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EIMO TECHNOLOGIES INJECTS
BEAUTY INTO EVERYDAY
PRODUCTS

269

MAGAZINE



DESIGN DESTINATION

AN INNOVATIVE HISTORY MAKES
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN A NATURAL
DRAW FOR DESIGNERS



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TOAST OF THE TOWN

**Grey Skies Distillery Handcrafts
Spirits With The Freshest Ingredients**

DESIGNER BLUEPRINT

**How Alison Shields Designs For
The User Experience at Stryker**



By: Steve Beebe
Business Relations Expert

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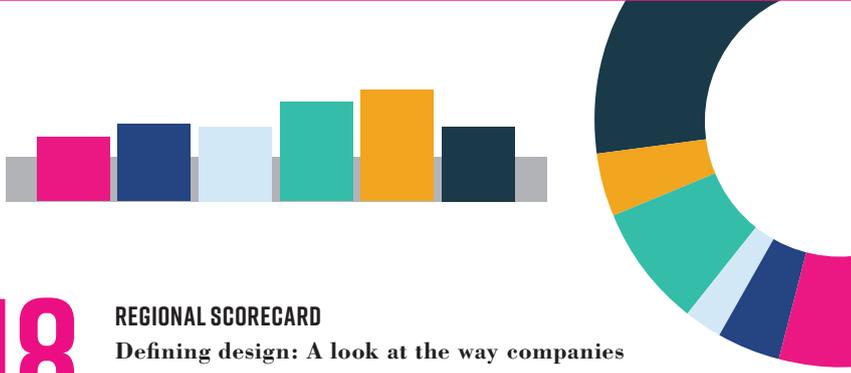
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— Steve Jobs



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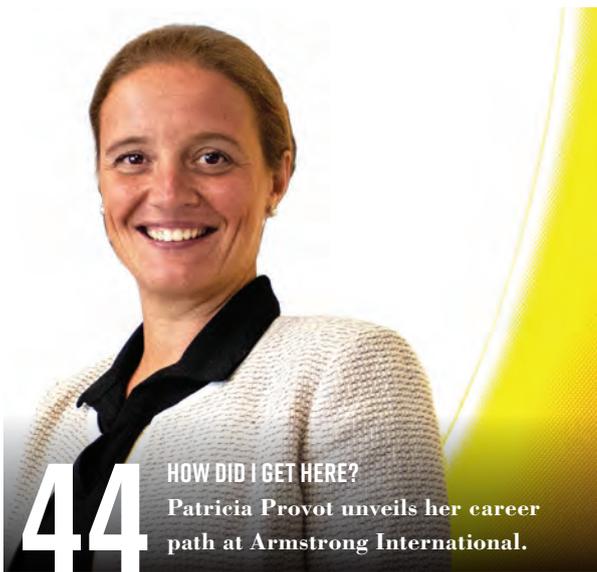
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BY HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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What Is Design?

IT'S ABOUT BRINGING IDEAS TO LIFE AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE



WHAT IS DESIGN?"

If you asked that question of someone passing by on any Main Street U.S.A., you would most likely get a response that included some decorative, even artistic, description.

Here in Southwest Michigan, where almost 25 percent of the workforce is employed in some profession tied to the manufacturing industry, you'd probably receive a different response. And it would go something like this: "Design is about progress. It's about knowing where you want to go, while clearly understanding where you've been. Design is about making life easier for people through a product, service, or end result. It's about seeing something that no one has ever seen before and putting that something in someone's hands. It's a way of life."

Here in Southwest Michigan, the impact of our designers can be experienced from the moment the alarm clock goes off. Scrambled eggs cooked on a Whirlpool cooktop. Music blaring out of that molded console in your car. The click of a Paper Mate pen as you scribble notes during a presentation. The swivel of your Herman Miller chair as you stand up to head home at 5:00 p.m. Or, that text telling you to bring home pizza, which you read on a cell phone that's fully powered thanks to your mophie juice pack.

These products all come from the minds of designers. No, designers are not magicians, witches, nor wizards. They are educated individuals who pursued degrees in fields like industrial design, graphic design, interior design, architecture, film studies, and more. What makes them different from

those who don't create products for a living is experience. These individuals are passionate about their field, committed to staying relevant, and always honing their technical knowledge.

What designers do and how they do it has a tremendous impact on the businesses in which they work. In "The business value of design," McKinsey & Company confirms that "those with the strongest commitment to design and the most adept execution of design principles had 32 percent more revenue and 56 percent more total returns to shareholders." And they didn't say it, but I will: There's no magic involved.

No, designers are not magicians, witches, nor wizards. They are educated individuals who pursued degrees in fields like industrial design, graphic design, interior design, architecture, film studies, and more.

What that means to everyone reading this right now is that you have the ability to make a difference. If you consider yourself to be a designer, then you know what I'm talking about. For those of us who work in different

fields and hold different degrees or certificates, don't let your current role limit you.

Open your eyes to a different way of seeing and interacting with everyday things. If your production line has a few hiccups, take some time to study it closely to speed things up. Maybe it's a software program that needs debugging; don't let error messages discourage you from identifying the right code and tracking the right path. Or, if it's simply that bike you tripped over in the garage this morning, then maybe it's time to design yourself a better storage plan.

Please enjoy reading about the designers highlighted in this issue of 269 MAGAZINE. After you process what they have to say, be bold and incorporate a little design into your life!

READ ON,

Heather

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JACOB BALLARD

SENIOR INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER,
NEWELL BRANDS

The close-knit factor. The people in this community are very open, friendly, and cordial. When I've gone to different regions in the country and worked with the designers there, they have a different vibe than those in our region. The Midwest is special in that regard. There's a lack of ego and everyone here is very approachable.

The Midwest is special in that regard. There's a lack of ego and everyone here is very approachable.

JACOB BALLARD



DARIUS GREER

RETAIL SALES CONSULTANT
AND ARTIST, AT&T

Growth. The design community in this region is very authentic and always growing. There are a lot of ambitious designers and young entrepreneurs.



KELSEA GUARINO

ACCOUNT MANAGER,
MAESTRO

Being able to interact with different people in the community. At events like MIX, I have the opportunity to just talk to people. It's an experience that's not possible in larger cities.




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DESIGN DESTINATION

AN INNOVATIVE HISTORY MAKES SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN A NATURAL DRAW FOR DESIGNERS

BY KATHRYN DAVIS
WITH HEATHER BAKER

ILLUSTRATIONS
IRINA STRELNKOVA (ISTOCK)
ADAM ROSSI





“I GREW UP HERE AND THOUGHT, ‘I HAVE TO LEAVE AND GET OUT.’ BUT REALLY, I’VE REALIZED THAT EVERYTHING I WANTED, EVEN BACK THEN, WAS ALREADY HERE FOR ME.”

—MATT GIFFELS, STRYKER

The Southwest Michigan economy is often recognized for the strong roles that its pharmaceutical, medical device, furniture, agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing industries play.

But what about design?

Michigan, as a whole, is brimming with designers of all sorts: industrial, interior, graphic, fashion—you get the drift. According to 2017 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Michigan is home to the country’s highest concentration of commercial and industrial designers, surpassing Ohio, Illinois, Texas, New York, and even California. Michigan has almost 40 percent more industrial designers than California and nearly 60 percent more than New York.

When zeroing in on Southwest Michigan, the concentration of commercial and industrial designers is even more striking. This is thanks, in large part, to the region serving as home to global companies such as Stryker and Newell Brands and smaller but still major players like Consort Display Group.

So, how did all those designers get here? It's no surprise really. It all started with regional firsts and innovations in the pharmaceutical, medical device, furniture, agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing industries, of course. Southwest Michigan is a community famous for Checker cabs, parchment paper, the friable pill from the Upjohn Company, Shakespeare rods and reels, Gibson guitars, Dr. Homer Stryker's turning bed frame, Whirlpool washing machines, Kellogg's Corn Flakes, and the list goes on.

Today, you have to look no further than the more than 200 Southwest Michigan companies that incorporate design into their product delivery process, students of Western Michigan University's (WMU) Richmond School of Design and Innovation, and annual MIX events attended by 1,000 area design professionals to see that design in Southwest Michigan not only exists—but thrives.

Don't feel bad if you were surprised by design's dominance in the area. We talked to several members of the Southwest Michigan design community who were unaware of it themselves and even looked elsewhere to find employment before returning to the region.

PERSONAL WALKABOUTS

When Matt Giffels, principle UX/UI (user experience/user interface) designer at Stryker, left his home state of Michigan to start college in

Florida, it was because he saw the move as his best chance at a career in an artistic industry. "My passion was always computers and art and games—anything where I could spend my time being creative and making things. In high school, I spent a ton of time in the art room, and when I went off to college, I knew I had to keep working in that creative realm." Michigan, as Giffels saw it then, just wasn't a place with the sorts of creative opportunities he needed.

MICHIGAN IS HOME TO THE COUNTRY'S HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS, SURPASSING OHIO, ILLINOIS, TEXAS, NEW YORK, AND EVEN CALIFORNIA.

For Roger Lepley, owner and president of Consort Display Group, the beginning of his career in architecture and industrial design began much the same as Giffels' did—with him shipping out to seek creative work beyond the Mitten State. "I grew up in Kalamazoo, but I left to study architecture at the University of Colorado. At one point, I was actually drafted into the Army, where they put me to work in the Graphic Arts Department."

Laurie Vennie's path to the world of design took her, in some ways, even farther away from home base than Lepley's or

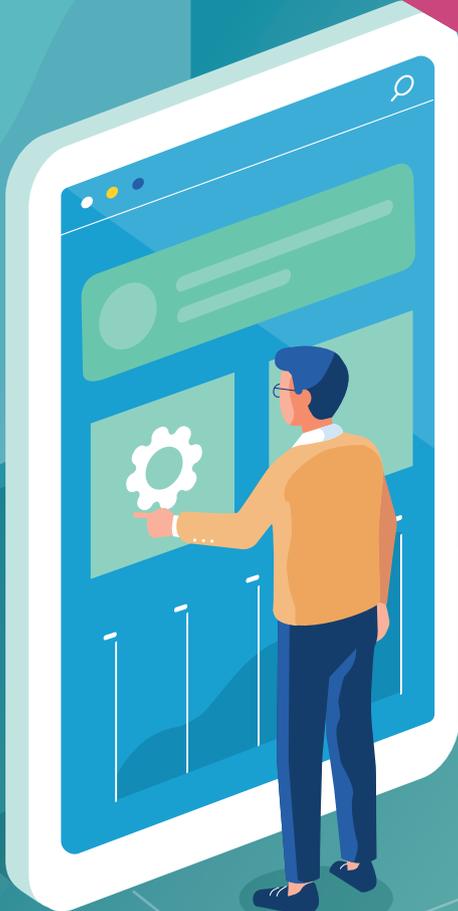
RETURNING BOOMERANGS

It took Giffels nearly 15 years to return to Michigan. In his decade and a half spent out of town, he worked mainly in video game design, on projects like NCAA Madden and Call of Duty. "I worked my way up to senior UX designer, although, for me, titles have always been somewhat irrelevant. Really, I was still doing lots of the usual [repetitive and tedious] work people tend to expect from designers."

Things changed when Giffels had a child.

"Ever since my child was born, coming back to Michigan was in the back of my mind. There was a point where I finally realized the work that I was doing wasn't worth staying so far from my family,

and I decided I'd move back to Michigan. I was pretty sure I wouldn't find anything I wanted to do [in



Michigan]—
sort of like
[how I felt] when I left
initially—but I decided I'd
move and figure the rest out later.”

And figure it out he did. “I just started applying everywhere—Meijer, Ford, Stryker, some other random spots—and then Stryker called.” Now, Giffels uses the creative perspectives he’s always had and the experience he’s gained over the years in a very different sector. “No matter my job title, the Adobe Suite has always been my second home—my first home, actually, in a lot of cases.”

In another fated change, the recession of 1981-1982 stunted construction projects in Michigan and that’s when Lepley’s career began a turn from architecture to industrial design. “Someone from Kalamazoo’s city council asked if I’d be willing to create some street banners like the ones they had in Chicago. At the time, Chicago was the only place with these banners. When the project was finished, I started to get all kinds of calls from all over the place—other cities that wanted banners of their own.”

So Lepley agreed, and he soon found himself busy enough to partner with a young graduate of WMU’s design program, who Lepley affectionately refers to as ‘Ed the Head.’ “Ed Tereshinski was a designer, but he could do anything,” Lepley explained. “For a long time, he was the head of every project we conducted.”

“And we kept at it,” Lepley continued. “We kept doing the little projects. We kept expanding, and eventually, we started to do the vast majority of our processes in-house. It got to the point where we had this whole team of people who could help in every stage of the process—and now we conduct business and work in design across the world.”

Vennie, who’d had a winding path of her own, also found herself called back to Southwest Michigan’s design community. “When I started at Newell Brands, none of this existed,” she said, gesturing to the building she works in now. “None of our team really even knew it was being built.” Though

employed
by Newell,
Vennie had been
living in Chicago. All
of her teammates also worked
remotely. But, when the building was
ready, the move to Southwest Michigan wasn’t a
hard sell. “I’m originally from St. Joseph, so when
they announced the new building, it just made
sense that I’d move with the job.”

Vennie described what it was like when she and the rest of the Newell team arrived at the freshly-finished building. “None of us knew what to expect, not from the building, not from each other.” Not knowing one another’s primary disciplines and specialties from the get-go actually allowed the team to fall into a highly collaborative rhythm, Vennie said. As most any design professional will tell you, design is all about solving problems. That, the Newell team did.

MIXING IT UP

When asked about their connection to the greater community of designers who call Southwest Michigan home, Giffels, Lepley, and Vennie unanimously noted their desire for deeper involvement. While Giffels has a global network from his years in video game design, Lepley has close relationships with long-time colleagues, and Vennie benefits from her tight-knit professional community, each creative recognizes the importance of creating connections—especially in a rapidly growing creative community.

And rapidly growing it is.

Back in 2017, Dan Guyette, dean of WMU’s College of Fine Arts, shared with 269 MAGAZINE that an undergraduate curriculum was in development for

the then newly unveiled
Richmond Institute for
Design and Innovation. Spurred by a
\$3 million gift from James and Lois Richmond
and supported by companies like Whirlpool, Tekna,
Newell Brands, Stryker, Fabri-Kal, Landscape Forms, and
Eaton, the institute was poised to be one of the most dynamic and
exciting programs anywhere.

In the spring of 2021, the institute’s first graduating class will
go out into the community and begin their careers. These young
professionals will have completed more than 125 credit hours

***IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE WE
HAD THIS WHOLE TEAM OF PEOPLE
WHO COULD HELP IN EVERY STAGE
OF THE PROCESS—AND NOW WE
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DESIGN ACROSS THE WORLD.***

—ROGER LEPLEY, CONSORT DISPLAY GROUP

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Their presence in the community, and that of future cohorts, will further bolster the region's status as a hub for design.

To bring these students, individuals like Giffels, Lepley, and Vennie, and their thousands of peers across the region together, regional economic catalyst Southwest Michigan First created MIX. The MIX initiative invites local creatives to come together for mixers, seminars, and workshops throughout the year. "The name of MIX has homegrown roots: MI stands for Michigan, and X marks the spot where creativity happens," said Petey Stephanak, partner at Southwest Michigan First.

***"THE NAME OF MIX HAS
HOMEGROWN ROOTS: MI STANDS
FOR MICHIGAN, AND X MARKS THE
SPOT WHERE CREATIVITY HAPPENS."***

—PETEY STEPHANAK, SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST

MIX events, which run the gamut from learning to networking experiences, are open to anyone who has a passion for design. Discovery sessions offer panel discussions where area experts

weigh in on specific areas of design, from problem-solving to the gig economy to how IoT (Internet of Things) will impact future living. There's also MIX Design Day, a day-long event where engineers from the automotive and medical device sector learn interactively alongside film and music makers. Plus, MIX hosts an end-of-year Innovation Celebration, which gives attendees an up-close look at the award-winning projects from students across WMU and K-12 schools.

Considering the availability of design jobs, the local university curriculum, and the host of curated events, it's not hard to predict that Southwest Michigan's design opportunities will continue to bring regional expats back.

"Looking at the area today, after coming back so much later, I'm realizing that there are a ton of design firms in the region," Giffels reflected. "I grew up here and thought, 'I have to leave and get out.' But really, I've realized that everything I wanted, even back then, was already here for me."

DEFINING DESIGN

AESTHETICS, FUNCTIONALITY, COMPOSITION, EXPERIENCE

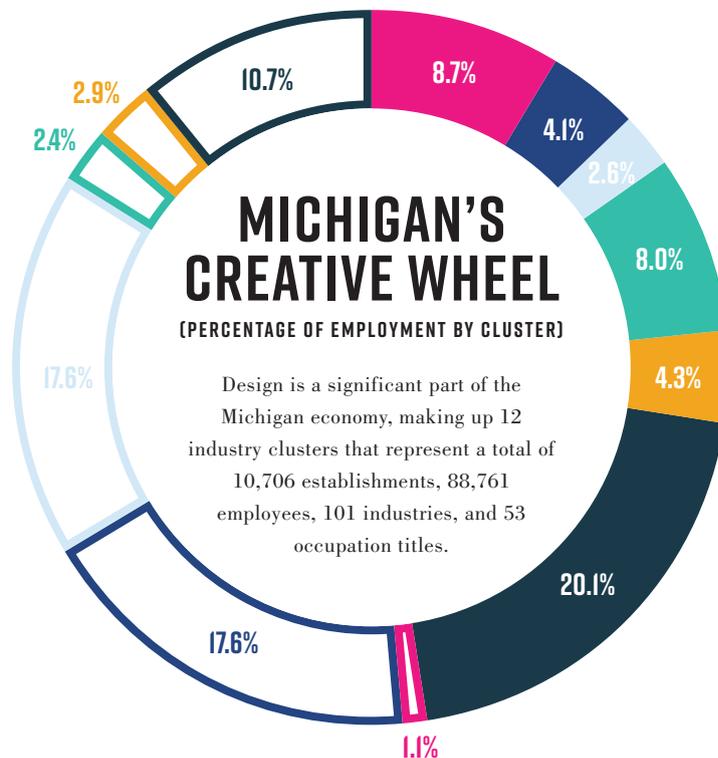
BY HEATHER BAKER

It is commonly agreed that the term “design” is difficult to define. What does it mean to be a designer? What does it mean to employ a design-focused approach? For companies, what does it mean to be design-centric? For this issue’s scorecard, 269 MAGAZINE defines design as the art or process of planning and creating something.

DESIGN INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

The wheel to the right demonstrates the percentage of overall employment within the design space in Michigan by cluster.

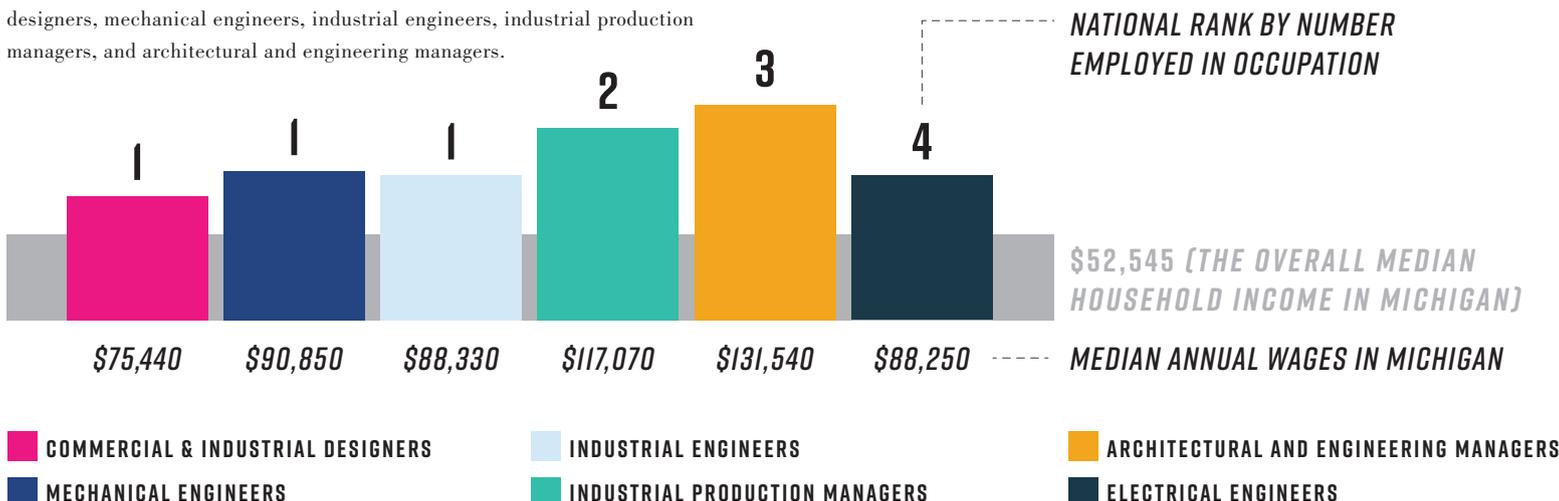
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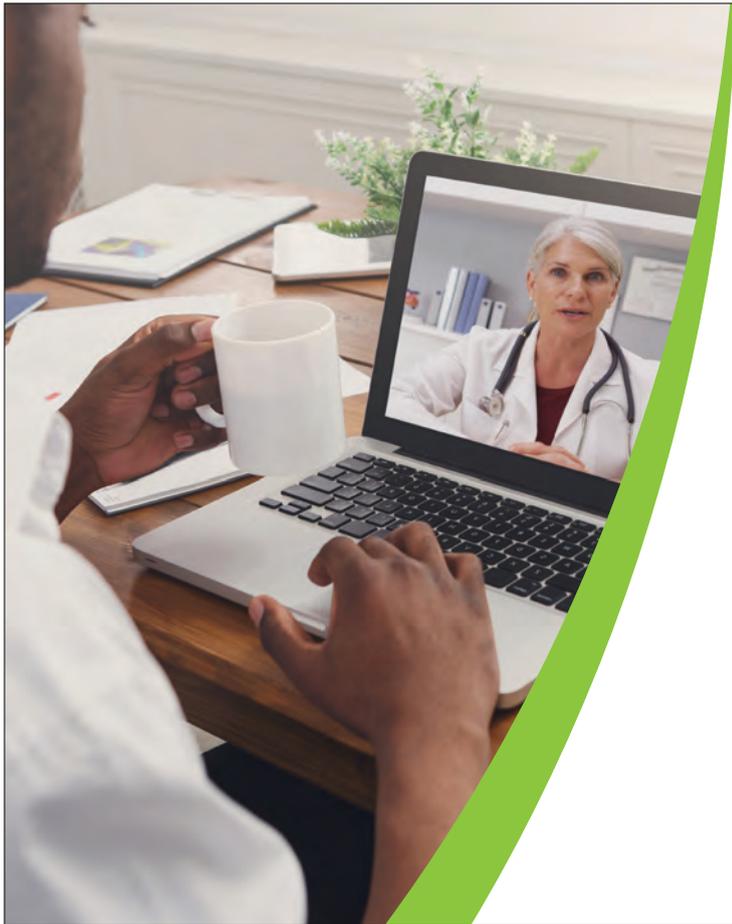
Source: “CREATIVE state MICHIGAN,” 2016 Creative Industries Report by Foundations for a Creative Economic Policy for Michigan.

LEADING OCCUPATIONS

Designers are embedded throughout the manufacturing industry. Michigan has the highest concentration in the country of commercial and industrial designers, mechanical engineers, industrial engineers, industrial production managers, and architectural and engineering managers.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2017)



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Coming to the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts in September *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*

September 14 - December 8, 2019



Njideka Akunyili Crosby, *Nwantinti*, 2012. Acrylic, pastel, charcoal, colored pencil, and Xerox transfers on paper, 68 × 96 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee and gift of the artist 2012.41.1 © Njideka Akunyili Crosby. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, David Zwirner, and American Federation of Arts

Enjoy the treasures of The Studio Museum in Harlem in the show's only Midwest stop, plus two remarkable exhibitions.

Resilience: African American Artists As Agents of Change will offer a fresh perspective on the 95-year old museum's collection, exhibiting more than 150 years of masterly works.

Where We Stand: Black Artists in Southwest Michigan will illuminate the talents of artists who enrich the region's cultural landscape.

Join us for this momentous occasion, when nearly the entire American art museum will be transformed to celebrate the role of Black artists in art history.

Visit kiarts.org for information about exhibitions and related events.

KALAMAZOO INSTITUTE OF ARTS



This exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and The Studio Museum in Harlem. Major support for *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem* provided by Art Bridges. Support for the accompanying publication provided by Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund.

INJECTING BEAUTY INTO EVERYDAY PRODUCTS

VICKSBURG-BASED **EIMO TECHNOLOGIES** SPECIALIZES IN DECORATIVE INJECTION MOLDING

BY KATHRYN DAVIS PHOTOS HANNAH ZIEGELER

COMPANY

Eimo Technologies

IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU

The first instinct of many is to pronounce this company's name as "Eee-mo," "Eye-mo," or even "El-mo." (That's right, as in the star of Sesame Street!) However, the correct pronunciation goes back to the company's Finnish roots. All together now, "Ay-mo!"

KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES

A few decades ago, Eimo Technologies was known as Triple S Plastics. The "Triple S" stood for its three original owners—Dave and Phil Stewart and Vic Siemers. With expertise in plastics and film, the company had customers like IBM, Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Polaroid. Its focus shifted over the years to cell phone production, with customers such as Sony Ericsson, Nokia, and Kyocera. With this shift, it laid the ground work for a merger with the Finnish company Eimo and in doing so, became a global presence in the production of mobile phones. "In 2001, Triple S merged with Eimo, which controlled much of the telecom market in the eastern hemisphere," said current Plant Manager, Randy Bongard. "We then took over a high-volume share of the global market for injection molding for telecom with these three major players at the time."

A little further down the line, Eimo was purchased by Foxconn, after which the company solidified into its current form. "Over time, it got to the point where our work was diversified between the medical, consumer, and automotive industries," said Bongard. "We started to focus a good portion of our work on decorative products for automotive, and now we have four decorative processes within the walls of our company—something we believe no one else in the world can offer."

RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU

Although you may not realize it just yet, Eimo's products are all over the place in your everyday life. Eimo covers a remarkable range of products and industries. A total of 53 injection machines allows the company to handle both low- and high-volume projects. Its portfolio of work features interior and exterior moldings for vehicles and finishings for electronics, appliances, health interfaces and devices, and more. The manufacturer's diverse background and versatility in production capabilities allow it to rise above many competitors as well as expand its own capabilities and projects on a regular basis.

EXCELLING ACROSS THE BOARD

"From a vision standpoint, we have always been focused on production and quality as our core," said Bongard. "But in the past few years, we've really started to focus on our people and culture which is the key to our success over the years. I wouldn't say we're getting away from our profit-centered approach—that'll always be important—but we're trying to invest equal energy into our people and their experience here."

For Eimo, much of this focus on employees begins with transparency on behalf of the company. "We share everything possible with our team—our cost of quality, financials, physical improvements in the space, wages—anything that might apply to the staff is covered openly with them."

Eimo recognizes the fact that workplace culture today demands a high level of care for and value placed on the employee. "The worst thing a company can do is fail to acknowledge its workers—to compliment them, to recognize their work, and thank them for it," said Bongard.

SUPPORTING THE INFANTRY

A military veteran, Bongard tends to approach work at Eimo with much the same mindset as in his prior career. "I like to think of our staff at Eimo as infantrymen: They're the nuts and bolts—the guts of the operation. They're the boots on the ground, and they're the ones on the battlefield doing the fighting," said Bongard.

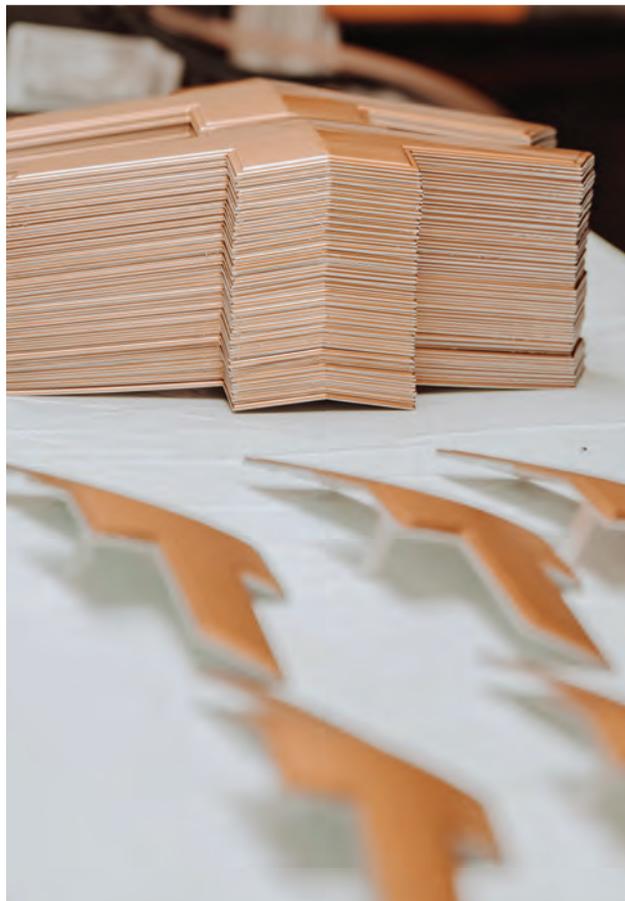
"We cannot win without them. Manufacturing is not easy; it is a continual fight to remain on top in our competitive industry. So from a leadership perspective, it's our sole responsibility to remove whatever roadblocks or obstacles that may get in the way of their success. It's our job to set them up for success and to support them all along the way, wherever the fight may take us."

A CLOSED SYSTEM FOR SUCCESS

From culture to physical products, Eimo Technologies pours half a century's worth of expertise into every aspect of its operations. With three complete plants located within just a few miles of one another, there's little need for the company to outsource tasks. Between treatment of staff, expertise, and sheer dedication to creating the highest-quality and most luxurious designer moldings in the business, Eimo Technologies comes out on top of the competition. The company is a real point of pride for the village of Vicksburg and Southwest Michigan overall.



The worst thing a company can do is fail to acknowledge its workers—to compliment them, to recognize their work, and thank them for it.



COMPANY TIMELINE

1969
Founded as Triple S Plastics

2001
Merged with Eimo Oy o Lahti Finland

2003
Eimo is acquired by Taiwan-based Foxconn

2008
Acquired by Nissha Co., Ltd. of Japan and its North American subsidiary Nissha USA, Inc.

HEADQUARTERS

14320 Portage Rd,
Vicksburg, MI 49097

LOCAL EXECUTIVES

Gary Hallam
General Manager

Randy Bongard
Plant Manager

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

300

REGIONAL FOOTPRINT

Three sites totaling
145,000 square feet

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- Medical
- Appliance
- Consumer Products
- Industrial
- Defense
- Other

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DESIGNING EXPERIENCES

USING EMPATHY AND PLENTY OF POST-ITS

A Q+A WITH ALISON SHIELDS

USER EXPERIENCE RESEARCHER AT **STRYKER**

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO KATHRYN DAVIS

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WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AT STRYKER?

I'm a user experience (UX) researcher on Stryker's product development team. My job is to advocate for the people who will eventually use our products.

I work to understand the needs of the end-user by gathering authentic feedback. My projects involve Stryker tools and graphic user interface (GUI) design. GUI designers connect and blend the digital world with the physical world. Within the medical field, many tools plug into consoles with software systems and interactive screens. When you're designing the interface, you have to make sure that the screen represents what's happening in the physical world and that it's being displayed in real-time.

HOW DO YOU EXPLORE USER EXPERIENCE?

Let's say our design team is developing a prototype for a tool used in surgery and we're considering five different handle concepts. To help us choose the best design, I ask surgeons to interact with each of our models. I conduct interviews with them afterward about their experiences. Throughout this process, I gather their feedback, whether it's verbal feedback, nonverbal feedback, or ranked choices. I have to get as much data as possible to decide which design would be best for those using the product.

UX is all about empathy. We have to understand what the end user's world looks like through their eyes. I've even gone to a cadaver lab, held Stryker products in my hands, and performed procedures on a cadaver. Healthcare is a critical industry, and that makes it even more important that designers get it right. Because of my role, I get an inside look into operating rooms to watch surgeries happen. It's humbling to sit in the corner with my notebook observing and trying to understand real-life scenarios.

HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND A USER'S POINT OF VIEW?

Early in my research, I determine the problems, or pain points, that our users currently encounter. I have conversations with surgeons, radiologists, and nurses, asking them to tell me a story about a time they used one of our products. If I just come out and ask, "What's your biggest pain point?" I won't get the answers I need. Many times, no one knows which problems need solving; my job is to challenge the way things have always been done. I ask them about the last time they were frustrated during

a procedure. For medical professionals, it's crucial that our designs limit their cognitive load—they shouldn't even be thinking about our products; their tools should be an extension of their hand.

In addition to research, I also synthesize the data I collect to drive informed design decisions. It's my job to translate data into insights. To make sense of it all, I have to get the information up on a whiteboard in front of me. I have to have Post-it Notes. I have to have color-coding. I create journey maps that show the users' product experience from start to finish. My goal is to find themes and trends by breaking down the process. This helps our team solve problems while keeping the positive aspects of a product.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU WANTED TO PURSUE DESIGN PROFESSIONALLY?

I took a nontraditional path to my current role. In high school, I had two passions. The first was art. I took creative classes that allowed me to do research on a topic and then interpret that information through artwork. I liked connecting the dots and conveying a message, whether that was through painting, ceramics, or any number of things. My other love was forensics, or oratory competitions. For fun on the weekends, I would dress in a suit and give 10-minute speeches. I became heavily involved and went to state and national competitions.

When I started at Hope College, which was my dream school, I was able to combine my two passions and double-major in studio art and communications. I specialized in painting. But in my final semester, I decided to get an internship because I didn't want to be a starving artist. I worked on a creative marketing and design team in the consulting world, and I loved it. After graduation, I was hired full-time. My first job was calling up mommy bloggers and gathering their opinions to create visual marketing for a children's toy that was sold in toy stores across the country.

HOW DID YOUR CAREER PATH LEAD YOU TO STRYKER?

My last consulting client was Stryker. They must have liked me because they asked me to join their team. I had just gotten married, and I started at Stryker two weeks after I got back from my honeymoon. My husband is also a creative person, and when I was still doing consulting work, he applied to Western Michigan University's product design program. He was accepted right around the same time I started working full-time at Stryker. Now that he's taking art and design classes, it's been remarkable how our worlds have blended.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY?

I learned early on that art is for yourself and design is for others. In the world of design, the goal is to make something for an end-user—and you're never the end user. It's always about others. I now know that if I want to create something for myself, I have to paint on my own time.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ASPIRING DESIGNERS?

Be willing to try something new! When opportunities come your way, say yes. When I first said yes to research, I wasn't sure whether it was what I wanted to do, but that decision changed the trajectory of my career. When you're first starting out, jump into unfamiliar territory, learn new things, and find out how you can apply your strengths. For designers and creatives, leverage your talent for visualization and your ability to tell a compelling story—it's a unique gift!

One last thing: Don't underestimate the power of grit. Long nights don't end in college. Everything you create is part of your personal brand. When people see my name on a project, I want them to be able to trust I've worked hard to make sure it's excellent.



SMOOTH AS GLASS

A BRIGHT FUTURE IS CLEAR FOR FORMAN GLASS

BY CATHY KNAPP PHOTO TRISHA DUNHAM

COMSTOCK TOWNSHIP WILL SPARKLE MORE BRILLIANTLY THANKS TO THE 25,200-SQUARE-FOOT FORMAN GLASS EXPANSION THAT BROKE GROUND IN JUNE 2019.

While the aesthetic impact Forman Glass brings to a project is dazzling, the company's solutions are practical. This 57-year-old company specializes in providing comprehensive solutions for the "building envelope"—all exterior glass and metal panels.

Forman Glass President Richard Phillips explains, "Our team has expertise in determining thermal values and net-zero energy properties that reduce the carbon footprint. We assist in meeting a client's goals encompassing cost, aesthetics, and glass performance."

Phillips began his career as a certified public accountant with companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange. In 2006, he was ready for a career change and bought into the Forman Glass business.

"I bought out my two partners during the recession," Phillips says. And he's moved full-speed ahead, even bringing on his son, Bob Phillips, to join the business.

Both are enthusiastic about the Comstock expansion, which will create 20 new jobs. Fabrication currently being performed in the company's Fort Wayne facility will be shifted there. All work is custom, involving 24-foot stock-lengths of extruded aluminum cut to size and formed into frames in which the glass is installed. Commercial service and residential work will continue to take place in the Fort Wayne facility, which also houses a showroom and product inventories.

Father and son reminisced about notable projects the company has completed. One involved a client request for a 20-foot-by-25-foot wall of glass. "It would have cost \$250,000," Richard says. "We suggested cutting it down to four panels with metal framing, reducing the price to \$25,000."

"Forman Glass is able to deliver on projects of this magnitude because we have a seasoned group of journeymen," Bob says. "We spend a lot of time training our employees. We bring people in as apprentices because you don't learn these skills in high school or college."

Apprentices rotate among different journeymen with varied specialties and expertise, resulting in a well-rounded team. "Our culture is one that works well with people who are self-motivated and can work independently. Goals are given, but people are not micro-managed," Bob says. "We want to be a place where people enjoy working and care about the quality and service they provide."

Perhaps the mission statement created by the Forman Glass team summarizes it best: "We want to be the best glass supplier in the eyes of our team members and our customers."

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

RAISE YOUR GLASS TO CELEBRATE JOBS

Regional economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First welcomed the opportunity to assist Forman Glass in expanding its presence in Michigan. The project, five months in the making, began with the team at Southwest Michigan First introducing Forman Glass leadership to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Through this introduction, Forman Glass explored and attained a \$100,000 Business Development Program grant to assist with project costs. Introductions were also facilitated with Comstock Township representatives for project support and infrastructure solutions. The result: 20 new skilled jobs in the region, further diversifying the area's manufacturing base.

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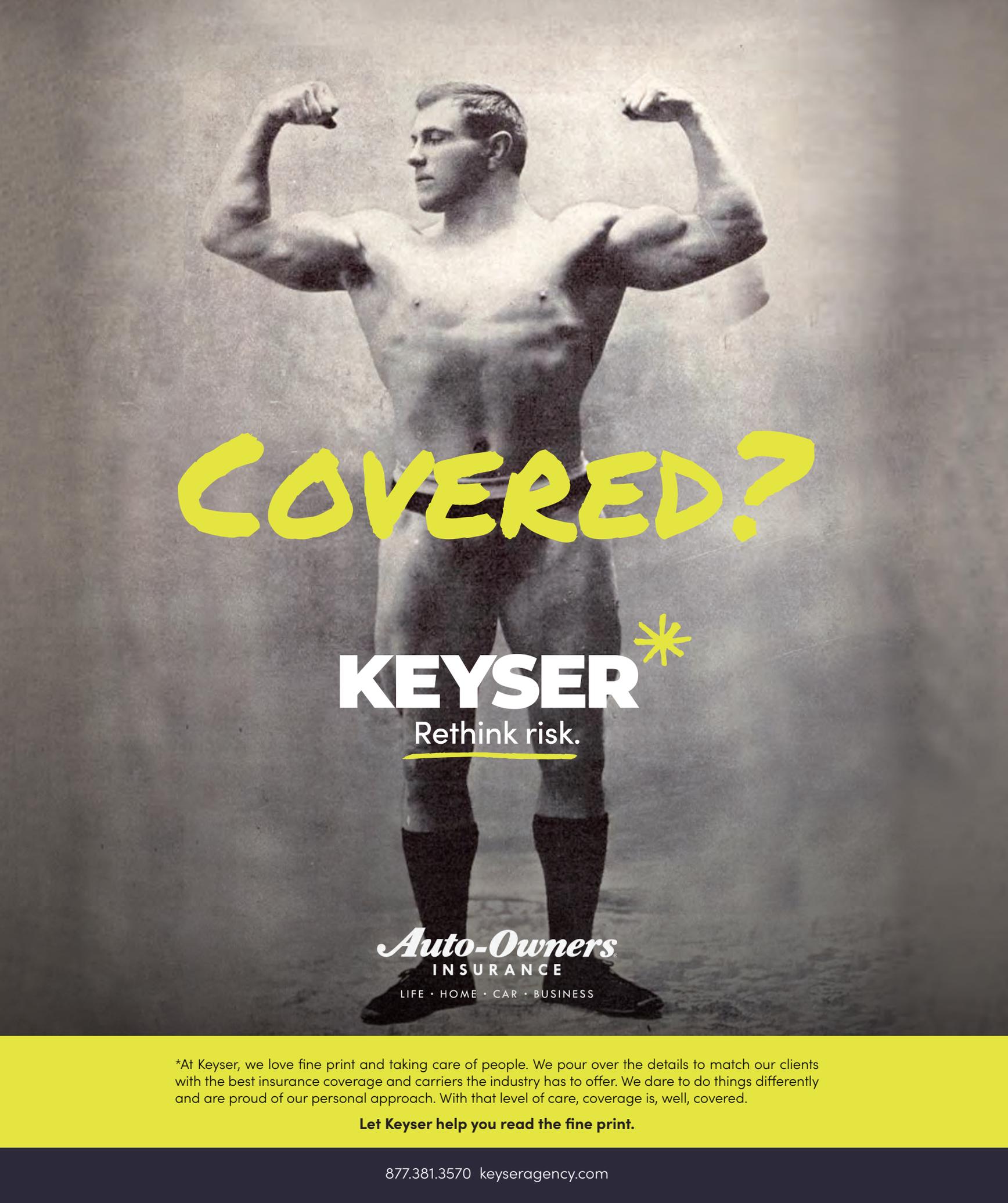
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GETTING DOWN TO THE NUTS AND BOLTS

BEN JEGLIC IS GETTING HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE AT KAISER ALUMINUM

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO KATHRYN DAVIS

KEEPING PACE WITH PRODUCTION

I work on the engineering and maintenance team. Our main goal as a team is to maintain our equipment, though I have helped with a number of other projects. Kaiser Aluminum's Kalamazoo facility is a leading producer of aluminum extrusions, specifically rod and bar in different shapes and sizes for general industrial and certain automotive applications. We are a critical part of the overall supply chain and our customers rely on us to keep up production. We need our machines to be up and running 24/7, 365 [days a year], and it's my team's responsibility to make sure that happens. I help keep parts in inventory so that if a piece of equipment goes down, we can get it back online as soon as possible.

LIKE A WELL-OILED MACHINE

When I come in at eight o'clock, I get a cup of coffee and read my email, but I have to hit the ground running. After our team's morning meeting, I like to get out on the floor a lot because it's hard to get things done at your desk. You have to go out there with the production team and the machines and get your hands dirty. If I have time, I start working on my long-term projects. Recently, one of my projects was to help install automatic lubricators on our equipment, which will improve efficiency and eliminate the process of having to dive in there and do it manually.

LESSONS LEARNED

My most important takeaway from this internship is that I have so much to learn. I've always done well in my engineering classes at WMU, so I started here thinking I knew everything already. I couldn't have been more wrong. There are people here with decades and decades of experience under their belts. I also learned that everyone has a particular niche to match their strengths. For example, when I run into a mechanical problem, I go to our master of mechanics. That has taught me how to work on a team. We can't afford to be critics; we all have the same goal, and we're here to support each other.

FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

I have been working at Kaiser since last summer, so I've been here for over a year. I work about 20 hours during the school year to leave time for classes, and then I'm full-time in the summer. Because I am accustomed to the flow of working every day, I feel one-hundred-percent ready to enter the working world. But because I have to be at peak efficiency all the time, I have been trying to focus on my personal life lately to make sure I stay balanced and happy. A career is important, but I can't be at my best if I am rundown.

MEET BEN

POSITION

Engineering Intern at Kaiser Aluminum

EDUCATION

Western Michigan University (WMU)
Industrial and Entrepreneurial
Engineering

Graduation Date: May 2020



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Who: Leaders at any level



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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

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Who: Emerging leaders



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Who: Leaders at any level



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Who: Professionals in the first five years of their careers

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BLUE WATERS TURNED GRAY

GRAY SKIES DISTILLERY'S SPIRITS ARE HAND-CRAFTED WITH FARM-SOURCED INGREDIENTS AND WATER FROM THE GREAT LAKES

BY
CHARLOTTE YOUNG
PHOTOS
COURTESY OF GRAY
SKIES DISTILLERY

WHEN TWO GRAND RAPIDS NATIVES OPENED THE DOORS OF GRAY SKIES DISTILLERY IN 2016, IT WAS A MOMENT LONG IN THE MAKING.

It all started in 2014 when Brandon Voorhees and Steve Vander Pol began transforming a dilapidated industrial building at 700 Ottawa Avenue NW into Grand Rapids' second distillery. Four walls and a leaky roof were soon transformed into a 10,000-square-foot production facility with a tasting room. Gray Skies is one of many additions to the Monroe North district over the last decade. Located near the riverfront, north of downtown, it's one of the city's most dynamic and up-and-coming neighborhoods.

Voorhees and Vander Pol had parted ways with Michigan after graduating from high school. It was after Voorhees moved back to Grand Rapids and while Vander Pol was still living in Denver that the two began laying out the framework for Gray Skies.

"Steve and I have always been close friends, and we always knew we wanted to get into some kind of business here in our favorite city," Voorhees said.

As the founders of an independent business, the two wear many hats. Vander Pol is Gray Skies' director of production, head distiller, and director of business operations. Voorhees leads Gray Skies sales and marketing efforts as the director of sales and oversees tasting room operations. Both are mostly self-taught distillers, though they took some distillation classes along the way. They are fortunate to have friends in the industry, which allowed them to pick the brains of other distillers as they embarked on their journey.

Gray Skies' whiskeys, rum, and gin are hand-bottled and crafted with farm-sourced ingredients and water from the Great Lakes. "Water is one of most defining ingredients in alcohol production," Voorhees stated. "In a bottle of 40 percent alcohol



by volume spirits, 60 percent of that bottle is water. An inferior water source will result in an inferior product. We are extremely lucky to have access to one of the greatest collections of fresh water in the world, right in our backyard. We print a depth chart of Lake Michigan on the back of every Gray Skies bottle, paying homage to the lake from which our water comes.”

Stop into the Gray Skies tasting room for a cocktail and take a tour through the entire whiskey-making process—all done on-site at the facility.

These spirits are produced from scratch—milled, fermented, distilled, and aged on-site—500 gallons at a time. Starting in a mash kettle and ending in a pot still, the small-batch method allows these distillers to provide the attention to detail required

to craft fine spirits. Using the double distillation method, Vander Pol creates a smooth but flavorful spirit because, as he says, “What’s the point of using the best ingredients if you can’t taste them?”

Gray Skies has a lineup of classic spirits, each with their own twist. Utility Vodka, Barrel Finished Gin, Silver Rum, and Coffee Liqueur are a few. The stars of the show and pride and joy of Voorhees and Vander Pol are their straight whiskeys. Gray Skies’ Michigan Straight Rye Whiskey and Michigan Straight Bourbon Whiskey are aged in charred American oak barrels for a minimum of two years. New batches are set for release this fall. These whiskeys are among very few crafted from grain to glass in Grand Rapids. Complex, enjoyable, and delightfully unique, they are incredible served neat or used as a base for a cocktail.

Attached to Gray Skies’ production space is its tasting room. It boasts a modern industrial sophistication and the approachable atmosphere of a cocktail lounge. The space was renovated in 2015. “We wanted the new space to feel intentional and hand-built—similar to our spirits. That’s why we opted for a mid-century feel,” said Voorhees.

And then there’s the drink menu, which is straight out of a cocktail lover’s dream. There are 10 seasonal cocktails—which utilize in-season fruits and herbs—available at all times as well as 10 classic cocktails, 10 original cocktails, and eight draft cocktails. Absolutely everything is crafted from scratch, including the tonic, liqueurs, ginger beer, cordials, and juices. There is nothing to be intimidated by here; the environment is low-key, and the bartenders are happy to advise on the perfect cocktail for average drinkers and connoisseurs alike.

Gray Skies’ spirits have been in distribution since 2016. As of August 2019, the distiller has a new Michigan distribution partner in Imperial Beverage. Imperial’s portfolio includes many independent, craft, and family-owned and operated brands which mirror Gray Skies’ own values and history. Look for Gray Skies bottles on the shelf at bottle shops, in bars, and on the menus of restaurants across the state. Or, stop into the Gray Skies tasting room for a cocktail and take a tour through the entire whiskey-making process—all done on-site at the facility.

Charlotte Young is a 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.





The Power of a Gut Feeling



DAVE MAURER,
PRESIDENT AND CFO OF
HUMPHREY PRODUCTS

BY
LORA PAINTER
PHOTO
HANNAH ZIEGELER

SOMETIMES A SPARK OF INSPIRATION IS ALL IT TAKES

INSPIRATION STRUCK DAVID MAURER WHEN HE WAS A STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

Maurer was studying biology, but he found that the subject didn't really suit him. One summer, he got a job working the assembly line at Humphrey Products. He ended up liking that a lot, and he became drawn to the people working there and the "clean and comfortable" environment.

That summer job sparked a change in him. Maurer went back to school and changed his course of study from science to economics.

As it turns out, making an educational and career-path change like this is not uncommon. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics showed that about 80 percent of students in

the U.S. end up changing their major at least once. That same study showed that, on average, college students change their major at least three times over the course of their college career.

When Maurer graduated from college, Humphrey Products made him a job offer. He started in the sales and product management side of the business. More than three decades later, Maurer has worked his way up to president and chief financial officer.

"One of the lessons that we [as a society] don't stress enough is that a career is like a marathon, not a sprint," Maurer said. "You're not going to start right out on the top of the heap. There are a lot of times when you're going to start out in an



One of the lessons that we [as a society] don't stress enough is that a career is like a marathon, not a sprint. You're not going to start right out on the top of the heap.

entry-level position, and just getting your foot in the door is the most important thing [you can do] because it opens up a lot of avenues for advancement.”

Maurer’s journey from factory floor to C-suite can become a reality for other children and young adults in Southwest Michigan. And area business owners have teamed up with local school districts to help in a variety of ways.

One way is MiCareerQuest Southwest, an interactive, tactile, informational career and college readiness experience. Businesses develop exhibits to introduce middle and high school students to different career options and help them map their future.

“It gives students a great opportunity to see people in action,” said Kim Weishaar, chief financial officer of Southwest Michigan First. “Not very often do you get to go into a plant, a manufacturing site, or even a hospital to see what goes on and what individuals are doing.”

During this unique experience, about 5,000 students from Kalamazoo and Calhoun counties will test-drive possible careers under the guidance of people who do these jobs every day.

Weishaar said the idea for the event evolved from hearing local manufacturers say that they were struggling to attract a local labor force. Kids were hearing from numerous sources that manufacturing was a field that they should avoid.

“Because of the Great Recession, the common thought was that ‘manufacturing was dead’ in Michigan, that good manufacturing jobs were now only available in other regions of the nation, and that all kindergarten through twelfth grade students should pursue a four-year degree in a specialized area,” Weishaar said. “MiCareerQuest Southwest gives students a hands-on experience in the world of manufacturing and other industries in Southwest Michigan so they can see all opportunities available to them here.”

A variety of Southwest Michigan employers, including Humphrey Products, signed up to educate students at 2019 MiCareerQuest Southwest at the Kalamazoo County Expo

Center on October 29 and 30. Employers from industries such as engineering and manufacturing, health sciences, natural sciences, construction trades, and information technology have worked together to brainstorm and produce exciting exhibits within approximately 50,000 square feet of exhibit space.

“[Manufacturing is an] in-demand area, and a lot of individuals [employed in this sector] can almost name their own price these days,” Maurer said. “I would encourage parents not to let their kids get through high school without having some kind of skill that would make them indispensable down the road.

I would try to encourage parents not to let their kids get through high school without having some kind of skill that would make them indispensable down the road.

Because no matter what happens with the business cycle, business leaders like me have to make hard decisions about things. We think about who is indispensable.”

According to the MiCareerQuest Southwest website, the organizing consortium includes Kalamazoo RESA, Southwest Michigan First, Michigan Works! Southwest, and Calhoun Intermediate School District, among others. The two-day event will also educate students on Kalamazoo Early/Middle College (EMC). Through EMC, Students can pursue an associate degree or certificate along with their high school diploma, enabling them to save time and money when they pursue a college degree.



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Founded in 1872 and headquartered in Coldwater, Southern serves the five counties of Branch, Hillsdale, Calhoun, St. Joseph, and now Kalamazoo with fourteen individual branches.

In 2016, Southern built a state-of-the-art branch on the corner of Kilgore and Westnedge. After quickly outgrowing that space, they expanded into the Portage Trade Centre in 2018, and by 2019, they transitioned to a larger space in the Trade Centre.

MEET THE TEAM

Southern's two Portage locations are staffed with an experienced team that knows banking and knows the region.

COMMERCIAL LENDING

Tim Kilmartin, Kalamazoo regional president, is a native of Kalamazoo who brings over thirty-five years of banking experience to Portage and Kalamazoo. His commitment to

Kalamazoo is further defined by his service on the boards of the Borgess Hospital Foundation, Congregation of St. Joseph Ministries, the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre Foundation, and the Arts Council of Kalamazoo. He has served on numerous other non-profit boards and is the past president of the Kalamazoo Rotary Club.

Vice President of Market Development Tom Schlueter grew up in Kalamazoo and is a resident of Portage. He has an extensive background as a banker, as well as local knowledge and involvement. Schlueter is currently a member of several boards in Kalamazoo, including the City of Kalamazoo Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and Economic Development Corporation, the Kalamazoo Cultural Center, and Ministry with Community. Additionally, he recently stepped out of his board position with the Kalamazoo Valley Community College Foundation after nine years of service.

CONSUMER LENDING

Kalamazoo native Derek Naylor brings over eighteen years of management and sales experience to his position as first vice president/head of retail lending at the bank. He is responsible for managing Southern's retail lending division and developing the Kalamazoo/Portage retail market. Naylor says, "Southern



When organizations large and small need support and sponsorships, they call on the community banks first. Yearbooks, shelterhouses, art festivals, and booster clubs rely on their contributions and sponsorships, and Southern is a leader in this field.

Michigan Bank and Trust has been around for nearly 150 years and we firmly believe there is a need in the Kalamazoo county market for a relationship-oriented bank like Southern. We focus strongly on our customers' experience with us by being their partner and adviser, as well as doing business in a modern way with all the added banking conveniences customers desire in today's market."

WEALTH MANAGEMENT

As a part of Southern's ongoing strategy to develop the region, it purchased Improved Funding Techniques, a wealth management firm owned by Joseph Spoerl, CEBS, who joined the bank as vice president/wealth management officer. Spoerl has served 43 years in the trust services and financial planning industry, where he specializes in employee benefit plans. He is heavily involved in the Kalamazoo community and participates in various fundraisers for Western Michigan University, Catholic Charities, Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes, and other worthy causes.

Vice President/Wealth Management Officer Mary Marshall, CTFA, has served over twenty years in the financial planning and trust services industry. Marshall is a member of the Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes Resource Development Committee, as well as the 100 Kalamazoo Women Who Care Group.

RETAIL BANKING

Cammy Fleckenstein began at Southern in October of 2015. She brings with her over thirty years of banking experience, where she has served in management positions. She volunteers her free time in the community and is a member of the Kalamazoo Sunrise Kiwanis.

Reflective of their loyalty to the city they love, Kilmartin, Schlueter, Naylor, Marshall, and Spoerl are all proud Western Michigan University alumni, as is Southern's President and Chief Credit Officer Kurt Miller.

HOW THEY DO BUSINESS

Southern is the 12th largest community bank headquartered in Michigan with assets of over \$781 million. It was recently recognized by American Banker Magazine on their national list of Top 200 Community Banks with less than \$2 billion in assets.

It attributes its success to always putting customers first. As Bryan Smith, owner of United States Lumber Company, describes it, "The customer service offered by Southern is more than just lending. When I walk into a branch, every single person knows my name."

Its hands-on approach has developed lasting relationships and a deeper understanding of how each of its customers

operate. "Southern took the time to know and understand my business and then listened," says Steve Taplin, president of the Taplin Companies.

Southern has continued to support its customer service efforts with added investment in banking technology. A suite of branchless banking products has enabled the ability to bank anytime, anywhere.

Online banking, mobile banking, bill pay, remote deposit capture, personal teller machines and eStatements are some of the products it offers. Southern also provides customer account alerts in order to mitigate fraud and monitor spending.

A COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

"What differentiates Southern from the big banks is its commitment to investing in the communities it serves," said Tom Schlueter.

Southern offers financial and physical support to local schools, non-profits, arts and athletics, and many other organizations and agencies in its service area. Since its arrival in Portage, Southern has provided over \$150,000 in monetary support, as well as numerous volunteer hours and corporate resources in the region.

Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo, Farmers Alley Theatre, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Ministry with Community/Chefs Against Hunger are just a few of the Kalamazoo county organizations Southern supports.

When organizations large and small need support and sponsorships, they call on the community banks first. Yearbooks, shelterhouses, art festivals, and booster clubs rely on their contributions and sponsorships. Southern has always been a leader in its support of charitable entities and events.

In addition to volunteerism and monetary support, it also provides a number of products and services that benefit the community. Going above and beyond traditional banking efforts, Southern has checking accounts with cell phone protection, roadside assistance, ID theft aid, and much more.

While it continues to expand operations in the area, there is no sign of slowing down. "We're here for the long haul," said Tim Kilmartin, "This is a market that is growing, and we look forward to being a big part of that growth."

SOUTHERN MICHIGAN
BANK & TRUST

FEATURE BROUGHT TO YOU
BY SOUTHERN MICHIGAN
BANK AND TRUST

LEADER²LEADER

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

BY JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTOS KATHRYN DAVIS, MIRANDA GARSIDE

JOSEPH THOMAS III

FIELD SERVICES AND JUVENILE DRUG TREATMENT COURT MANAGER
AT KALAMAZOO COUNTY NINTH CIRCUIT COURT—FAMILY DIVISION

LINDA APSEY

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
OF ITC HOLDINGS CORP.

WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST LEADERSHIP MOMENT?

THOMAS: I remember when others first started identifying me as a leader. That is my proudest achievement. I didn't grow up seeing myself as a leader, but when other people began to recognize the potential in me, believed in me, and even trusted me to lead them, that's when I started to live up to my position. Now, being in a leadership role, I can give voice to a population that wasn't always at the table.

APSEY: The day I was announced as the new president and CEO of ITC, I stood in front of all our employees and shareholders to proudly express my gratitude for the opportunity. I had the chance to articulate my vision for the growth of ITC and dedication to driving value for those we serve. This moment serves as my true north; I think back to it every day to make sure I stay true to what I stand for and represent.

WHICH LEADER WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET?

THOMAS: President Obama. I first learned about him before he was running for president. I read his memoir, "Dreams from My Father," and saw a lot of parallels between our values. I'd love to pick his brain and learn how he went from organizing a grassroots activism in Chicago to becoming a president of the U.S.

APSEY: Margaret Thatcher. I marvel at her vision, tenacity, and ability to lead significant reforms in an environment that was so

resistant to change. And, as a woman and leader of one of the world's most powerful countries almost 40 years ago, I would be fascinated to hear about her experiences and perspective.

WHAT IS YOUR SECRET FOR MANAGING A BUSY SCHEDULE?

THOMAS: I try to live every moment as it comes. No matter if I'm at work or at home, if things are hectic or laid back, I do my best to enjoy every moment. I don't take anything for granted. I stay positive and find little things each day to be thankful for. There's so much negativity in the world already that you have to find ways to keep the praise high.

APSEY: Despite a hectic schedule, I always make it a priority to have a weekly meeting with my senior leadership team so we can all stay abreast of current events and provide each other with direction and feedback. These meetings also offer an opportunity to set the tone and expectations. Communication and collaboration are the keys to effectively leading, managing, and executing.

HOW DO YOU CELEBRATE THE SUCCESSSES OF YOUR TEAM?

THOMAS: I've learned that not everybody wants to be in the spotlight. I try not to have a cooker-cutter approach to recognition. As a leader, I have the responsibility to know my colleagues as people, and I individualize my approach accordingly. Some people respond better to a private pat on the back, while others appreciate humor. The one thing I never do is give out gift cards. To me, that's so impersonal.

APSEY: One of our values at ITC is "Being Better Together," so we are always taking advantage of opportunities to highlight the great work and accomplishments of our employees. We recognize and reward performance with everything from simple shout-outs and thank you notes to our annual formal award ceremony. I believe that celebrating success drives a healthy culture.

HOW DO YOU RELAX?

THOMAS: I enjoy spending time with my kids. I love watching them grow. When I leave work, I do my best not to take it all with me.

FIRST THINGS FIRST



FIRST BIG PURCHASE?

THOMAS: My professional barbecue pit.

APSEY: A brand-new car: A shiny, red Ford Probe.



FIRST THING YOU WOULD DO WITH A MILLION DOLLARS?

THOMAS: I would fund a community center for local kids.

APSEY: Take my family on vacation!



FIRST AWARD YOU WON?

THOMAS: As a teenager, I won a junior golf tournament.

APSEY: I was born and grew up in Scotland. In elementary school, I won a Robert Burns poetry contest.

When I go home, I want to be completely focused on my family. When I'm with my son, I talk to him about his passion: Soccer. And my daughter loves to sing, so I have to be there to support her. If I focus on my kids and my wife, the troubles of the world fall away.

APSEY: Day to day, the most effective way for me to relax is to stop, put down the electronic devices, and enjoy the time with my husband and family. Although I'm never quite perfect, I strive to balance work and family time. That's the only way I can feel balanced and relaxed. My happy place is our cottage up north in Michigan. When I'm there, I can be happy and appreciate my family and the beauty of the outdoors.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO START THE DAY?

THOMAS: Every morning, I wake up and read one of the Proverbs [from the Bible]. To me, [the Book of] Proverbs is about wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Reading them strengthens me to face whatever the day may bring. When I walk in the door each morning, I know I'm likely to see and hear unbelievably heartbreaking stories, so it's essential for me to be spiritually grounded.

APSEY: Always with a cup of coffee! Every morning I mentally walk through my day, thinking not just [about] logistics but the purpose of each meeting and decision. This helps me prepare for what I need to accomplish. I envision how I need to "show up" to every interaction.

HOW DO YOU PRACTICE SELF-CARE AND MANAGE YOUR ENERGY?

THOMAS: I keep things light. In my workplace, we confront difficult situations on a daily basis. When you deal with so many heartrending stories, you have to find ways to stay upbeat. I love humor. Finding opportunities for laughter helps keep my team and me in good spirits.

APSEY: Your energy level is a crucial factor in your engagement and performance as a leader. You also have to set the example. Of course, sleep, exercise, and eating well always help, but it starts with your inner self. Managing your energy, and resulting behavior, begins with being satisfied, happy, and at peace with yourself.



JOSEPH THOMAS III

As a leader, I have the responsibility to know my colleagues as people, and I individualize my approach accordingly. Some people respond better to a private pat on the back, while others appreciate humor.

JOSEPH THOMAS III



LINDA APSEY

Every morning I mentally walk through my day, thinking not just [about] logistics but the purpose of each meeting and decision. This helps me prepare for what I need to accomplish.

LINDA APSEY



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DENISE LEE YOHN



Ron Kitchens sat down with the author, marketing guru, and Catalyst University alumna to get to the heart of branding and culture. Denise Lee Yohn has been in the branding business for over two decades. In that time, she has built a portfolio that includes big-name brands such as Sony, Burger King, Land Rover, and Jamba Juice.

What does good branding mean to you? Imagine your brand as a source of light. In an ideal world, the light of your brand would shine brightly and directly on your intended customers, allowing them to see very clearly the value that your brand offers to them. The reality is that, in the clutter and tumult of today's marketplace, people have a hard time differentiating your organization from your competitors. **How do businesses get it wrong?** To most people, branding is just a bundle of catchy ideals that look good on a billboard and describe the way an organization sees itself. But branding goes beyond that. I always say that your brand is what you do and how you do it—both have to be aligned. **Where can leaders start when redesigning their brands?** To establish a stand-out brand, you need to know what sets you apart from the rest. The first thing you should do is clearly articulate an overarching purpose and a single set of core values for your organization. Everything you do must trace back to those values; this makes communicating a consistent message to the public organic and authentic. And as a leader of an organization, your number-one responsibility is to hold that line. You have to ensure that your organization stays true to your values across the board. That can only be accomplished by aligning your external brand identity with your internal functions. **Explain how leaders can better align their organizations internally.** Even the structure of your organization needs to match your brand. Let's say you want to become known as a more innovative brand. You might go about it by reworking your product development



department or introducing a new rapid-prototyping process. You have to double-down on your values and live what you want to project. Everything from top to bottom must align. **What else can leaders do to maintain a consistent culture?** Culture doesn't happen just because you say so. You have to work at it. Sweat the small stuff, the day-to-day details of your organizational life. Don't overlook the little details, like your policies, procedures, and rituals. Think about your policy on technology use, your dress code, and which events you choose to celebrate. Taken together, these details make up your culture. Ask yourself, "Do all of my organization's internal procedures reflect our external brand?" Even if it's an average Monday, your team needs to live and breathe your brand. **What does a compelling culture look like?** There's no one single definition of a good culture. There is a right culture for you, but that's going to be different for every organization. You, as a leader, have to decide what that culture is. Embrace the uniqueness of your organization and weave those things into your culture and branding strategies. **How can leaders get their teams on board with culture and branding?** Your whole team needs to understand what your brand stands for backwards and forwards. They need to be excited about it, and then they need to know how to interpret your brand identity and your brand strategy when making decisions and interacting with clients. Everyone has to be on board. A solid marketing team can help with that, but it starts at the top. The leader sets the example, and everyone else follows. ✨

A TIME FOR REFLECTION

TAKE TIME THIS FALL TO CONSIDER YOUR NEXT DECADE OF LEADERSHIP

BY SARAH MANSBERGER PHOTO STOCKPLANETS (ISTOCK)

FOR JUST A MOMENT, THINK BACK TO JULY OF THIS YEAR.

Oh, the glorious days of midsummer, when the sun was shining, the humidity was just right, and the evening temps were cool enough to sleep with the windows open. It was easy to be lulled into the false sense that midsummer in Southwest Michigan—with its beaches, blueberries, and fireflies—would last forever. Of course, the romantic spell of the season broke eventually, and we shifted into a new mode: back to school, back to business.

Now, mid-fall, we've fully adjusted from fireflies to football and business on full tilt. But only a short while ago, as the sun started to settle its way down by dessert instead of at bedtime, we had to wrestle with change. We were in the throes of transition—some of us excitedly, some reluctantly—in our working lives and at home.

As fall took hold, how many of us paused for a moment to reflect on the glories of summer? Or where we were heading in the fall? Or where we wanted to go?

Metaphors likening the changing seasons of the year to the changing seasons of business and life are familiar. But what

are perhaps less familiar, and certainly less practiced, are focused acts of reflection following periods of change. Reflection is one of our greatest teachers. To borrow the words of John Dewey, the American philosopher and educator, “We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.” Yet too often we rush from one change to the next, never fully stopping to distill episodes of glory or struggle into insights about who we are, who we want to be, and what we will have to pick up or leave behind to get where we want to go.

We have a tremendous opportunity for reflection and learning in the months ahead. As we approach this next season, we will see the start of a new decade together. As our very own 20s come roaring into view, my leadership challenge to you is to take stock of the season you are in as a leader. Make time for reflection to distill the most glorious glories and solemn

struggles of this past decade into the insights that will shape your leadership into 2020 and beyond. Challenge your team to do the same. Get your loved ones involved. Lay the foundation now for an intentional beginning of the year and the decade that feels like the start of something big.

How will you show up in 2020?



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?

PATRICIA PROVOT

NORTH AMERICAN
CONTINENTAL LEADER AT
ARMSTRONG INTERNATIONAL

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
PHOTO KATHRYN DAVIS

1978 | BORN IN BELGIUM

I was the first of four children born to a French-speaking dad and Dutch-speaking mom. My delivery happened while my parents were on vacation for a month in Belgium. My father was a diplomat for the Belgian government, and my parents were living in Bizerte, Tunisia. When I was just 10 days old, we took the boat back to Tunisia.

1984 | FAMILY MOVED TO ECUADOR

We lived in Tunisia for six years, then moved to Ecuador. We spoke Dutch at home, but my siblings and I went to a Spanish-speaking school for the seven years we spent in the country. I remember that on the first day of school, the noise in the classroom overwhelmed me as I was trying to figure out what people were saying.

I was quite angry with my father for making me go to school in Ecuador, but over the years, I really came to appreciate my childhood. When I was older, I thanked him. Experiences like these made me who I am today. Now I speak four languages and have moved 17 times to date. Growing up outside of my comfort zone made me adaptable, flexible, and unafraid of being thrown into a new environment.



My father's job as a diplomat also allowed us kids to interact with a lot of high-ranking personalities. But at the same time, I had a lot of friends from school who were very poor—some hardly had a house. This range helped me feel comfortable in any social environment. It also made me realize that no matter where you are on the planet or on the social scale, we are all human beings.

1990 | ATTENDED BOARDING SCHOOL IN BELGIUM

We then went back to Belgium for two years. When I was 15 years old, my parents and family left for South America again. I decided to stay behind and study at a boarding school in Belgium. One year later, I was living on my own. Being independent made me grow up quickly—I had to purchase food, clean the house, and take care of myself.

Growing up outside of my comfort zone made me adaptable, flexible, and unafraid of being thrown into a new environment.

2000 | GRADUATED FROM INSTITUT SUPÉRIEUR INDUSTRIEL DE BRUXELLES WITH A MASTER'S DEGREE IN CHEMICAL ENGINEERING

When I was a kid, I wanted to become an air stewardess to see the world or work for Greenpeace to save the planet. Even at 18, I had a hard time deciding what to study. In the end, I chose the same path as my father: engineering. But I was not a [total] fan of engineering, so I took chemistry.

2000 | JOINED ARMSTRONG INTERNATIONAL AS A CHEMICAL ENGINEER

I still had no idea what I wanted to do when I finished school. I wanted to work at Armstrong because I was attracted by its mission of saving energy and family culture. I joined as

an energy auditor, and for the first seven years, my work was auditing refineries and chemical plants, helping them resolve safety and energy-saving issues with their steam systems. I was in that role for three years before I was promoted to Energy Service Manager.

2007 | TRANSFERRED TO FLORIDA HEADQUARTERS

I met with the CEO, David Armstrong, who asked me to come to Florida to work at Armstrong's headquarters. He threw me right into the thick of things. My first challenge was to install an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. I have an engineering background, not a business background, so I had to be adaptable and figure it out. My time there helped me advance to Global Engineering Manager in 2008.

2011 | OVERSAW EXPANSION IN INDIA

Next, I moved to India to help oversee the development of our new Indian operations. Whenever the company goes abroad, it takes its values with it. It's interesting to see how universal it is across cultures. For example, Armstrong is a company built on trust—we don't have time cards, and our cafeterias are run on the honor system. When we opened in India, a lot of our Indian colleagues were saying, "Those kinds of policies are not going to work in India, no way. You have to lock the facility and your money up or people are going to steal it!" In reality, that wasn't true at all. I like how the Armstrong family stood super steadfast in those values.

2015 | RELOCATED TO CHINA

I moved to China to help with the company's engineering activities there. My experiences moving as a child ended up helping me navigate these international moves. I was able to just go there and figure it out. And like me, my now seven-year-old son was born and grew up in a foreign country. He was made in

India, and born in Belgium, but I like to say he was perfected in the U.S.

2017 | U.S. STEAM AND CONDENSATE PRESIDENT

Two years ago, the president of Armstrong's Three Rivers division retired. I was asked by now CEO Patrick Armstrong if I was interested in taking over the leadership. It just felt right to me. It felt like the right time to do it. At the time, I was the corporate director of engineering, leading about 70 engineers globally. However, they were all reporting to their own managers and presidents, so it was quite a jump to directly lead an organization of 250 people.

I learned that leading an organization takes an incredible amount of your energy and attention, so it's important to remember, "Work is what you do, it's not who you are."

2019 | NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENTAL LEADER

Even though the transition ended up being smooth, I still wish I had listened to some of the advice I heard when I started in this role. People told me, "Don't take on too much!" But I'm a bit stubborn, so I didn't listen. I did take on too much. I decided to meet with each of the employees, trying to understand what they would like to see improved. I used what I learned to create a strategic plan for the next three years. It was worth it, but I stretched myself a little thin in the first year. I learned that leading an organization takes an incredible amount of your energy and attention, so it's important to remember, "Work is what you do, it's not who you are."



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We make what matters work.

not an artist, but as I became more and more involved, I found that engaging that side of your brain can make you a better person.

HOW CAN PEOPLE SUPPORT THE KIA AND LOCAL ARTISTS IN GENERAL?

At the end of November and beginning of December, the KIA hosts its Annual Holiday Art Sale. The entire lobby, and even the art school studios, are filled with pieces from over 150 artists from every corner of the community. You can find paintings, jewelry, ceramics, photographs—everything you can think of. I've been able to buy some beautiful pieces for my home. I bought a couple of paintings last year and got to know the artist. This event is a great opportunity to talk to artists and learn about their work, processes, and inspirations.

People don't know how extensive and impressive the institute's collection is. I was stunned that it had works from artists like Degas, Warhol, and Van Gogh.

HOW DOES THE HOLIDAY ART SALE IMPACT THE COMMUNITY?

The Holiday Art Sale is not only about picking up paintings; it keeps money in Kalamazoo by supporting local artisans and the KIA. It strengthens our community by helping to make the city a place where artists want to live. It brings culture to people by showing them the creative side of Southwest Michigan that they may not have seen before.

This art sale may be a person's first introduction to the KIA. The KIA is one of the few art institutions in the country that has an accredited art school—the Kirk Newman Art School. Both my dad and my daughter have taken pottery classes there. It becomes an anchor point to keep people engaged in the community. I have three kids, and my dream is that they say to me someday, "We love it in Kalamazoo, and we'd love to stay here!" Institutions like the KIA create a vibe that helps the community resonate.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN MUSEUM

MEET AND SUPPORT LOCAL ARTISTS AT THE KIA'S ANNUAL HOLIDAY ART SALE



K. PERRY WOLFE

Community President and Senior Lender at Chemical Bank

Treasurer of the KIA Board of Directors

EVENT

Annual Holiday Art Sale

ORGANIZATION

Kalamazoo Institute of Arts (KIA)

DATES AND TIMES

November 30 from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm

December 1 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm

LOCATION

435 West South Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

BY JAKE FREDERICKS PHOTOS TRISHA DUNHAM & KALAMAZOO INSTITUTE OF ARTS

WHAT ROLE DOES THE KIA PLAY IN THE COMMUNITY?

When I first moved to Kalamazoo, the city didn't have much of a downtown. People went there to work but drove back to the suburbs at night—the streets were so empty you could have shot off a cannon. To have a great city, you have to get people living and playing downtown. But it's not enough just to have a few shops. Some downtowns look great, but there's not much to them. So what makes a city thrive? Culture. Culture is what separates ghost towns from places like Kalamazoo. A city needs to have spaces like the KIA that provide opportunities to open your mind up to new things. I have to pinch myself when I look at our downtown today.

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO GET PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN THE KIA?

It's been a treat and an honor to be part of Kalamazoo's renaissance. I feel fortunate to live in such a philanthropic town. I pitch in how I can, and I started focusing on the KIA because of how crucial high culture is to a community. People don't know how extensive and impressive the institute's collection is. I was stunned that it had works from artists like Degas, Warhol, and Van Gogh. To me, the KIA is a cornerstone organization. I'm



BY RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO CHAAY _ TEE (ISTOCK)



Imagine, Design, and Redesign the Future

HOW CAN WE THINK LIKE DESIGNERS TO REIMAGINE SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN?

FROM TAXI CABS, CORSETS, AND FISHING RODS TO THE WORLD'S FIRST DISSOLVABLE PILL AND FIRST OUTDOOR PEDESTRIAN MALL, SO MANY GROUNDBREAKING DESIGNS HAVE BEEN DREAMT UP IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN.

But our region's century-long legacy of creative leadership doesn't end there. While most people in the nation don't think of our little corner of the Midwest as a hotspot for innovation, influential products like KitchenAid mixers, Sharpie markers, Yoplait cups, and Kellogg's boxes are all designed right here.

Economic vitality springs from innovation. Each of the companies creating these universal products is built upon an idea. In fact, all business empires are founded with a single idea. From that initial spark, manufacturing plants, supply chains, sales departments, marketing teams, and countless other jobs are created.

While most people in the nation don't think of our little corner of the Midwest as a hotspot for innovation, influential products like KitchenAid mixers, Sharpie markers, Yoplait cups, and Kellogg's boxes are all designed right here.

The people who generate these larger-than-life ideas—dreamers and creatives—push the boundaries of the possible. And nothing attracts creatives to an area like other creatives. It's no secret why Nashville is a Mecca for musicians, or why

filmmakers flock to Los Angeles. Creatives cluster together. They need each other for collaboration and competition. The most prosperous areas in the country (think Silicon Valley) are the places where industry meets design.

In Southwest Michigan, our community harbors design incubators that are unlike anything else in the country. Western Michigan University (WMU)'s Richmond Institute of Product Design and Innovation is a prime example. A decade ago, the university's design program disbanded. Without a pool of local designers, businesses were having a difficult time filling seats on their creative teams and staying innovative. To solve this problem, these companies banded together with university faculty to create a program that develops designers right here in Southwest Michigan.

Today, the institute cooperates with corporate partners to bring professional designers into the classroom. At WMU, higher education interacts with industry, bringing together people from across the university to work on difficult challenges and solve problems together through the lens of design.

At its heart, design is about solving old problems by coming up with new solutions.

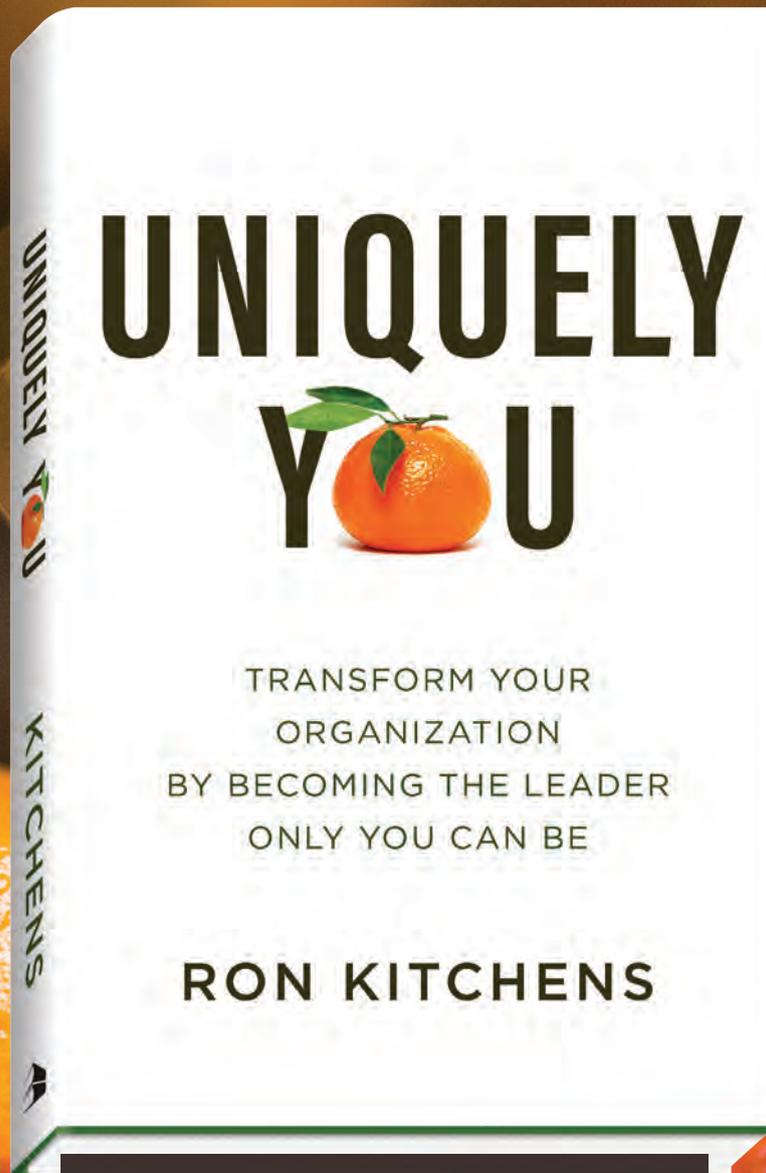
You may not consider yourself a “designer,” but to solve the problems we face as a region, we have to think like designers. The only way forward for a product, an organization, even a region, is to evolve. Our best ideas today become the minimum expectation tomorrow.

If we want to continue thriving as a region, we must continue to be pioneers in imagination.

We advance only by redesigning ourselves and our futures. If we want to continue thriving as a region, we must continue to be pioneers in imagination. We must immerse ourselves in new ideas, surround ourselves with out-of-the-box thinkers, and make room for creatives to do what they do best.

ALWAYS FORWARD,

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