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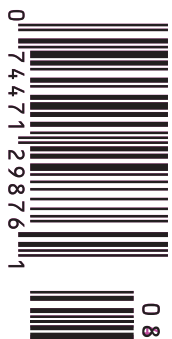
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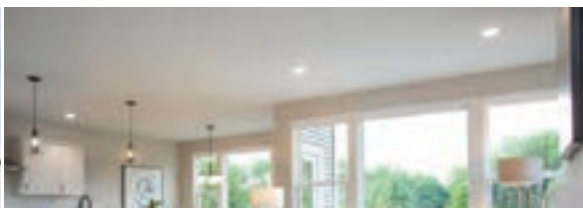


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BY HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PHOTO FERREGORY (ISTOCK)



From Material Girl to Modern-Day Cinderella

HOW ONE INTERNSHIP LEFT ITS INDELIBLE MARK

WITH MY CAR RADIO BLASTING MADONNA'S "MATERIAL GIRL," I PARKED OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING IN WHICH I WAS TO BEGIN MY VERY FIRST INTERNSHIP.

I couldn't have been more excited. My sophomore year of high school was over, and summer had

just begun. I had a job with the local public schools system, and my best friend was going to be working with me. Everything was absolutely perfect.

But not for long.

Upon arrival, my supervisor handed me a pointed stick and rubber gloves. My daily responsibility involved roaming the 20-acre site's grounds to pick up all of the trash that had accumulated overnight. If I finished this task before my shift was over, I could start washing the floors inside the 120,000-square-foot facility before the next shift arrived. My best friend's role was a bit different, as she filled in for the receptionist who was off for three months.

I know what you are thinking, or at least what I was: I had turned into a modern-day Cinderella.

What made my assignment harder to handle was that the person assigning roles was my father's best friend and my best friend's father. But I never complained—not even when my co-workers, including my best friend, teased me by calling me a "garbage picker" whenever I passed by during those long summer months.

After my initial shock at this turn of events subsided, I started to feel waves of humiliation. Then, my mental warrior took over and ordered this "Material Girl" to put on rose-colored glasses. Hey, I was outside getting a tan while my friend was stuck

inside. Moreover, I saw myself as technically having a bigger impact on the facility than her. During the summer, the building logged few calls if any, but many visitors used the grounds. Instead of letting my role get me down, I took pleasure in enhancing the beauty of my workplace.

I learned something very important during that internship: Every job at every company is essential. And the people who perform each job should be treated with respect. That life lesson has served me well time and time again.

I learned something very important during that internship: Every job at every company is essential.

A couple of years later, I interned at a private, family-owned corporation with a portfolio that included hotels, oil refineries, a professional sports team, and everything in between. The company rotated my assignments bi-weekly among multiple divisions. I had enough time in each to learn things like how to bid for a road construction job and how to submit state taxes on the proceeds of a vending machine. C-level leaders regularly invited me to sit in on their strategy discussions so I could learn why they made certain decisions. Over time, I developed

long-lasting friendships that stretched from the CEO's executive assistant to the vice president of finance. I had finally found an internship where they did it "right!"

This issue's cover story sheds light on how some of the most engaged companies in Southwest Michigan, including CSM Group, MANN+HUMMEL USA, and Duncan Aviation, do it right by providing internships that are beneficial for students, the company, and the community.

To all of our regional employers who open their doors to interns throughout the year, the editorial team at 269 MAGAZINE applauds you and your team. And to those who are contemplating starting an internship program, I personally offer this advice: If you hand an intern a mop, be sure to provide a bucketload of insight into how their swabbing will positively impact your customers (and maybe assign a nice Excel spreadsheet next to keep things interesting).

READ ON,

Heather

Tell us about your first internship @269Mag with #269InternStory!



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Where was your first internship or work experience? What lesson did you take away from it?

USE YOUR VOICE @269MAG WITH #COMMUNITYCOMMENT



Emerging leaders enrolled in First UP, a cohort leadership program designed for professionals in the first five years of their careers, talked about their first employment experience with the 269 MAGAZINE team.

If you are or know of a young leader interested in building a strong leadership foundation, go to catalystuniversity.me/first-up.



STEPHANIE JACKSON

CAREER SPECIALIST, KALAMAZOO REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCY

I used to think asking questions made you seem weak or less knowledgeable. At a teaching internship in a third-grade classroom, I learned that it's okay to ask questions. There, I quickly realized that it's better to ask questions and execute a task correctly than to not ask questions and do a task completely wrong.



ALYSSA WEISKOPF

OFFICE COORDINATOR, ARTS COUNCIL OF GREATER KALAMAZOO

My biggest takeaway [from working] at a small family-owned artist management company in Nashville was to not expect to know everything right out of college. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and learn from any mistakes you make.



TINESSA PATTERSON

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE CITY MANAGER, CITY OF KALAMAZOO

During my time as a sales coordinator for Kalamazoo Sportswear, a local screen-printing and embroidery shop in downtown Kalamazoo, I honed my customer service and organizational skills. I also learned the importance of relationship building. I formed a lot of great community connections during my experience that I still have to this day.



THERESA GUARINO

EMERGING LEADER, GREENLEAF HOSPITALITY GROUP

I worked as a food and beverage intern for the summer at a country club in the Chicago area. During my time there, I learned about exceptional guest service, time management, and relationship building. Most importantly, I learned that it's possible to have fun while at work and that I worked harder when I was having fun!



ASHLEY BRENDEL

CIVIL ENGINEER ASSOCIATE, WIGHTMAN

My first internship at Kane County Division of Transportation in Illinois taught me that, as a new professional, it is pivotal to be open to new, sometimes difficult experiences. By challenging myself in new situations, I had the opportunity to not only develop unique technical skills but also learn about myself and various goals, talents, and passions that I wasn't aware of before.

Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and learn from any mistakes you make.

ALYSSA WEISKOPF



RANJEET GHORPADE

BUSINESS ANALYST AND QUALITY ASSURANCE, SALESPAGE TECHNOLOGIES

I found my first internship at AACORN, an outdoor skill-building and enrichment program for adults with developmental disabilities, through the Kalamazoo College career center. After graduation, I became grounded at AACORN and, through that process, found simplicity at the right time. AACORN taught me to look for and bring out the best in others.

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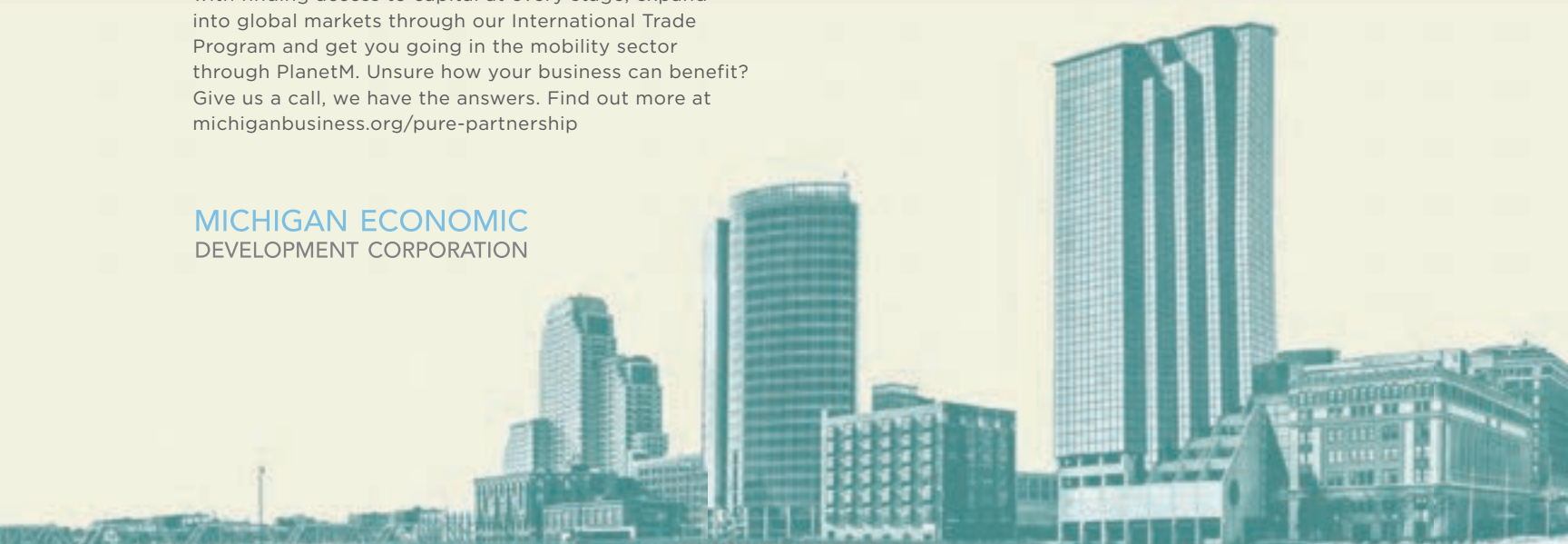
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CRAFTING THE

ULTIMATE

INTERNSHIP

WHEN REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE EXCELLENT
INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES, EVERYONE BENEFITS

BY KATHRYN DAVIS PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

A photograph of a desk with a laptop, a spiral notebook, and a red and orange striped object. The background is blurred, showing a white plastic chair and a desk lamp.

BETWEEN THE REGION'S NINE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, OVER 41,300 STUDENTS STEP ONTO CAMPUS EACH ACADEMIC YEAR IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN.

These students gain vital experiences in their years spent at these institutions, but classroom learning isn't always enough to prepare them to launch straight into a career upon graduation. Internships are an important complement to college courses, as they help fully prepare students for the challenges and day-to-day realities of a professional career.

This is precisely why 78.2 percent of higher-education students in Southwest Michigan will complete at least one internship before graduation.

“Ultimately, when students leave college, we want them to go with real, tangible experiences that are impactful and intentional,” said Sarah Hagen, career development specialist at Western Michigan University (WMU). “We want them to take the things they're learning in the classroom and apply this knowledge in a context where they'll be able to pair it with skills and professional experiences.”

Maybe the term “internship” brings to mind a student being sent around the office and given busy work—*Brew coffee! Make copies! Sort files!* You'll be encouraged to learn how companies across Southwest Michigan are working to eradicate this old-school portrayal by providing students with an internship experience they'll carry with them until the day they retire.

“The ultimate internship is not getting coffee and filing papers,” Hagen stressed. “It's a meaningful experience in which students feel as though they're a part of the team, they're working on an actual project—something they can look at and say, ‘I touched this. I had a part in this product.’ [In the ultimate internship], students have a seat at the meeting room table. They leave with real professional skills and competencies.”

So how are Southwest Michigan companies developing “the ultimate internship?” Strategies include building infrastructure for year-round or multi-year experiences, dropping interns straight into the thick of things, assigning students to follow and aid in major projects, and more. At many area companies, including MANN+HUMMEL USA, CSM Group, and Duncan Aviation, interns will leave having never fetched a coffee order—and the student, the company, and the region will be better for it.

ENGINEERING MATURE PROFESSIONALS

When Jack Endres, vice president of operations at MANN+HUMMEL USA, started at the full-service automotive supplier in 1997, about 70 people were employed at its Portage branch. Today, the branch boasts over 720 individuals. At any given time, between nine and 17 of them are interns.

Endres has no qualms about including these student workers in the firm’s total employee count, largely because of how wholly MANN+HUMMEL USA integrates interns into its team. “[Back in ’97], we found that we were struggling to pull full-time engineers for our market and have them be really ready and able to contribute up front—so we started bringing in interns,” Endres said.

“A lot of companies target juniors and seniors,” Endres continued. “But the way we see it, snagging interns when they’re early in their school career is a real opportunity for us and the students. We like to get two or three years from the experience for a couple of reasons. Because of that length of time, students can begin contributing fully and competing with even full-time employees. They get the chance to try on some different hats and really locate their passions. We get to see them grow, and by the end of it, they’re contributing fully—so if we decide to bring them on full-time, they’re holding their own from day one because they’ve already been in the job, essentially, for three years.”

Endres hired the company’s first-ever intern soon after starting full-time himself. “I graduated from WMU, then hired someone as an intern who was a few years behind me in the program there. It happened really quickly and clearly. We could see that, when these interns graduated, they were outperforming all of the professionals we brought in off the general market. It all made perfect sense.”

Over the course of an intern’s two to three years—year-round—with MANN+HUMMEL USA, they will experience learning that is “drastically different from what they’re doing in school.” They’ll kick off their tenure by engaging in a “buddy system” of sorts—an opportunity which provides work experience and guidance to interns as well as leadership opportunity for existing employees. In the beginning, there will be a lot of administrative work on the interns’ plates to help familiarize them with the company and its processes.



A LOT OF COMPANIES TARGET JUNIORS AND SENIORS. BUT THE WAY WE SEE IT, SNAGGING INTERNS WHEN THEY'RE EARLY IN THEIR SCHOOL CAREER IS A REAL OPPORTUNITY FOR US AND THE STUDENTS.

JACK ENDRES
MANN+HUMMEL USA

Interns spend the latter years working to offset labor alongside full-time engineers, supporting areas that see spikes in activity. The length of the commitment that the firm makes to its interns—and the interns to the firm—sets the internship program at MANN+HUMMEL USA apart. “In the end, we’re building. We’re trying to develop this talent pipeline so we’ve got a labor pool of these experienced, talented young engineers to pull from as we grow.”

Endres said of the program as a whole, “Our interns aren’t delivering paychecks or handing out mail—except on Tuesdays, when they actually do distribute the mail. But really, we make it so they have tasks that are highly necessary. We give them decisions to make. We empower our interns so that they’re really a part of the team—not some subset or subspecies to our full-time workers, but they’re really a part of everything we do here.”

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Nearly 32 years ago, Todd McDonald started with CSM Group as an intern. Now he’s the company’s principal/chief operating officer. Thinking back on the early days of the group’s internship program, he said, “There wasn’t a lot of structure to it then. Steve East, who’s our chairman and CEO now, wasn’t quite finished with his own degree back then. He was taking classes at WMU, and he’d meet students in class and bring them on as interns. Our recruiting and internship experience has certainly been refined over the years, but that’s how it all began.”

INTERNSHIP 101

THE PATH TO THE ULTIMATE INTERNSHIP

At first glance, the outstanding internship programs already in place at area companies may seem out of reach. There's so much planning and expertise, as well as many years worth of work, behind any good internship program, right?

While this is often true, Internship 101, a workshop designed for employers and powered by Western Michigan University Career Services in partnership with Southwest Michigan First, is meant to serve as a fast-track for companies looking to build a great internship program.

Internship 101 helps Southwest Michigan companies—some new to the internship game, others seasoned and looking to add some energy to their existing program—learn the things they need to know to set up or refine an internship program. The workshop includes insight from other local businesses, which share strategies, materials, and best practices. Jill Bland, managing partner at Southwest Michigan First, says, “In Internship 101, we work to address all the relevant nuances and challenges we can, so area companies are empowered to offer the best internship programs possible.”

Head to southwestmichiganfirst.com/events for more information on Internship 101 and upcoming workshop sessions.

ON A DAILY BASIS, OUR INTERNS ARE A WORKING PART OF THE TEAM. THEY UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY DAY COMES WITH EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES—NOT JUST TASKS. AT THE END OF THE SUMMER, THEY'VE HAD AN HONEST EXPERIENCE.

TODD McDONALD
CSM GROUP

These days, CSM Group works to make every intern's experience as purposeful as possible, from start to finish. “We did a ‘signing day’ for this year's interns,” McDonald said. “We brought each of them into the office and used social media to broadcast each intern's decision to spend the summer with us.”

From there, the onboarding process is the same for interns as it is for any new hire. “Each intern receives a package in the mail prior to their start date,” McDonald said. “It contains a packet with information regarding everything they need to prepare for their first week, including a detailed itinerary. They also receive the clothing they'll need at different times over the course of their internship.”

When things get rolling in a CSM Group internship, interns find themselves onsite alongside their assigned team every day. This summer, the firm has an intern with a team in Traverse City, another in Jackson, and several others accompanying teams around the region and state. These interns will return to CSM Group's main office, which is located in The Foundry in downtown Kalamazoo, only a couple of times throughout the summer. This keeps the students fully integrated in their specific projects.

Placing interns at project sites allows CSM Group to demonstrate to interns the importance of each individual day. “We ensure that every intern has responsibilities—not just tasks, but real commitments—every day,” McDonald said. “Every intern should come to work each day with a plan and direction for their work. On a daily basis, our interns are a working part of the team. They understand that every day comes with expectations and responsibilities—not just tasks. At the end of the summer, they'll have had an honest experience.”

A typical internship with CSM Group will include learning industry project management software, keeping daily reports, working with a project's foreman and surrounding team, and more. McDonald explains the group's goal for interns simply: “We want our interns to experience just the sort of things we want our permanent team members to experience.”

He added, “From our perspective, the most successful internship results in an intern who remains a part of our team long after the summer has ended. It's an internship where a student actively seeks responsibility and teaches our team as much as we teach them.”

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

At Duncan Aviation, three short months can have a big impact on interns. As Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Andy Richards put it, “It's three months of total immersion; we really throw them into it.”

Over the course of the summer months, interns with Duncan Aviation learn about industry safety standards. They spend time inside, beneath, and on top of aircraft. By the end of the summer,



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they've had a range of experiences that are typically reserved for seasoned professionals.

"Our interns have loads of coaching and mentorship throughout the process because they're brand new, and because we work in such a safety-intensive industry," said Richards. "A lot of oversight is provided, but the key is for us to get them to the action, to have our interns experience what it's like to really do the job."

The impact of Duncan Aviation's internships is embodied by Margaret Lorinczi, a former intern who has gone on to make a career with the company. "My internship [with Duncan Aviation] was great; I was able to add so many tools to my belt," said Lorinczi. "I remember being nervous at first, but I realized then that I'd already been given all the tools I needed, even to work on [huge projects]."

After graduating, Lorinczi chose to stick with Duncan Aviation and moved to a full-time role. "When I started full-time, I realized that, although I'd only been in the role for a short time, I was totally fine to support myself, even through a large install. My internship played a huge part in that." Lorinczi feels the same way many students do about the value of internships, whatever the field: "When it comes to working with an aircraft—you're just not going to learn that stuff while sitting at a desk."

According to Liz Van Dussen, human resources manager at Duncan Aviation, the company's internship program will continue to grow over the coming years. "What makes it so sustainable is the fact that we've cultivated this really competitive career marketplace. Maintaining our internship program means we've got a major advantage when it comes to hiring interns and bringing them on as really strong, well-trained professionals."

Richards also sees the benefits that the internship program brings

OUR INTERNS HAVE LOADS OF COACHING AND MENTORSHIP THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS BECAUSE THEY'RE BRAND NEW, AND BECAUSE WE WORK IN SUCH A SAFETY-INTENSIVE INDUSTRY. A LOT OF OVERSIGHT IS PROVIDED, BUT THE KEY IS FOR US TO GET THEM TO THE ACTION, TO HAVE OUR INTERNS EXPERIENCE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO REALLY DO THE JOB.

ANDY RICHARDS
DUNCAN AVIATION



to all involved. "At the end of the day, our internship is this great win-win thing—for the intern, for Duncan Aviation, and for our industry as a whole. We all benefit from working with these great young professionals."

A VALUABLE INVESTMENT

Sarah Hagen of WMU emphasizes that regional companies shouldn't miss out on the benefits of having an internship program. "In Southwest Michigan, we've got this enormous pool of students—from WMU to Kalamazoo College to Kalamazoo Valley Community College—we have so many young professionals right here in the region who are extremely hungry for the practical, hands-on internship experience that companies can offer them. From these companies' side of things, the talent they need is, quite literally, right in the backyard. They have everything they need to build a talent pipeline—and that starts with creating a valuable internship experience."

From the very first moment of an internship, Hagen advises all companies to be as intentional as MANN+HUMMEL USA, CSM Group, and Duncan Aviation. According to Hagen, each organization should ask these questions when striving to develop the ultimate internship: "What's the big picture of your company? Why are your interns here? What's your mission, and what does your work—and the work of interns—do for the world? It's by determining these things and constructing a valuable internship experience around them that interns will become the important asset to our workforce that they can ultimately become."



WHY INTERNSHIPS MATTER



41,309 STUDENTS

ATTEND SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

Source: Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Studies (Fall 2018).

78.3%

OF U.S. COLLEGE GRADUATES HAVE COMPLETED AT LEAST ONE INTERNSHIP.

OF THOSE, 59% ARE OFFERED A FULL-TIME JOB FROM THEIR HOST COMPANY, AND 77.3% OF THOSE INTERNS ACCEPT THE POSITION.

GRADUATES WHO HAD **TWO OR MORE INTERNSHIPS** IN COLLEGE WERE

TWICE AS LIKELY

TO BE EMPLOYED WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF GRADUATION THAN THOSE WHO NEVER COMPLETED AN INTERNSHIP.

Source: The Impact of Undergraduate Internships on Post-Graduate Outcomes for the Liberal Arts. National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017).



RETENTION RATES FOR ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS ARE

SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER ★

WHEN AN ORGANIZATION HIRES EXISTING INTERNS.

THE FIVE-YEAR RETENTION RATE OF AN ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEE IS:

51.8%

WHEN AN ORGANIZATION HIRES **ONE OF ITS INTERNS.**

35.8%

WHEN AN ORGANIZATION HIRES A CANDIDATE **THAT WAS NOT ONE OF ITS INTERNS.**

Source: Internships & Co-op Survey, National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017).

21.7%

NO INTERNSHIPS

32.2%

ONE INTERNSHIP

30.7%

TWO INTERNSHIPS

15.4%

THREE OR MORE INTERNSHIPS

Source: The Impact of Undergraduate Internships on Post-Graduate Outcomes for the Liberal Arts. National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017).

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KEEPING IT UNDER CONTROL

HUMPHREY PRODUCTS COMPANY EXCELS AT VALVE AND PRESSURE REGULATION TECHNOLOGY

BY KATHRYN DAVIS PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

COMPANY

Humphrey Products Company

HERE'S A LITTLE WARM-UP

When visitors step onto the Humphrey Products Company campus, Chairman and CEO Bob Humphrey makes it a point to offer them a glance at the organization's history. He leads visitors to his office, where an original 1920s Humphrey gaslit fireplace rests against the wall. Before the invention of forced-air heating and electric lighting, Humphrey Products Company manufactured gas lights for home and commercial lighting and street lamps as well as home heating systems like the fireplace. "But as new innovations came along, we had to find a new trade," Humphrey said. "We had to adapt and keep learning in order to stay relevant."

BEHIND THE SCENES

These days, Humphrey Products Company primarily makes valves and valve control systems. "If a customer is looking to control fluid flow, our products help accomplish that," said President Dave Maurer. Although you don't typically see the valves, you've probably encountered them. "Our valves might be found in an anesthesiology machine or a hospital bed, in a ventilator, in a vehicle's transmission, or even in an ice cream machine. Precision instrumentation and precision leak detection are also big markets for us."

THE HUMPHREY DIFFERENCE

The truth about valves is that, well, some of them leak! Humphrey Products Company has spent decades learning from the shortcomings of other valves, working to refine its own techniques to produce a superior valve. The Humphrey team has perfected the use of what's called a "poppet diaphragm" for sealing solutions. "Thanks to the poppet, our valves are direct-acting, which means that the solenoid electromagnet [directly shifts] the valve," said Maurer. "The poppet itself is an extremely robust sealing solution, and our specialization in this area allows us to make exceptionally effective valves. Other valves tend to stick, which makes them less effective." Because of Humphrey's focus on poppet diaphragms, the team created the tagline "Cannot Stick; Will Not Leak" for a recent marketing campaign.

GLOBAL AFFILIATION

In 1962, a partnership with Humphrey Products helped to launch KOGANEI Corporation, based in Tokyo, Japan, into the North American pneumatic belt industry. The two companies maintain a relationship and "friendly competition" today.

FANS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

In recent years, Humphrey has "started to liberalize the definition of what career and technical education means for employment in the region and across [its] team." It is committed to education "from start to finish," meaning that Humphrey is involved in education at all stages. The company works with the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency to facilitate co-op experiences for high school students as well as programs like FIRST Robotics, Communities in Schools, Project Lead the Way, Junior Achievement, and more. "At Humphrey, we really believe that kids shouldn't 'check out' after math and science requirements have been met at school. They are hard subjects, but [students should] push through failures. Who cares if you get a B? The value of that education and those skills can be so great in a growing career and [are valued] throughout the workforce. It really matters."

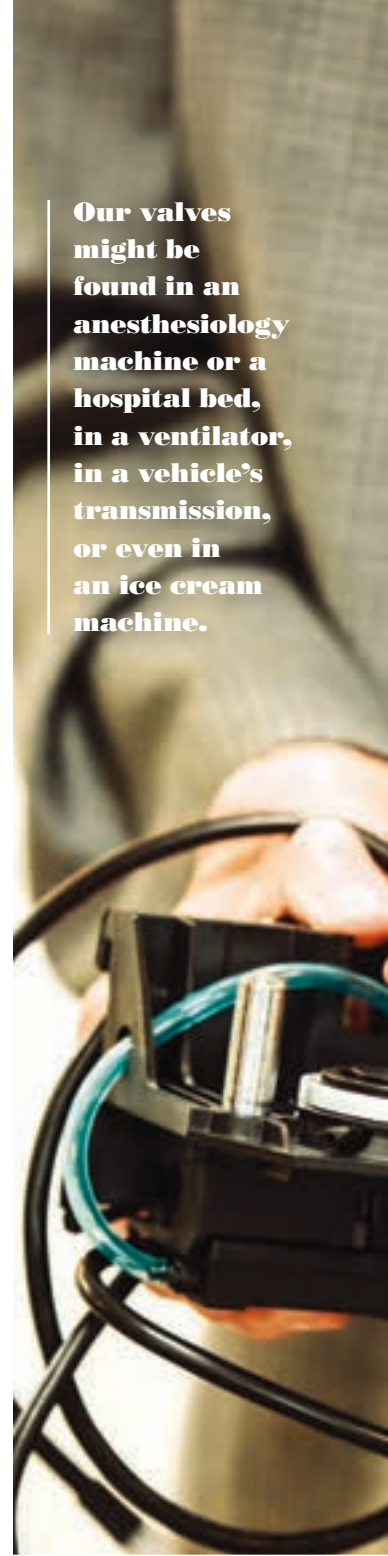
A LESSON IN VALVE SOLUTIONS

From its engineers to its machinists to its inspection personnel and beyond, Humphrey has maintained a commitment to career and technical education. "We believe that education gives people purpose and adds value to the work they do every day," said Maurer. "This is especially important because we believe that the work we do in manufacturing is imperative. We serve our region and its economy by educating our own people, by making learning and certification a real priority, then letting that impact our work every step of the way."

A COMMUNITY CULTURE

Humphrey's commitment to people doesn't stop on the factory floor or in the classroom. The company is dedicated to its surrounding community, too. In 1997, Humphrey partnered with Kendall Electric to launch the Giving Garden. The team has tended the garden ever since, giving back to Southwest Michigan by providing fresh vegetables to residents who have a hard time coming by healthy, quality produce. When they're not tilling the Giving Garden, you'll find the Humphrey team working alongside the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, United Way, and other organizations.

Our valves might be found in an anesthesiology machine or a hospital bed, in a ventilator, in a vehicle's transmission, or even in an ice cream machine.





YEAR FOUNDED

1901

LOCATION

5070 E N Ave,
Kalamazoo, MI 49048

FOOTPRINT

140,000 square feet

EXECUTIVES

Bob Humphrey
Chairman and CEO

Dave Maurer
President

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

200+

MARKETS

- Life Science
- Vehicle
- Food and Beverage Distribution
- Technology

INTERESTED IN JOINING THE TEAM?

Humphrey Products Company is always looking to add driven people to its team.

In an effort to foster lifelong learning, Humphrey even hires high school students who are interested in gaining technical skills and machining experience during the summer.

IF YOU'RE AN EAGER LEARNER WHO WORKS WELL WITH OTHERS, GO TO [HUMPHREY-PRODUCTS.COM/CONTENT/EMPLOYMENT-OPPORTUNITIES-0](https://www.humphrey-products.com/content/employment-opportunities-0)

THE POWER OF ATTRACTION

CREATING GRAVITATIONAL PULL IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

A Q+A WITH **BRIAN REVOIR**

SENIOR DESIGNER
AT **LANDSCAPE FORMS**

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

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WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AT LANDSCAPE FORMS?

At Landscape Forms, we create outdoor furnishings and site amenities, lighting, and custom work. I'm part of a three-person design team, so the projects get split up between us.

We're authors in a sense. Working on a tight-knit team is fun because we're constantly switching it up. If you know what you're looking for, you'll see our work everywhere. We're up in Grand Rapids, we're in New York City, and if you're sitting on a bench on the Kalamazoo Mall, there is a good likelihood we designed it.

WHY IS DESIGNING INTENTIONAL OUTDOOR SPACES SO IMPORTANT?

We are passionate about the outdoors—it's the center of our universe. For our team, our role is not just about designing and building furniture; we also educate people about the value of outdoor space. For example, if you travel to Fiji, you won't spend your time there taking photos of the hotel lobby. You'll be too excited to get outside and enjoy the sun.

WHAT IS GOOD DESIGN?

Good design is timeless. It's why we fall in love with things. Designers don't just restyle; in my role as an industrial designer, my job is not only to make something beautiful but to solve a problem. Some of the best projects I've worked on have provided solutions that people didn't even know they needed. If you can do that, the design will speak to everyone. One of the joys of working as an industrial designer is when you have a moment of clarity and finally find a solution. I love those "ah-ha" moments.

WHERE DO YOU GET IDEAS FOR NEW PRODUCTS?

My ideas are insight-driven. To design a new product, we do a lot of human observation to learn how people operate in a particular space. My team will stake out an area and observe people going to get a beer together or hurrying to work. If you watch carefully, you'll see that people don't stop in big, wide-open spaces. Nobody sits down in the middle of a field; they'll pick a tree instead—it's subconscious. We try to design functional social anchor points—like a kiosk or a shaded picnic table—in an outdoor space that serve the same purpose and give people something to gravitate towards.



WHAT OTHER INSIGHTS HAVE YOU GAINED THROUGH OBSERVATION?

Large groups of people behave very much like a river in the sense that water flows quickly down the center but slows down and spins in eddies along the edges. If you look at people, they also pull away from the middle and stop by social anchor points, allowing others to move past. When we're designing space and want a stream of people to slow down and utilize an area, we can create a pinch point in the middle that causes people to slow down and flow around it; think about it like tossing a boulder in the middle of a river. A great example of this is The Bean (Cloud Gate) in Chicago's Millennium Park. It's designed so people can zip around it, but it also serves as an attraction point for people to gather [around].

WHEN DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU WANTED TO PURSUE DESIGN?

I grew up in a very creative household. My brother and I drew constantly. As I got older, I got into other outlets. I built a lot of models—and not the plastic kind you buy in the store. I'd cut up balsa wood and build models from scratch. I knew I wanted to do something creative as a professional, but I didn't know what that meant. I knew it would be really difficult to find someone who would pay me to draw dragons all day. But luckily I made it work.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE ON A CAREER IN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN?

I went to RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) in New York. My first year was filled with a broad range of art courses. I was taking drawing and ceramics classes to find out which path I wanted to take. Then I walked into the industrial design department. I remember seeing market renderings like you see in old ads for cars or power tools. I instantly gravitated towards the department because, not only was I able to draw, but with this career path, my drawings had the potential to become real.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ASPIRING DESIGNERS?

I think the more you immerse yourself in creativity—whether it's building models, painting, taking some art classes, or tinkering—the more you will discover where your compass is pointing. If you're in high school and discover you have a creative streak, I would ramp that up and build a portfolio. My college selected me because of the work I was able to complete in my high school classes. My grades were secondary. Design schools aren't necessarily looking for a Rembrandt, but they do want to know that you are a diversified thinker, creative, and hungry to learn.

MOLDING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

MINIATURE CUSTOM MANUFACTURING
RECOGNIZED FOR GROWTH TRAJECTORY

BY CATHY KNAPP PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGELER

SPARKLING CONFETTI RAINED DOWN ON STEVE SHOEMAKER AS HE STOOD CENTER STAGE—ATTIRED IN A BLACK TUX AND BOW TIE—AT THE BRESLIN CENTER IN EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN. IT WAS THE EVENING OF MAY 8, 2019, AND SHOEMAKER'S COMPANY HAD JUST BEEN NAMED ONE OF THE 2019 "MICHIGAN 50 COMPANIES TO WATCH."

This statewide award is presented by Michigan Celebrates Small Business, an organization that champions small business and fosters entrepreneurial spirit in Michigan. That Miniature Custom Manufacturing (MCM), the Vicksburg-based company of which Shoemaker is founder and co-owner, was honored is especially meaningful, considering the company's humble beginnings.

"In December of 2008, an opportunity came to me to mold a part," Shoemaker explained. "My wife and I put a second mortgage on our house, bought one injection mold press, and started business in my brother's pole barn. I spent a lot of time in that barn, but things have evolved considerably since then."

From 2009 to 2012, MCM grew with the acquisition of six presses and operated from a Galesburg facility. Shoemaker was still the sole employee, making it work through long-run jobs and fewer change-ups and by leveraging automation. However, he knew he didn't want to work alone forever.

Enter Kevin Murphy, who joined forces with Shoemaker in 2013. "We were neighbors," Murphy said. "The Galesburg facility was in my previous sales territory. I stopped in during lunch and fell in love with injection molding. I've always been fascinated with

building things. Finally, while on a conference call one day, I decided I didn't want to work for someone else anymore. I ended the call, drove to Galesburg, and told Steve I was ready to join the business."

Murphy admits being a co-owner was harder than he'd imagined. "We had to roll up our sleeves and

In December 2008, an opportunity came to me to mold a part. My wife and I put a second mortgage on our house, bought one injection mold press, and started business in my brother's pole barn.

learn [on the fly] anything we needed to know in running the business," he said. "Starting out, you have to wear a lot of hats."

Murphy's hats have included human resources, sales, and operations. Shoemaker's roles revolve around machine controls and information technology. "Steve is a machine doctor," Murphy

said. "He can walk in, listen to a machine, and diagnose what's wrong with it."

It's a good "marriage," and they agree on how to run the company "98 percent of the time."

MCM produces GNC protein powder scoops, automotive and medical components, food packaging, biodegradable plastic forks, and the Green Glove Dryer. Since 2012, operations have moved to Vicksburg. The company is now going through a third expansion there, adding 24,000 square feet to its existing 45,000-square-foot enterprise. Employment is at 70 team members and rising. The partners are now able to concentrate on hiring the right people rather than trying to do everything themselves.

"Our priorities are people, quality, and production, in that order," Murphy said. "It's getting fun now. We're putting the right people in the right seat on the bus, like in the book "Good To Great." It's your people that separate you from your competition."

MCM's workforce is diverse, featuring a female plant manager. Shoemaker and Murphy agree

that she brings a different perspective to the table—and that this is an asset.

“Connie is very personable,” Murphy said. “Along with the team, she organizes fulfilling activities like Biggest Loser competitions, picnics, quarterly gifts, and Adopt-A-Family and Generous Hands projects.”

The company created a digital employee information board to celebrate team birthdays and promotions, recognize achievements, share news and events, reveal the winners of friendly shift challenges, and applaud the multiple recipients of the annual award for perfect attendance with no tardiness.

MCM provides financial wellness coaching for employees by bringing in bankers, who open employee savings accounts onsite, and retirement plan advisors. It also encourages advancement through the reading of leadership books.

Shoemaker explained that MCM is differentiated not only by its prioritization of people but also by its approach to its other two priorities: quality and production. “Our product is still injection molding,” he said. “It’s just how we go about doing it. We’re meticulous about machine maintenance and training people. We also plan ahead for problems, which is why we have redundancies like multiple pieces of equipment [for when something breaks].”

The future glows as MCM’s partners set a pace for 25 to 30 percent growth this year.

A word of advice to other business owners? “If you don’t believe putting people first will make a difference, try it,” said Murphy. “Chase winning and money will chase you.”

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

WHEN THE RIGHT KIND OF CONSULTING PAYS OFF

Over the past four years, Miniature Custom Manufacturing (MCM) has engaged with regional economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First for business consulting expertise. The agency has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the manufacturer through its acquisition of Michigan Business Development Program funding to assist with growth and local Industrial Facilities Tax abatements to reduce tax outlays on new investment. The agency has also helped MCM find talent to fill key leadership positions. Members of the MCM team have taken advantage of Southwest Michigan First leadership programming like Leadership Kalamazoo and Managing from the Middle. The result: MCM’s workforce has grown and will soon be working in a 69,000-square-foot facility.

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WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD

WITH TARA ANNIS

BY JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGLER

FROM POINT A TO POINT B AND BEYOND

At Clark Logic, we provide logistical and supply-chain solutions for our clients. My job is to coordinate the company's truck shipments. I schedule our semi-trucks and their drivers, ensuring everything makes it to its destination efficiently. We haul pallets for all kinds of different companies. We ship beer for Founders [Brewing Company], and we also do a lot of recycling. If you recycle any cans or cardboard, chances are, it's me making sure it ends up in the right place.

IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

Obviously, staying organized is critical. This job has made me an expert in time management. When I'm drafting my delivery schedule, it's a lot like putting puzzle pieces together, especially when we have last-minute bookings. I always have my shipments planned out from the night prior, so my six drivers know where they're going before they get in.

WORKING WONDERS

In college, I studied advertising, and learning effective communication skills turned out to be critical. My drivers call me when they secure their trailers and get rolling, and I touch base with them throughout the day. Customers also email or call to tell me they need something moved right away, so I'll have to reshuffle the schedule and contact available drivers to make it happen. The job requires a lot of communication, a lot of emails, and a lot of engaging with people.

FROM COLLEGE TO CAREER

Transitioning from college life to office life was hard at first, but I got used to it. I work directly with [our dispatcher], who has taken me under his wing. He used to be a truck driver and has been in the business for ten years. When I started, I didn't know much about trucking, so he has taught me everything. Everyone here is super friendly and fun to work with. I think the people you surround yourself with make the job.

KEEP ON TRUCKING

I have two siblings who are going to be graduating college soon, and they've been asking me about how to find jobs. I tell them to have an open mind—you're not going to ace every interview, and you have to be ready to hear "no" once in a while. But in the end, it's all okay; every experience is a stepping stone towards a career you're passionate about.

MAKING TIME

It's essential to find time for yourself because you need an outlet for stress. I try to get to the gym every day, and I get outside whenever I can. I love living in Michigan because I can find something to do for each season. In the winter, I love to go snowboarding at Timber Ridge [Ski Area]. I also bought a kayak last year, so when it's nice outside, I head to the river.

EDUCATION

Grand Valley State
University (GVSU)
Advertising, B.S. '17

EMPLOYMENT

Dispatch, Clark Logic

HOMETOWN

Sturgis, MI



LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMING



LEADERSHIP KALAMAZOO

Since 1989, Leadership Kalamazoo has been our region's premier civic leadership development program, helping professionals build strengths, talents, knowledge and relationships to succeed in ever-changing environments.

Who: Mid-career leaders with direct supervisory responsibilities and desire for community impact



MANAGING FROM THE MIDDLE

Managing from the Middle tackles the "energy squeeze" for those navigating from the middle while having to balance key relationships, oversight of teams, power dynamics and change.

Who: Mid-level managers



FIRST 50

First 50 helps emerging leaders discover and develop their leadership skills through mentor relationships and a series of interactive learning sessions.

Who: Emerging leaders



FIRST LEADERS

The world around us is changing faster than the eye can see. First Leaders delves into future industry trends with renowned subject-matter experts through lively discussion.

Who: Leaders at any level



FIRST UP

First Up gives professionals navigating the first five years of their careers access to tools, best practices and key leadership insights to move from questioning to confident.

Who: Professionals in the first five years of their careers

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the right talent...*

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2019

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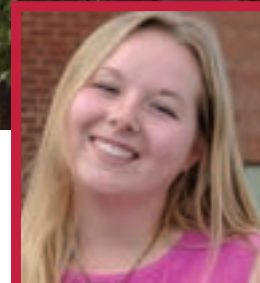
Just a few of our talented summer interns for 2019.



HEATHER LEANY



SAM MORGAN



CAITLIN COMMISSARIS



JOHN VARY



WIGHTMAN

ALLEGAN | BENTON HARBOR | KALAMAZOO

TRY THIS SUMMER SIPPER

BY
CHAZ PARKS

PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
IMPERIAL BEVERAGE,
THE BOSTON BEER
COMPANY, AND MARK
ANTHONY GROUP INC.



IT'S BASICALLY FACT: ALL THE BEST MICHIGAN SUMMER ACTIVITIES REQUIRE A COLD BEVERAGE IN HAND.

Beach bumming on one of the Great Lakes, hiking around a state park, or kayaking down a lazy river just wouldn't be the same any other way. For most Michiganders, the go-to beverage has always been an ice-cold beer or a pre-made cocktail; but now, there is a new kid in the cooler—hard seltzer.

In recent years, a handful of breweries have started to notice drinkers gravitating towards more health-conscious options. Hard seltzer is the industry's answer to changing tastes.

Here's a primer for the seltzer rookie: The drink's production is not unlike that of beer, as both are fermented beverages. However, beer is usually made using malt and barley to extract alcohol during fermentation, while hard seltzers use pure cane sugar. This method allows the drink to be low-calorie, low-carb, gluten-free, and naturally flavored—with a tasty kick. Typically clocking in at around 100 calories, this new alternative to beer and wine has been gaining in popularity since 2013, when it was first spotted through cooler doors. Its growth shows no signs of stopping.

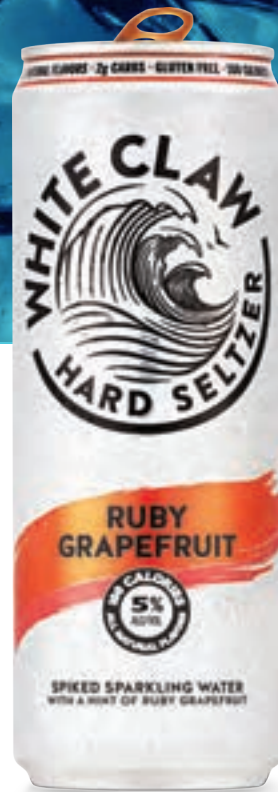
“The shift in consumer trends is about as reliable as your local weatherman,” said Jon Sutton, Imperial Beverage beer category manager. “One can predict what people are going to grab when they go to their local retail outlet, but we can only really see the effects after the storm has broken. It's great to be at the forefront of this emerging category and growing with it.”

Imperial Beverage distributes the two leading hard seltzer brands in the Southwest Michigan market: White Claw Hard Seltzer and Truly Hard Seltzer. Mark Anthony Group Inc., the same company that produces Mike's Hard Lemonade, owns White Claw. It was one of the earliest adopters of hard seltzer, and it offers flavors like lime, mango, and black cherry. Truly Hard Seltzer is manufactured by The Boston Beer Company, which also owns Samuel Adams Brewery, Twisted Tea Hard Iced Tea, and Angry Orchard Hard Cider. Truly has a whopping 13 flavors, including raspberry lime, pineapple, passion fruit, and pomegranate. Both brands are widely available in chains and independent retailers across the U.S.

“The hard seltzer category has exploded despite criticism that this would be just another in-and-out [fad],” explained Justin Stoneburner, national brand manager at Imperial Beverage. “Even

Hard seltzer sales surged last year, and Southwest Michigan businesses expect another banner year as the summer heats up.

HARD SELTZER BECOMES THE NEW FAVORITE BEACH-DAY BEVERAGE



though Michigan's winter months are slower for this category's sales, the numbers have continued to climb, and we don't see them slowing down anytime soon. Having the top two brands in our warehouse helps increase sales and [Imperial's] presence in the Southwest Michigan market."

To keep up with this rising trend, breweries have started to jump on the hard seltzer bandwagon, each developing its own style. Big Sky Brewing out of Missoula, Montana, has created a line of spiked seltzers that will be available in Michigan later this year. Big Sky takes the craft approach, boasting the fact that its product is made with pure Montana water and comes in an unusual assortment of trendy flavors, including strawberry mint, cucumber melon, and ginger lemon basil. "As this category evolves and starts to take shape," said Sutton, "Imperial Beverage is excited to bring new and exciting brands into local retailers across Michigan."

Hard seltzer sales surged last year, and Southwest Michigan businesses expect another banner year as the summer heats up. In "Off-Premise Beer Sales Flatten in 2018 as Hard Seltzer Sales Near \$500 Million," market research firm Nielsen reported that in 2018, national sales grew 169 percent, totaling nearly \$487.8

million, while volume increased by 181 percent. These data showed that a majority of this growth occurred between Memorial Day and Labor Day, confirming that this summer sipper sees peak sales during the Fourth of July holiday.

So the next time you're soaking up the summer sun in Southwest Michigan, dive into your new favorite beach-day beverage! Hard seltzer may just be the drink you never knew your summer adventures needed.

The hard seltzer category has exploded despite criticism that this would be just another in-and-out [fad].

Chaz Parks is events and donations coordinator 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.



Making the Most of Their Internships

COLLEGE STUDENTS RETURN TO THE REGION FOR CAREER-BUILDING INTERNSHIPS

BY
LORA PAINTER
PHOTO
KATHRYN DAVIS

FOR MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT KIMBERLY VERDUZCO, SUMMER VACATION DOESN'T MEAN A HIATUS FROM WORKING TOWARDS CAREER GOALS.

Verduzco, who studies advertising with a minor in public relations, is spending her summer working as an intern at economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First.

“The thing that I wanted to work on the most [during my internship] is writing,” Verduzco says. One of her initial tasks is composing biographies of her fellow interns for placement on the Southwest Michigan First website and social media sharing.

At her desk in the company’s office in downtown Kalamazoo, Verduzco peers at her laptop screen through gold-rimmed

glasses, clicking away on her keyboard as she translates her thoughts into digital form. She stops typing to join in a laugh with her fellow interns.

The four summer 2019 interns at Southwest Michigan First are studying at universities throughout the Midwest, but each calls Southwest Michigan home.

Intern Jet Valentine, who attends Miami University in Ohio, is working in the organization’s sales department.

“I am helping find leads for [targeted sales],” Valentine says of his role. “I spend a lot of my day doing that as well as various projects around the office. I’ve always wanted to work in media, so this is a really good opportunity for me to help book



INTERNS CAN REGISTER FOR THE **AUGUST 14, 2019, SUMMER INTERN MIXER ON EVENTBRITE.COM**. IT STARTS AT 5 P.M. ON THE PATIO AT OLD DOG TAVERN IN KALAMAZOO.

advertising [for targeted sales]. It also helps [me work towards my] overall goal of understanding how business works—specifically when it comes to sales.”

Verduzco, Valentine, and their colleagues are part of a large group of college students in the region who are spending their summers advancing their careers. A recent study from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) showed that 97 percent of large companies plan to hire interns. Estimates of the total number of interns across the country range from one to two million.

Kim Weishaar, chief financial officer at Southwest Michigan First, says that internships are an important part of higher learning, as they teach students more about themselves and their desired career path than can typically be learned in a classroom.

“Interns have the opportunity to bridge the gap between what school life is like and what their working lives may be,” Weishaar says. “They get a taste of their future and a chance to determine where their passions may lie.”

Verduzco echoes this sentiment. “I definitely think it’s building on top of the things that I’m learning in school. Getting to apply them is honestly very fun and challenging. Here, I really feel like I’m contributing.”

Southwest Michigan First has set up its internship program to offer interns a taste of the things one could encounter in the workplace. It works to provide interns with a holistic view of the organization by involving them—most of whom are studying sales and marketing—in other departments, including accounting or economic development.

Weishaar says she and her colleagues hope their interns have an experience that helps them decide on a career path and gives them a leg up in landing a great job.

The 2019 internship report from NACE showed that the incidence of employers converting their interns into full-time hires is on the rise—benefitting both the interns and the companies.

“The benefit for [companies] is [that internships] bring in fresh new perspectives,” Weishaar says. “It also gives companies an opportunity to build a [talent] pipeline.”

Interns have the opportunity to bridge the gap between what school life is like and what their working lives may be. They get a taste of their future and a chance to determine where their passions may lie.

For students, internships can open a lot of professional doors. Southwest Michigan First is very intentional about creating networking opportunities for interns. It even organized three intern mixers during the summer of 2019.

“The intern mixers are part of our efforts to build a community of next-generation leaders in Southwest Michigan,” says Weishaar. “They are another way we are connecting young talent with companies in the region. The mixers give them the space to build a tribe.”

An intern’s view? “The mixers are a great way to get yourself out there, get to know people, and hear about other opportunities through what [your peers] are doing at their internships,” Verduzco says. “Networking is really important in establishing a professional presence.”

Weishaar encourages any interested interns to take part—and to seek out other events. “Be open to any opportunity that is presented to you. Just be eager to learn and meet new people.”

The intern mixers are part of our efforts to build a community of next-generation leaders in Southwest Michigan. The mixers give them the space to build a tribe.



**AS SEEN LIVE ON
WWMT (CBS) | CW7.**

TAKING A BREAK

INTERNS AT MERCANTILE BANK OF MICHIGAN HIT THE GROUND RUNNING



MERCANTILE BANK OF MICHIGAN STARTED ITS SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF GIVING COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPOSURE TO THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY.

But more than that, its program is designed to recruit students from diverse backgrounds and provide them with meaningful hands-on work experience and exposure to opportunities that will impact their communities.

For eight to 10 weeks, students take a break from books and classes to hit the ground running in a real-world workplace. Beginning on the interns' first day, they start getting exposure to multiple departments and various functions throughout the bank, including human resources, commercial and mortgage lending, and bank operations.

Diversity and Inclusion Officer Misti Stanton has been overseeing the program for the past five years. "At Mercantile Bank, we place a strong emphasis on being an active leader and supporter of the communities we serve," she says. "Our program focuses on providing students with the tools they need for future success. It's our hope to develop students by exposing them to a professional work environment and teaching practical work skills such as teamwork, customer service, multi-tasking, punctuality, and time management." She reports that, every year, Mercantile Bank receives contact from almost 400 applicants from colleges and universities across the country for their positions throughout Michigan.

FROM THE BOOKS

FEATURE BROUGHT TO YOU BY
MERCANTILE BANK

As a community bank, giving back to the diverse communities it serves is embedded in Mercantile's culture. Because of this, community service is a key component of its summer internship program. For many interns, this experience may be their first professional opportunity. In an effort to help connect students to community, Mercantile provides them with a variety of meaningful volunteer and community-focused projects. Each year, students engage in a service project, exposing them to non-profit organizations that are working on addressing various community needs.

Amari Brown, a Hope College junior and human resources intern at Mercantile, says of her experience, "Diversity is a great teacher, and knowledge of how to work with people from different backgrounds, ways of thinking, and cultures is an essential tool for today's professionals. Stanton intentionally creates a diverse program, picking top talent from all walks of life. With projects, lunch and learns, and community events, interns are empowered to grow their knowledge and expand their worldview."

With its summer internship program, the community bank recognizes training talented professionals from diverse backgrounds will better help its customers navigate the financial decisions that affect their lives. As Mercantile Bank looks to the future, the company believes that mentoring the next generation makes it a better bank while, at the same time, improves communities from the ground up.



NOT JUST ANY TEAM YOUR TEAM



Nancy Turtle
Community Bank President



Kim Labadie
*Vice President,
Treasury Sales*



Josh Bush
*Vice President,
Commercial Banking*



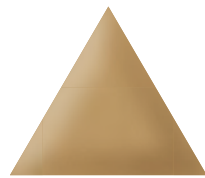
Marcus Brussee
*Vice President,
Commercial Banking*



Justin Horn
*Assistant Vice President,
Commerical Banking*



Lisa Carriveau
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LEADER²LEADER

Meet two local leaders through their keen insights on success, development, motivation, and more.

BY JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGLER AND TRISHA DUNHAM

MARY LEWIS

PRACTICE DIRECTOR AT FAMILY HEALTH CENTER

TIM MITCHELL

VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF REGIONAL OPERATIONS AT SME USA

ADVICE FOR FIRST-TIME LEADERS

LEWIS: You have to be authentic in your leadership. It's easy to imitate someone else's leadership style, but if you do that, you'll always come up short. You're unique—you've been created this way for a reason. You have to find your leadership voice and lead with authenticity.

MITCHELL: Take time and get to know your people before you start directing them around. Communicate often and leave your door open. If you run into an issue, deal with it right away. That will help you define your culture, and, as a leader, that's one of your most important responsibilities. The better you establish your culture, the easier your job will become.

LEADERSHIP HABITS

LEWIS: I spend a lot of time reading journal articles and leadership books to stay on the cutting edge because the field of medicine changes every second. I also make use of the expertise of my peers. I believe in mentoring others, but I also have mentors who invest in my leadership and encourage me to be better.

MITCHELL: I try to make it a habit to give back. I'm on the advisory board for Western Michigan University's College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and I judge senior design projects. Over the years, I've also helped with our regional Science Olympiad. Working with young people and seeing their enthusiasm gives me new energy.

ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP QUALITY

LEWIS: You have to be willing to work when no one else wants to work. There's a difference between hard work and what I call "the grind." Being a leader demands doing more than what's required. You have to be the first person in the door and the last person to leave.

MITCHELL: At SME, our performance principles are: face facts, take ownership, work hard, and be honest. I think honesty and integrity have to come first. When things get tough, leaders can't tolerate cutting corners, letting things slide, or covering things up.

When things get tough, leaders can't tolerate cutting corners, letting things slide, or covering things up.

TIM MITCHELL

THE HARDEST PART OF BEING A LEADER

LEWIS: Leadership comes at a cost, but having a solid support system will help you achieve your leadership goals. For instance, I have four kids at home, and I'm fortunate to have an amazing husband who has stepped up in a big way.

MITCHELL: Leading is difficult when you don't have good mentors. Leadership can feel isolating at times, so it's critical to know that someone has your back.

THE GREATEST LEADER IN HISTORY

LEWIS: For me, Jesus is the epitome of a leader. He knew his purpose, and he literally transformed people's lives. I truly believe

FIRST THINGS FIRST



FIRST JOB AFTER COLLEGE?

LEWIS: Medical assistant

MITCHELL: Geotechnical engineer



FIRST PERSON YOU CALL WITH GOOD NEWS?

LEWIS: If I go a day without calling my sister, it's a big deal

MITCHELL: My wife, Pam



FIRST FARAWAY TRIP?

LEWIS: The Bahamas with my husband

MITCHELL: A European cruise on the Rhine River

that leadership is all about influence. You can have power, but it's really about having influence and the ability to inspire.

MITCHELL: John Wooden. Along with being the [coach with the most NCAA men's basketball championships], John Wooden was an excellent leader. His leadership style was centered on knowing your values and never compromising them. He understood that, as soon as you make one exception, everything starts to fall apart—if you're going to lead, you need to lead.

LEADING OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

LEWIS: I sit on local committees and am active in my church. I take the skills I learn in my professional life, like communication and mentorship, and apply them in the community. I think leadership is transferable. I can even take those same principles home to continue to become a better parent.

MITCHELL: Every year, I ride with a group of friends on a bike ride from Michigan to Iowa. It's a huge event that has been going on for 45 years. With all the training, endurance, and teamwork that's required, it's astonishing how applicable leadership skills can be to something like an interstate bike ride.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

LEWIS: First, find a mentor. Then look for a professional association that suits your goals; start going to conferences and build your network. I've realized that if I want to be CEO one day, then I'm going to have to connect with a CEO who can take some time and help me learn and grow.

MITCHELL: Use your opportunities and ask for more. That doesn't mean you have to work 60 hours a week, but always strive to do an excellent job. Also, be inquisitive—people are mostly willing and happy to share knowledge. Your managers will recognize that kind of thing.



MARY LEWIS

Being a leader demands doing more than what's required. You have to be the first person in the door and the last person to leave.

MARY LEWIS



TIM MITCHELL

Leading is difficult when you don't have good mentors. Leadership can feel isolating at times, so it's critical to know that someone has your back.

TIM MITCHELL



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NEIL GIRALDO



Ron Kitchens sat down with the musician, Grammy-winning songwriter, and founder of Three Chord Bourbon to talk inspiration, shaking up the status quo, and giving back.



What gives you the energy to do everything you do?

I love making music. I love writing songs and writing screenplays. I love everything I do because the truth is, I shouldn't even be alive. I was born not breathing. I was a blue baby; I barely made it. I'm just happy I'm here. When I met my wife Patricia (Pat Benatar) 40 years ago, we were two people who needed each other. And we still do. My whole life, I wanted to work with a great singer like her. **When did you first realize you wanted to be an artist?** I think everyone kind of knows what they're about when they start out in life. When I was six years old, my dad bought me my first guitar. That's when I knew I would be a musician. That was it. I couldn't imagine myself doing anything else. **What advice would you give to artists and musicians who are just starting out?** I love the Mike Tyson

quote, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." You will be on top of the world one moment, and the next, the world will be on top of you. You have to keep pushing. I made so many records that were turned down by record companies again and again before becoming hits. **How do you push yourself creatively?** I love pushing boundaries and challenging the status quo. I wasn't trying to be cute with the crazy drum beat in "Love is a Battlefield." At the time, I had a drummer who told me, "You can't use that!" When I asked why, he said, "The kick drum is not in the same place; it's a six-bar phrase—drummers don't play like that." And I said, "So what?"

Where do you find inspiration? I don't intentionally look for inspiration. It punches me in the face. Inspiration is everywhere—you just have to open yourself up. I try to be aware of my surroundings and take note of absolutely everything. I have thousands and thousands of words, ideas, and voice recordings on my phone. **What was the inspiration behind the founding of Three Chord Bourbon?** My family came from Bronte, Sicily. When they came to America, my grandfather had a still in his basement, and he would make wine and whiskey. When I was young, I remember my father making wine out of plums. So, I'd have to say making whiskey is in my blood. Even so, at Three Chord Bourbon, we're always asking ourselves, "What could we do differently?" Our process is disruptive by design. It's not a gimmick. **What's your favorite aspect of the business?** It's not just about the

juice—it's really about giving back. We donate a portion of our proceeds to musicians who don't have healthcare in the hopes of paving the way for their success. I don't want to wait until we're a three-hundred-million-dollar company before we start giving back. I want to give back right away. **How do you define success?** To me, success is never about being in the right place at the right time. Nothing's ever that easy. There's no substitute for hard work. I believe you have to work hard at everything you do, whether you want to be a better musician, a husband, a father—anything. ✨



YOUR REGION'S STRENGTH HINGES ON YOUR SUCCESS

OR SHOULD WE SAY “SUCCESSION PLAN?”

BY SARAH MANSBERGER PHOTO PATPITCHAYA (ISTOCK)

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) FUNCTIONS WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS ARE CHANGING. FADING ARE THE DAYS WHEN HR MANAGERS WERE HIRED SOLELY TO KEEP EMPLOYEES COMPLIANT WITH POLICY AND THE BENEFITS COMPETITIVE.

Today, organizations are seeking leaders of “people departments” to usher talent development initiatives forward, provide organizational development interventions, and craft meaningful learning opportunities for every level of employee. Many organizations are embracing coaching styles that tap into employees’ intrinsic sources of motivation. Others have crafted more flexible work arrangements than ever before, and still others are considering things like unlimited paid time off or work-from-home policies that keep an increasingly diverse talent pool engaged.

Despite all the innovation and progress in the HR and people development functions of organizations, there is one fundamental that too many are leaving by the wayside: succession planning.

Ask any leader this question: Who would replace them tomorrow if they were gone from the company suddenly? Many will offer an answer, perhaps even a confident one. For too many organizations, however, “names on a list” is where succession work begins and ends, and only C-suite leaders are considered. Done right, succession planning is both supported by and is an outgrowth of a comprehensive talent development strategy that takes people development seriously across all levels of the organization. A comprehensive talent development strategy assesses things like key roles and the related competencies required for success. To take your strategy to the next level, it also requires an honest and systematic assessment of the current performance and potential of talent.

Here are some reflective questions to help you reach that next level:

ROLES

Which roles are key to moving this business forward? What does it take to be great in each of those roles?

- Who in your organization feels irreplaceable right now? (Hint: It’s not just your C-suite.) Whose departure from leadership, from the front lines, or anywhere in between would slow the pace of business—or bring it to a screeching halt? Consider not only aspects like unique expertise and institutional knowledge but also levels of formal and informal influence and depth of relationships within and outside the organization.
- What does it take to excel in each of the key roles you have identified? Ask the folks who currently hold the seats and those around them to make a list of critical competencies.

Who else presently possesses the required competencies? At what level and depth? How difficult would it be for a new person to acquire and master said skills? By what means—other than longevity—can up-and-coming talent develop the skills, knowledge, and relationships required to shine?

TALENT

Where are the zones of greatest potential within the current talent pool? What must we do to develop the talent of today into the successors of tomorrow for each of our key roles?

- Who are the highest-potential players in your organization? Take care to look beyond title and level when assessing potential. Add a forward-looking consideration of employee potential to retrospective performance evaluations to determine where it makes the most sense to focus your customized talent development efforts.
- Does my organization possess customized development plans for a published and continuously-refreshed slate of successors for all key roles?

The considerations above should help you identify potential successors for not only C-suite leaders but also other critical roles within the organization. Engage those individuals in active conversation about their next steps professionally. What plans will you put in place together to ready your slate of successors? Research from the Society of Human Resources Management suggests that stretch assignments, mentorship, and formal learning opportunities are most effective at accelerating successor readiness.

As many companies in our region navigate waves of Baby Boomer retirement, succession planning is something that can no longer fall to the wayside. It affects not only the health of individual bottom lines but, ultimately, the collective readiness of a region to succeed into the next decade and beyond.

What can you do today to activate your people department and leaders around the challenge of identifying and readying successors? The health of your region's economy just might depend on it.



Sarah Mansberger is a managing 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.



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How Did I Get Here?

RUSS MCFEE

PRESIDENT OF GHS STRINGS

BY JAKE FREDERICKS

PHOTO TRISHA DUNHAM

1959 | BORN IN BATTLE CREEK

My good friend's grandfather was the doctor who delivered me at the community hospital. I always say he was the first person to see me alive on this earth.

1960S | BEST CHILDHOOD MEMORY

Back in the late '60s, my parents took our family on a trip to Yellowstone in a pop-up trailer. I remember camping with my brother, who is two years older than me. We went behind our trailer and found all these beer bottles. We put them on a stump and knocked them down with pine cones.

1981 | RECEIVED BACHELOR'S DEGREE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

I went to the University of Michigan and got my bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. After I graduated, I moved out to California and went to work for a company named Schlumberger. It was my first job. I was running crude [oil] out in the field. I tested oil wells that were mostly on land, but some were offshore. That was back before cell phones, so I was out there on my own!

1987 | EARNED MBA FROM NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Afterwards, I moved to Newport Beach, California and went to work for an aerospace company. I was in sales and called on huge corporations like Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. I did that for two years before applying to Northwestern University, where I got my MBA and met my wife.



1987 | JOINED THE FAMILY BUSINESS

With my MBA, I went to work for Saylor-Beall for about three years. Saylor-Beall is an air compressor company in St. Johns, Michigan, owned by GHS. In 1984, my father, who purchased the company in 1975, wanted to diversify. So, GHS went into the air compressor business and acquired Saylor-Beall and two additional air compressor companies. In the middle 2000s, we combined those two companies to create Sullivan-Palatek and built a new manufacturing facility in Michigan City. It's quite a large business; we have around 15 percent market share nationwide.

1990 | STARTED AT GHS STRINGS

Eventually, I moved to Battle Creek and started working at GHS Strings. GHS Strings makes music products—primarily fretted string instruments like guitar strings, banjos, and mandolins. We work with top musicians, including Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Gene Simmons, the Kinks, the Birds—I could go on—who play, or have played, our product.

As president—let's face it—I do everything, including shoveling the sidewalks. But it's also up to me to lead the company and figure out where we're going next.

1996 | BECAME PRESIDENT OF GHS STRINGS

As president—let's face it—I do everything, including shoveling the sidewalks. But it's also up to me to lead the company and figure out where we're going next. One of our struggles has been that the guitar business is not growing like it used to. Think about it: Today's kids play on their phones—they don't play guitars. I have 50 guitars in my house, but do my kids ever pick them up? No.

2000 | A TIME OF DIVERSIFICATION

We decided to redefine GHS Strings as not just a string manufacturer but also a musical accessory manufacturer. We started to sell picks, straps, and cables. Then, in 2000, GHS Strings diversified again by buying an electronics company named Rockton that makes electronics for the music industry. We started designing and selling electronics, including guitar pedals and the world's best-selling talk box, called the Banshee. Everybody from Kid Rock to Bon Jovi uses the Banshee.

The dynamics of family business aren't always perfect. You may think it's all fun and games, but one of the problems is that your business follows you everywhere. You go to dinner at your parents' house, and you talk business. But we make it work.

2015 | EXPANDED MARKET THROUGH INNOVATION

About four years ago, we changed the inner package for our guitar strings. We started sealing the product in a nitrogen-rich environment. Due to oxygen in the air, metal strings oxidize and corrode. But by eliminating the oxygen and pumping nitrogen into the packages instead, we can now claim that our strings have an unlimited shelf life. This is particularly important for countries like China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines, where they have high humidity. We're the only company doing this, and it has helped us enter new markets. GHS Strings sells to about 90 countries across the world, and almost half of our business this year was through export. While the U.S. is obviously our biggest market, it is certainly not our fastest-growing market. In 2019, that will be China.

2019 | WHAT'S NEXT?

GHS Strings has great plans for the year: 2019 is going to be a year of acquisition after acquisition. We're buying a company in the United Kingdom that makes big, upright [acoustic] bass instruments for jazz and bluegrass. We're also in negotiations with a company that makes finger picks in Michigan.

FAVORITE CONCERT

Aerosmith at Wings Stadium in 1976.

FAMILY TIES

We still operate like a small company; I get everybody involved. I don't have any secrets—I tell our hourly employees the same things I tell our management. My wife and daughter work in the business too. When I came back to Michigan to work at GHS Strings, my wife went to work for Kellogg's in its marketing department. She took Tony the Tiger all over the country by bringing the suit to different locations and hiring a local actor to wear it. Of course, the actor couldn't talk—because they would all sound different—so she would be the spokesperson. She would say, "Tony has laryngitis," or something. But in 1990, she came to work for the family business as well. She still does a lot of our marketing. We come home; we fight about business. It never shuts off. Never. But I always get the last word in: "Yes, dear."

The dynamics of a family business aren't always perfect. You may think it's all fun and games, but one of the problems is that your business follows you everywhere. You go to dinner at your parents' house, and you talk business. You go out with your brother, and you talk business. But we make it work. I'm proud of the fact that, after 55 years, we're still growing every year.



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A RECIPE FOR HOPE

AT THIS GOURMET GALA, THE MARCH OF DIMES SERVES UP MIRACLES

BY JAKE FREDERICKS PHOTO RICK FLAGET

MARK JONES

Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of AmeriFirst Home Mortgage and Presenting Sponsor of March of Dimes Signature Chefs Auction

EVENT

Signature Chefs Auction

ORGANIZATION

March of Dimes

DATE AND TIME

September 29, 2019 at 5:30 pm

LOCATION

Radisson Plaza Hotel at Kalamazoo Center
100 West Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

FINE DINING WITH A PURPOSE

AmeriFirst sponsors many different philanthropic events in the community, but the Signature Chefs Auction is our big one. Not only does it help the March of Dimes raise money to research solutions for the biggest risks that premature babies face—but the food is simply spectacular.

TOO MANY CHEFS? IMPOSSIBLE!

The March of Dimes hosts chefs from the area's top restaurants. The night of the event, each chef prepares two to three bite-sized entrees at stations around the Radisson ballroom. The variety is amazing. Guests get to walk around and sample each dish, then vote for their favorite chef.

In the lobby, there are silent auctions with prizes sponsored by local businesses. There is also a professional, motor-mouth auctioneer to auction off the big-ticket items that are picked especially for foodies. You can even win the honor of having a chef come to your home to prepare a five-course meal! One year, my wife and I won a cooking class at Zazios and were able to create a fantastic dinner for two with the help of the restaurant's head chef.

A LIFE-CHANGING EVENING

The reason I love this event is more personal than business-related. The first time I was invited to the Signature Chefs Auction was about 10 years ago. That night, the speaker

The original mission of the March of Dimes was not healthy babies—the first was the eradication of polio.

shared something that I didn't know: The original mission of the March of Dimes was not healthy babies—that was actually its second mission—the first was the eradication of polio. In fact, back when polio was a widespread childhood illness, the March of Dimes got its name from the school kids who marched around with little cans asking for a dime to fund research.

The March of Dimes had touched my life twice. When my dad was 15, he was stricken with polio and lost all the muscles in his left leg. The children's hospital that he went to, which was supported by the March of Dimes, was able to rehabilitate him. Because of that, my dad never had to be in a wheelchair, he never used crutches, and I never saw his leg as a handicap. Then, years later, when my youngest son was born prematurely, my wife and I were unbelievably grateful that he was able to benefit from the advances the March of Dimes had developed in their mission, such as an oxygen therapy tent.

I went home that night 10 years ago and decided to jump into supporting the March of Dimes with both feet. How often do you get a philanthropic organization that succeeds in its original mission and has the enviable problem of needing to find a new cause? What a great testament to an organization with real impact.



BY RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO HIGHWAYSTARZ-PHOTOGRAPHY (ISTOCK)



Grow Your Future—One Intern at a Time

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS ARE WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS ACROSS THE BOARD

TALENTED YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACROSS SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN AND AROUND THE WORLD FLOCK TO THE REGION'S UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES HOPING TO GROW THEIR FUTURES. BUT WITHOUT REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE, THE ROAD IS LONG AND ARDUOUS.

Meanwhile, companies across the region are facing challenges of their own, given that a growing number of their most experienced and reliable employees are considering retirement.

It would seem that the demand for talent would be easily filled by eager applicants fresh out of college. However, two barriers stand in the way. The first is that, in search of the most qualified candidates in an already tight job market, employers often opt for experienced professionals over recent grads. At the same time, grads, who are often unaware of the full spectrum of possibilities available to them in Southwest Michigan, may opt to move across the state or the country in search of that perfect job.

The good news is that the leg up young job seekers need to find opportunities in Southwest Michigan—a quality internship with a regional business—is becoming more readily available. Until recently, internships have gotten a bad name. As a region, we're rightfully reframing the way we think of internships, by seeing interns as more than just "summer help" or "coffee picker-uppers." Providing interns with meaningful job skills and experiences is a win for all involved. The internship programs of today should not only equip young professionals with the real-world experiences they need to compete in the job market but also support businesses by allowing easy access to talented and driven team members.

For aspiring young professionals, it's a given that a good internship can be just the resume-booster they need. But beyond that, an internship should be an opportunity to explore career pathways and new opportunities available right here in the region. And if an internship provides a young person with mentorship, applicable experience, and engagement, it could easily lead to a job. According to Forbes, 60 percent of internships turn into job offers. And the National Association of Colleges and Employers tells us that 90 percent of interns who work for a company for two internship periods join the company after graduation. But you don't have to look any farther than the pages of 269 MAGAZINE to see former interns who have found a great fit at a local business that led to a satisfying career.

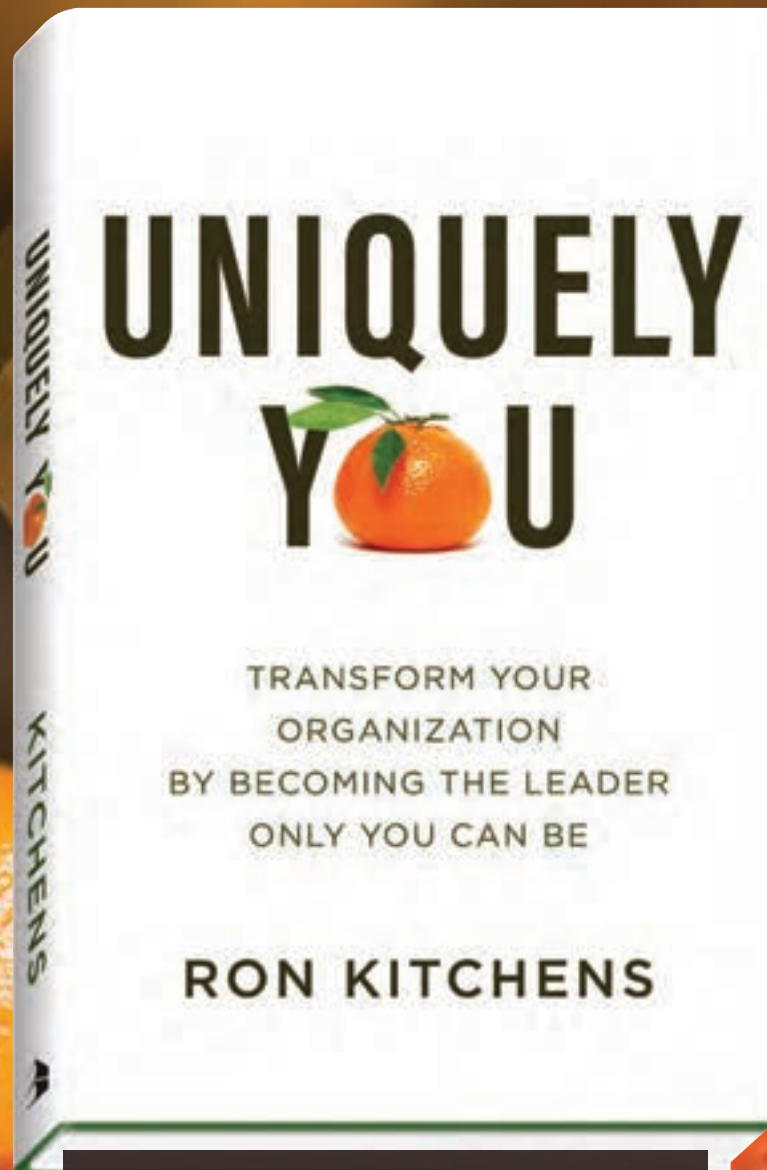
For businesses of all stripes, a successful internship program can establish a pipeline of talent. This relieves much of the stress that comes with vexing and costly recruiting efforts. Throughout the region, more and more companies are thinking strategically about how to diversify and enrich their internship programs. Perhaps a business major from Western Michigan University (WMU) could bring new ideas to your sales department.

Or maybe an art expert studying at Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) could be just what your graphic design team needs to take your communications to the next level.

To grow the leaders of tomorrow, we as a region need to provide fertile soil for those just starting to take root. We need to water them with the time, resources, opportunities, and advice they need. Given the right conditions and challenges, interns thrive. There are over 5,000 students in each class at WMU alone; if businesses commit to accepting new talent and creating meaningful experiences for them, we could secure the future of this region. The intern you take on for the summer could quickly mature into your next new hire, then one day your experienced manager, until—eventually—they become a community leader with the next big idea that propels Southwest Michigan to even greater things.

ALWAYS FORWARD,

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



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**A LEADER'S PAST
CAN HELP CREATE A
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To learn more about Eaton in Southwest Michigan, go to: [Eaton.com/SWMichigan](https://www.eaton.com/SWMichigan)

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