professionally. Clay is originally from Fresno, California, and he became a father this year. While adjusting to transitions is nothing new for him, Clay said that it's still encouraging to know that his employer embraces change and supports its employees' professional development.



THE NEXT SESSION OF **FIRST UP** IS EXPECTED TO BEGIN IN FALL 2019. TO LEARN MORE, GO TO CATALYSTUNIVERSITY.ME/FIRST-UP

“I’ve been learning that, if you want to be a leader, you don’t necessarily have to be in a leadership role,” Clay said. “You can really lead from within the middle of the pack.”

It’s through his employer that Clay connected with Southwest Michigan First, which started a new leadership development program called First UP. The goal of the program is to give up-and-coming talent—who are in the first five years of their career—information and resources that will help them succeed in their various job fields. Clay and more than 30 other young, diverse professionals are participating in the first cohort of the program.

“They’ll learn some basics, such as communication skills,” said Kim Weishaar, chief financial officer at Southwest Michigan First. “Also, a lot of employees are coming straight out of college. They are asking, ‘How do you manage your time in a professional setting? How do you hone your leadership skills?’ It’s important for them to know that just because they’re fresh out of college and starting their career, it doesn’t mean they can’t be a leader.”

I’ve been learning that, if you want to be a leader, you don’t necessarily have to be in a leadership role. You can really lead from within the middle of the pack.

First UP is broken into three curriculum-based sessions and meets at the Catalyst Center in downtown Kalamazoo. Southwest Michigan First also hosts educational luncheon opportunities where participants learn from area professionals who work in various fields in the private and public sectors, including education, medicine, and the military.

“A lot of the programs out there right now are really geared toward more seasoned workers,” Weishaar said. “We wanted to fill that gap in the market and develop a space for individuals who are younger leaders and are still trying to figure out how to navigate the working world.”

The U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics defines young professionals as people ages 20 to 34 who are working in a professional or technical job. In 2016, these government agencies said there were more than 17 million young professionals in the workforce nationwide.

“It’s really important for the younger generation to start building those leadership skills,” Clay said. “Because if you look around, there are a lot of good leaders around us and some big shoes to fill. So, we need to start early.”

Weishaar said that entering the first phase of a career can be tough for young professionals because they might be surprisingly unprepared. They might not feel that they are capable or confident.

“First UP was born out of conversations that we’ve had with some of our more seasoned local leaders about how we can get our younger people engaged immediately,” Weishaar said. “How do we get them feeling involved, not feeling burnt-out right out of college? It’s a huge transition going from college life into professional life. And we realize too that [companies] want to help these people develop professional skills immediately instead of waiting five, 10 years down the road.”

As Clay builds out his professional skill set, he’s found that mental resets play an important role. At Wightman, Clay and his co-workers take breaks during the day to play basketball in the office’s garage. During the few minutes of casually passing the ball back and forth, dribbling, and dunking, anyone watching Clay and his teammates would see smiles on their faces and hear loud laughter, followed by handshakes and pats on the back.

“[The breaks] give me a clear mind and [help me to] be more efficient when I get back to work,” Clay said. “When I originally came out and interviewed with Wightman, I got the feeling that they really did care about the people whom they serve as well as their employees and families. We had a basketball tournament at this office, and a bunch of families were here watching and hanging out. We just had a really good time.”

Between the encouragement of his professional development and the knowledge that he is valued, Clay’s decision to join the Wightman team appears to be a slam dunk.

First UP was born out of conversations that we’ve had with some of our more seasoned local leaders about how we can get our younger people engaged immediately.



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 TRISHA DUNHAM AND HANNAH ZIEGLER

ELISABETH VON EITZEN

PARTNER AT WARNER NORCROSS + JUDD LLP

L. MARSHALL WASHINGTON, PH.D.

PRESIDENT OF KALAMAZOO VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

LEADERSHIP APPROACH

VON EITZEN: Collaborative understanding is key. Warner Norcross + Judd is emblematic of that approach. We are all very team-oriented, and my leadership style is in line with that culture of teamwork and collaboration. I always ask for everyone's thoughts and ideas first before I make a decision.

WASHINGTON: My approach to leadership includes being open and respectful. I make an effort to understand the life experiences of the people with whom I am working. People bring the culmination of their lives' experiences to the workplace, which influences how we interact with one another. A variety of opinions is usually the best way to make a plan for success. The best leaders allow for and encourage a wide range of individuals to participate in the process of goal-setting and achievement.

THE KEY TO MOTIVATION

VON EITZEN: For people to be motivated, they have to have a stake in the outcome. When I work with an associate, I can take two approaches. I could say, "You must do this, and you have to do it my way," or I could say, "Here is our problem, and we need to come up with a solution. Let's talk about strategy. What are your thoughts?" From there, we can develop a plan together. By involving someone in the project, you get a better product, more involvement, and a happier employee.

WASHINGTON: Receiving acknowledgment and accolades is motivating for me and for most of us. I've found that just saying

"thank you" helps to create a positive environment. Plus, we're learning to celebrate success in a variety of ways, which provides validation of the daily efforts, individuals, and teams at Kalamazoo Valley Community College.

HABITS FOR LEADERS

VON EITZEN: My practice is primarily bankruptcy and litigation. I could have 30 to 40 cases going on at one time, so I have to make sure that I can manage everything correctly and not lose sight of a deadline. I still love my yellow legal pads that I write on by hand. I don't use Outlook because I want the satisfaction of crossing things off.

WASHINGTON: I'm an avid reader. I love all kinds of books, from important New York Times bestsellers to books just for the fun of it, including comic books. Not only do I learn a lot, but I'm also able to relax and escape with a good story.

BEING A MENTOR

VON EITZEN: A mentor's role is to be a guide. A mentor supplies the brush and the paint, but they shouldn't actually do any painting. When I am in a mentoring role, I demonstrate techniques and then take a step back. For mentors, it's really important to listen to your mentee; learn what their goals are, give them the tools to get there, and know that they have to find their own path.

WASHINGTON: People can be better leaders and mentors by being willing to be uncomfortable. Becoming uncomfortable means stepping out of our safe zones, embracing diversity of ideas, and being willing to find solutions in new ways and through various styles of leadership. Being uncomfortable means being patient with the unrest change causes and believing that the long arc of time bends toward justice.

WHAT LEADERS NEED TO REMEMBER

VON EITZEN: Leaders need to keep in mind how interconnected and meaningful moments can be. If you drop the ball or aren't responsible even one time, the implications can have a huge impact. You end up hurting your clients, your colleagues, even your friends. Every business is built on relationships; someone is always relying on you. Leaders need to take that seriously and humbly.

FIRST THINGS FIRST



FIRST CAR?

VON EITZEN: 1991 Mercury Tracer

WASHINGTON: An Oldsmobile '98



FIRST TIME PUBLIC SPEAKING?

VON EITZEN: Narrator of a seventh-grade Shel Silverstein play

WASHINGTON: At church, in an Easter program



FIRST TV SHOW TUNED INTO ON A RAINY DAY?

VON EITZEN: "How to Get Away with Murder"

WASHINGTON: "Bewitched"

WASHINGTON: First and foremost, leaders need to be mindful of the people they lead, realizing that we are only as good and successful as those around us. Leaders need to stick to the tasks at hand and not get caught up in the chatter and chastisement of detractors. Ultimately, leaders are in service to those around themselves. Faculty, staff, and the rest of us at the college have the opportunity to impact thousands of lives each semester—we know that we are better when we serve together.

BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT

VON EITZEN: My biggest achievement is that I'm happy in all facets of my life. I have a great husband and great kids. I also have a career—not just a job—at an organization I appreciate, and that appreciates me back. I'm proud of finding everything I need to be happy. I'm blessed by that.

WASHINGTON: My relationships with my family and friends are my biggest achievements. Early in our marriage, my wife Tonja and I made creating a safe, loving, and stable home for our children our biggest priority. We're proud of the fine adults our three children are becoming. Professionally, it brings me great joy to make investments in others, too. Part of the reason I chose to become an educator, and now a college president, was to have an impact on the lives of others.

CORE VALUES

VON EITZEN: I strive to be true to myself and what I hold dear. It all goes back to being authentic. Your leadership style has to be true to you. The best leaders are those who acknowledge their shortcomings along with their greatest achievements. That's why it's important for emerging leaders to find an organization that is aligned with their personal values and allows them to grow.

WASHINGTON: A good leader needs to understand his or her strengths and lead with those strengths. It's exhausting to try to lead in any other way. Communicating respect is also critical. I try to choose my words carefully to encourage those around me to help carry our initiatives forward. In those early days of learning to lead and speak in front of groups, I remember getting butterflies in my stomach—sometimes I still do, but I've gained confidence along the way.



ELISABETH VON EITZEN

Your leadership style has to be true to you. The best leaders are those who acknowledge their shortcomings along with their greatest achievements.

ELISABETH VON EITZEN



L. MARSHALL WASHINGTON, PH.D.

My approach to leadership includes being open and respectful. I make an effort to understand the life experiences of the people with whom I am working.

L. MARSHALL WASHINGTON, PH.D.

BUSINESS IS BOOMING

LAW FIRM MILLER CANFIELD IS HELPING BUSINESSES LEVERAGE KALAMAZOO'S EXPLOSIVE GROWTH



PHOTO
DAVID DEJONGE

FROM HER OFFICE, DANIELLE MASON ANDERSON HAS A GREAT VIEW OF THE THREE CONSTRUCTION CRANES THAT TOOK UP RESIDENCE IN KALAMAZOO'S CENTRAL CITY LAST YEAR.

The cranes are evidence of massive commercial development underway, and Anderson can envision the impact it will have on the city she grew up in and returned to after completing her education.

Anderson is principal attorney, managing director, and resident director at Miller Canfield, a 220-lawyer firm. The building that houses its Kalamazoo office, 277 South Rose Street, was one of the last downtown commercial construction projects completed before the Great Recession brought new development in most Michigan cities to a halt.

But that's all changing as the city undergoes impressive and much-welcomed growth.

Construction and redevelopment of three major mixed-use buildings in Kalamazoo is planned for later this year. These

projects, which represent more than \$140 million of combined investment, will add more than 300 new residential units and tens of thousands of square feet of new commercial real estate to Kalamazoo's downtown.

Businesses are leveraging the once-in-a-generation opportunity that the massive development and investment are creating. There has been a surge in plans for new grocery stores in the central city, which has been described as the fastest-growing residential neighborhood in Kalamazoo. The Michigan Strategic Fund

Construction and redevelopment of three major mixed-use buildings in Kalamazoo is planned for later this year.

recently approved more than \$10 million in funding for a \$44 million hotel project downtown, which will redevelop the historic



As Kalamazoo's transformation takes shape, Anderson sees a vibrant Kalamazoo in the future where there are ample opportunities to live, work, and play.

Rose Street Market building. And a proposal has been and remains in play to build a \$110 million downtown event center.

"Kalamazoo will have a whole new community of 24/7 residents who will change the character of the downtown," Anderson said. "Our business district has long been home to a daytime population of workers and professionals. But full-time residents require a host of other services, like more banking, entertainment, shopping, and health care. They need emergency services and quality-of-life features like parks, footpaths, and bike lanes."

Situated halfway between two of the Midwest's great cities, Detroit and Chicago, Kalamazoo boasts a diverse and educated workforce, an active cultural community, and three college and university campuses.

Anderson has always had a deep love for Kalamazoo, its history, and its potential. For much of her career, she has not only been one of the city's greatest cheerleaders but has also invested her time and talents into shaping its evolution. She served as a board member on the Kalamazoo Economic Development Corporation Board/Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and currently serves on the boards for both the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts and Southwest Michigan First, the economic development organization focused on supporting business, job growth, and entrepreneurship in the greater Kalamazoo area.

Anderson's colleagues at Miller Canfield are similarly committed to the Kalamazoo area, investing in pro bono and volunteer service at organizations like the United Way, the American Red Cross of Southwest Michigan, the Kalamazoo Humane Society, OutFront Kalamazoo, and the Downtown Kalamazoo Partnership.

Anderson is thrilled that she and the firm have been and will continue to be a part of Kalamazoo's renaissance.

Her firm is already enjoying opportunities afforded by the growth of the city. Miller Canfield's robust Corporate Group has been well-positioned to help new businesses with business formation matters, leasing, and contracts. Similarly, the firm has invested in serving employers by expanding its immigration and employment practices. With one of the largest financial services practices in the state, Anderson and her colleagues have been busy structuring deals and counseling clients about tax credits and other financial matters that arise as businesses start or expand in a new area.

"Every area of service that new businesses need so they can serve this residential boom—real estate, employment and labor, financial services, manufacturing, commercial lending, municipal, and public-sector law—are areas where we already have bench strength and a strong infrastructure to build on," Anderson said. "The firm is enjoying this growth as much as any of our neighbors in the business community."

As Kalamazoo's transformation takes shape, Anderson sees a vibrant Kalamazoo in the future, where there are ample opportunities to live, work, and play. The downtown growth has also helped attract professionals in her field to the city, she added.

"It's no secret that attorneys and young professionals are looking for downtown living options. They like having activities and services and the opportunity to live and work in a full-service, walkable, auto-optional downtown," Anderson said. "That's what we can offer. They want to move to the next cool city, and Kalamazoo is it!"

It's no secret that attorneys and young professionals are looking for downtown living options... They want to move to the next cool city, and Kalamazoo is it!

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VIVIAN HOWARD

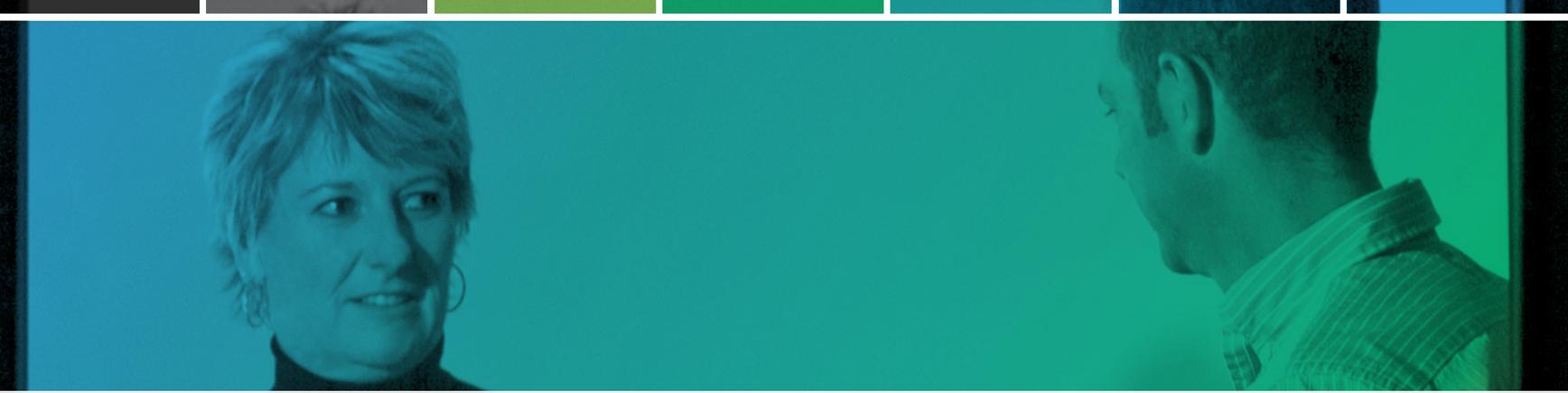


Ron Kitchens sat down with the chef, restaurateur, and television host to talk food, storytelling, and small-town development.



Where does your story begin? I grew up in eastern North Carolina on a tobacco farm in rural Deep Run. One of my first memories is wanting to leave. I didn't want to live in the country; I wanted to be able to order Chinese food and break out chopsticks like a city person. **Did you get to experience city life?** After I graduated from college in Raleigh, North Carolina, I moved to New York to work in advertising. I quit to pursue writing and got a job in a kitchen, hoping to turn that experience into a career as a food writer. But I just kept cooking and not writing at all. I loved the camaraderie of the kitchen, and I loved creating things. **How did your culinary career unfold?** I met my husband, Ben, at that restaurant, and we began a little catering business called Viv's Kitchen out of our apartment in New York. We started to have some success, so when we told my parents the news that some folks wanted to invest in an actual storefront, my parents counter-offered, saying they would help us open a restaurant provided we relocate to North Carolina. **Did you accept?** We moved back to North Carolina and opened Chef & the Farmer in downtown Kinston. When my husband and I started looking around, we realized that our community was filled with farmers with small plots of land. We thought we could support these folks by offering to buy anything they grew, and that led us to a lot of niche produce and

cheeses. **How did you find your way to television?** I still couldn't let go of this idea of storytelling, and I wanted to make a documentary about the farmers and cooks in eastern North Carolina. I enlisted the help of a friend who became my director. She decided that I really needed to be in the show, so we started "A Chef's Life." We shot five seasons, and I got to write my cookbook, "Deep Run Roots." **Were you happy to be back in the country?** By then I had developed a deep love for my community. When we first opened the restaurant, every other building on the street was boarded up or condemned, and no one would spend time downtown after dark because they felt it was dangerous. But when "A Chef's Life" started, it was humbling how many people traveled to Kinston to visit the restaurant. Over five years, two new hotels and several shops and restaurants opened. Now, you regularly see tourists coming to walk around the four blocks that make our downtown. My goal is to make my community vibrant enough that my children might consider moving back here. **What's next for Vivian Howard?** My life has changed so much from the beginning of "A Chef's Life." We're working on a new show. I want to evolve the concept to also reflect my interests as a community leader and a Southerner. The new show will be called "South by Somewhere" and will debut on PBS this winter. ✨



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TAKE IT IN STRIDE

OVERWHELMED AT WORK? REMEMBER THE (UNOFFICIAL) STRIDE LAW

BY SARAH MANSBERGER PHOTO M-IMAGEPHOTOGRAPHY (ISTOCK)

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE CHANGING OF THE GENERATIONAL GUARD IN THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE.

A multi-generational workforce certainly presents its challenges, but perhaps not more so than it has in the past. Think of a time when members of the Greatest Generation were lumped into meetings with young members of Generation X (Gen X). Expectations of workplace decorum and the point of work itself undoubtedly differed between the two groups. Today, we are witnessing baby boomers and Gen X bumping up against millennials and now Generation Z in the boardroom.

Haven't the young always been disruptors? Isn't it their job to challenge the status quo and that of "the old guard" to defend it?

While most of what we think of as an epic "clash of generations" is overblown, one tidbit from Deloitte is striking because it sheds light on a gap between the styles of millennials and boomers or Gen X leaders.

Haven't the young always been disruptors? Isn't it their job to challenge the status quo and that of "the old guard" to defend it?

In "The Millennial Mindset: Work styles and aspirations of millennials," Deloitte points to a lower overall tolerance for ambiguity amongst millennials compared to their boomer and Gen X peers. What does this mean? Millennials want less grey. They seek expertise. They'd prefer a sure thing over a move that poses risk.

The report speculates that some of the low tolerance for ambiguity may be attributable to phase of career. After all,

many members of this generation are just beginning to hit their strides professionally and may have not yet emerged from their twentysomething or thirtysomething phase of intense questioning of purpose and path. That

Millennials want less grey. They seek expertise. They'd prefer a sure thing over a move that poses risk.

being said, the report suggests that lower ambiguity tolerance may prove to be an actual generational trait that distinguishes millennials from those older and younger in real and measurable ways.

There are many good reasons why these dynamics may be playing out in our workplaces. The report points to several societal trends that likely contribute. Regardless of generational affiliation, everyone in the workforce today operates in increasingly complex environments where learning happens early and often and change has become a mode of being. For those who thrive on it, it's invigorating. For those who are sapped by it all, it's overwhelming and redoubles the yearning for something certain.

It turns out that the law of comedy which relies on "threes" also applies to the

(Unofficial) Stride Law. For any given responsibility, it takes about three years to *really* perform, if you stay the course:

- **Year one** is 52 weeks of task familiarity and plotting: *What is this gig and what does it really take to pull it off?*
- **Year two** is 12 months of muscle memory with tweaks: *I remember what this feels like and here is how we are going to level up this time around.*
- **Year three** is the year of really pulling it off: *So, this is what it feels like to hit my stride!*

If you or a member of your team is struggling to weigh anchor, remind yourself of the (Unofficial) Stride Law and the related steps on the journey. It will help you to both stay the course and reframe moments of ambiguity "drowning" as expected waves of change and learning hit you.



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.

How Did I Get Here?

FRANK SARDONE

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
AT BRONSON HEALTHCARE

BY KATHRYN DAVIS

PHOTO HUNTER BRUMELS

1957 | BORN IN AKRON, OHIO

I was born in Akron. I grew up in a family of five children, although before I was born, there were only two—so I came right in the middle. We'd moved from Ohio to South Carolina by the time I was three, and we finally landed in Danville, Kentucky, when I was still in elementary school. I feel like a lot of the passion I have for leadership and service came from those days, growing up and watching my parents. They were deeply involved in their community and with organizations like the United Way. They always worked to help people and serve their community, so that's something I've carried with me since childhood.

1979, 1981 | RECEIVED BACHELOR'S AND MASTER'S DEGREES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

I remember college as a major time for learning. I got my Bachelor's degree from the University of Kentucky. Even though Lexington is really just up the road from Danville, it's a lot different. Lexington isn't huge, but it's much bigger than what I'd known before. For me, college came with exposure to tons of people from different backgrounds and lifestyles I hadn't previously been familiar with. I stuck around after my Bachelor's degree and earned my Master's at the University of Kentucky as well, and it all just became this crucial growing experience for me.

1981 | WASTED NO TIME AND WENT STRAIGHT TO WORK WITH HUMANA

I didn't take time off after school—not for a job search or anything. I didn't even step away to interview; I found my first job with Humana right on my college's campus. This was when Humana was one of the largest hospital-management companies in the country. Even from the outside, the job and the company really appealed to me, and I started working with Humana as a management specialist. I learned about the complete operation of hospitals. Like I said, I'd always felt drawn toward opportunities for service, toward positions in which I could help people. I'd wanted something that combined business and people, which that first job did. I moved from Kentucky to Chicago for Humana, which was a whole new growing experience in itself.

We've grown since then from 2,000 to 9,000 total employees. I do my best to remember names, but I can tell you it's gotten tough over time, just because of our growth.

1984 | HEADED BACK TO DANVILLE, KENTUCKY

I was with Humana for a few years before I happened upon the chance to head back to my hometown of Danville, Kentucky. I found a job there at the Ephraim McDowell Regional Medical Center, where I got to try some new things but also put my skills from school and Humana to work. My title during that time was director of marketing and planning, which was a bit different from what I'd been doing at Humana. One of the most memorable things

about that time overall is the huge amount of change that was going through the healthcare system as a whole. Looking back, I see that the most consistent thing in the health care field has always been change. Things are always evolving and adapting, and the same was true when I was early in my career.

1988 | JOINED BRONSON HEALTHCARE AS ADMINISTRATOR OF INPATIENT SERVICES

After a few more years of work, I landed at Bronson Healthcare. It's hard to summarize my 31 years with the company, but it was simpler at one time. At first, I was the administrator of inpatient services. I'd gone from working with Humana in a human-centered and business-heavy role to this new role at Bronson where I was working in what we call "service line"—which really just means I was working in tons of disciplines around various sectors of the hospital. I got involved in operations, clinical work, personal interactions, and business matters. My first role at Bronson really served to introduce me to many of the areas I've come to work with in the decades since.

1996 | BECAME PRESIDENT AND CEO OF BRONSON

And just like the rest of the health care system, a lot has changed at Bronson since I started. In 1996, I was promoted to president and CEO of the company. We've grown since then from 2,000 to 9,000 total employees. I do my best to remember names, but I can tell you it's gotten tough over time, just because of our growth. Our footprint has spread; we've grown up from being a hospital to being an entire health care system that spans something like a hundred miles across the region. Since I started in 1988, Bronson has grown into a health care system that can provide tailored care to any patient—and there will only be more of that in the future.

2005 | BRONSON RECEIVES MALCOLM BALDRIDGE NATIONAL QUALITY AWARD

At the time, only 64 companies had ever received this honor since the program began in 1988 and only five had received it in health care. We participated in the process to learn from other high performing organizations. We were the first health care organization to be awarded recognition on the first site visit! Bronson was and still is on a journey to excellence, continuously raising the bar as we benchmark our performance against best practice organizations in health care and in other industries. Everyone at Bronson works so hard to be the best because it is the right thing to do for the patients and families we serve.

We're really proud of Bronson's work because lots of what we do is to encourage people to take on volunteer roles in the community—to really work toward empowerment in that way.

TODAY AND TOMORROW | LOOKING FORWARD TO SERVICE

One of the main things that's kept me happy and productive in my career is the community service mindset that has guided my life's decisions. I remember feeling inspired watching my parents serve others. In my role now, the focus on people—the focus on patients—that's what's important. It's all about keeping an attitude of service, working for that human connection and change in the community. We've been working on a project which looks at the homeless population that utilizes our emergency departments. We're working to identify what these people really need, how we can best address their healthcare necessities, and, further, how we can pull these people out of their current condition. We've incorporated equity into our strategic plan and overall. We're really proud of Bronson's work because lots of what we do is to encourage people to take on volunteer roles in the community—to really work toward empowerment in that way. Over time, my role has evolved to focus more on long-term strategic planning than on the day-to-day—but in the end, it's always about the people.



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ONE STEP AT A TIME

WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S
LEADS EVER CLOSER TO A CURE

BY JAKE FREDERICKS PHOTOS SAMANTHA WEST



MELISSA GOODSON
Development Director,
Alzheimer's Association

EVENT

Walk to End Alzheimer's

DATE AND TIME

September 29, 2019 at 12:00 pm

LOCATION

Kalamazoo College Athletic Complex,
1600 West Michigan Avenue,
Kalamazoo, MI

STAND TOGETHER, WALK AS ONE

Walk to End Alzheimer's is the nation's largest event to raise awareness and funds for Alzheimer's care, support, and research. The walk in Kalamazoo will be one of over 600 walks held across the country. We like to call it our biggest support group of the year, where community members come together with others who have been through a similar journey. For one day, people within our community become family members to each other. We keep things positive—our goal is to inspire hope and solidarity in the face of hardship.

WHAT TO EXPECT

People generally arrive mid-morning to enjoy some of the vendors and spokespersons who will be there during the registration process. After you get your T-shirt at registration, you can meet up with the rest of your team for the opening ceremony. We share personal stories, Alzheimer's statistics, and research developments, then blow the horn and start the walk. People start conversations, and sometimes lifelong friendships, with those walking alongside them. We've even seen marriages come out of this event! Knowing that everybody in that space understands the importance of eradicating this disease gives a true sense of purpose and unity.

HOPE BLOSSOMS

For me, the Promise Garden Ceremony is the most moving moment of the day. Each participant receives a colored flower at registration that they can decorate or put a loved one's name on. The colors of the flowers each represent a different connection to the disease. At the ceremony, people onstage share their stories but with a sense of hope as opposed to sadness. The audience raises their flowers at the end and it becomes a beautiful sea of color.

For one day, people within our community become family members to each other.

ENDING ALZHEIMER'S AS A TEAM

There is no fee for registering, but we do encourage people to build a team, become a team captain, and raise dollars that support the work we do. In 2018, more than 65,000 teams participated [across the U.S.] and raised

more than \$90 million in total. With your help, the Alzheimer's Association is able to educate millions of caregivers, advocate for the needs and rights of people facing Alzheimer's, and advance research that brings us closer to a cure.

THE BRIGHTENING FUTURE

The trajectory of research has been genuinely inspiring in recent years. I have a six-year-old and a four-year-old; the first survivor is most likely in their generation. It gives me shivers just to think that one day, they may never have to worry about Alzheimer's disease. Until then, if you need the support of a social worker, caregiver, or somebody who understands what you're going through, the Alzheimer's Association website is a great resource, and our number is (800) 272-3900. It's answered by a trained professional every minute of every day.

TO REGISTER, START A TEAM,
OR VOLUNTEER, VISIT
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BY RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO MILKOS (ISTOCK)



Talent Will Take Us to the Top

HOW OUR PAST SETS THE AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

IN THE IMMEDIATE WAKE OF THE GREAT RECESSION—BEFORE ANYBODY KNEW THAT OUR THEN-STORMY ECONOMIC CLIMATE WOULD EARN AN OFFICIAL TITLE—WE ALL SAID GOODBYE TO FRIENDS WHO LEFT MICHIGAN TO START LIVES IN OTHER STATES.

For-sale signs sprouted up in every neighborhood, while attendance in our classrooms thinned as unemployed workers moved out of foreclosed homes, taking their elementary-aged kids with them.

Today, with a decade separating us from those dark days, the clouds have parted. The evening news is no longer filled with layoff announcements. Instead, we have been able to look forward to sunnier job reports and strengthening economic indicators. And as jobs have steadily come back to Southwest Michigan, I am happy to report that our unemployment numbers no longer keep me up at night—we're officially at full employment!

Even so, that doesn't mean we can ignore the lingering impact of the Great Recession. Any economic developer worth their salt will tell you that jobs go where talent is. If a region doesn't have a talent pool deep enough to fill available positions, then those jobs have to pack up and leave. The places that are going to be successful in the future understand that talent is now the most sought-after raw material across all industries. These days, when I look forward to the future of our region, what worries me most is the talent we lost post-2008.

Michigan, and particularly Southwest Michigan, didn't just lose jobs in the Great Recession; we lost out on future talent. This spring, the same kids who were whisked away by their parents to

start school in other states are now graduating from high school and college in cities like Dallas and Denver. And this situation is not helped by the fact that in the not-so-distant future, 35,000 local baby boomers are set to retire. Our hope rests in filling these positions with eager, talented workers equipped to lead.

Any economic developer worth their salt will tell you that jobs go where talent is. If a region doesn't have a talent pool deep enough to fill available positions, then those jobs have to pack up and leave.

The good news is that Southwest Michigan is in a unique position to thrive. Our seven-county region has an advantage most places across the country can only dream of. We have many award-winning centers of higher education with more than 42,000 enrolled college students living and studying in our region. The first thing on my agenda for the future is to engage these

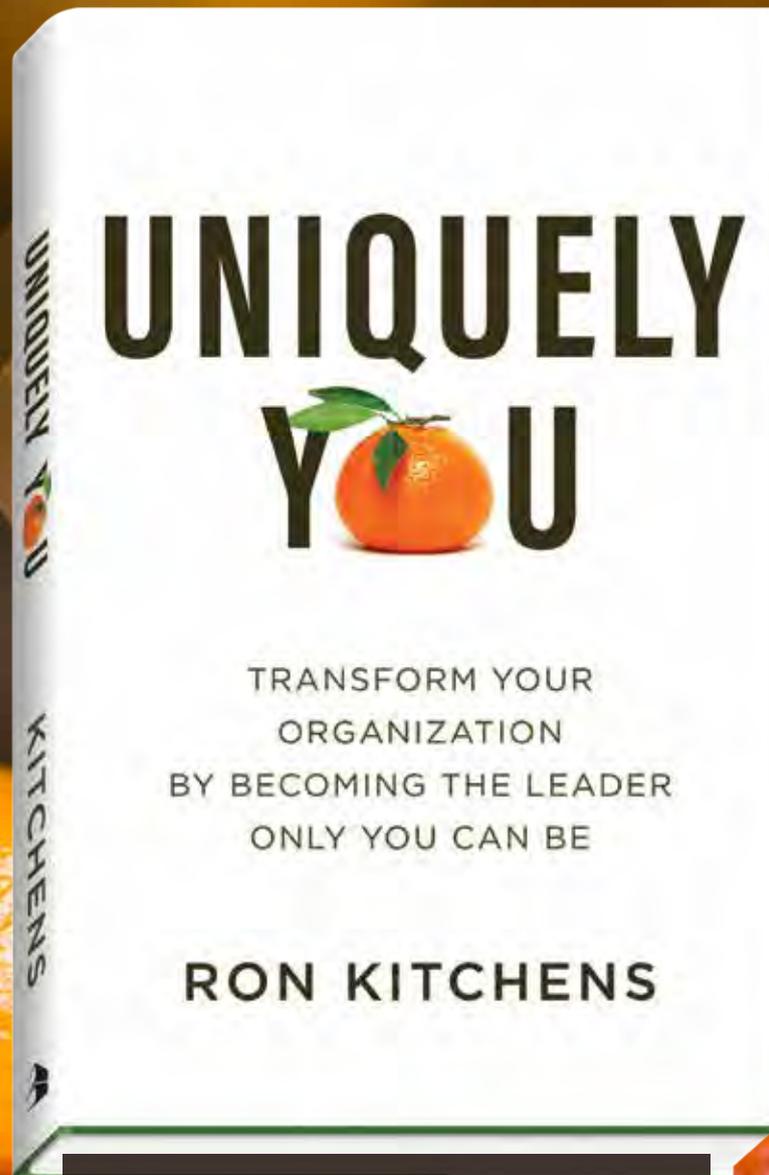
young future leaders in our community. Many of them have known Southwest Michigan all their lives, but thousands more out-of-state and international students choose our region over anywhere else in the world. Each will spend four years or more in Southwest Michigan, giving leaders in our community a wide window to get them involved and show them what our region has to offer.

Luckily, the ascendant generations of millennials and Generation Zers are eager to dig in and get involved. They are ready to make their mark and have a passion for the arts, volunteer work, building a career, and more. All that we, as community leaders, have to do is provide them with opportunities to get engaged and, when we can, mentor them along the way.

The more talent we can keep here in Southwest Michigan, the brighter our future will become.

ALWAYS FORWARD,

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