

269

MAGAZINE

inside:

CONTINENTAL LINEN SERVICES IS HAVING LOADS OF SUCCESS

WONDERFUL WORKPLACES

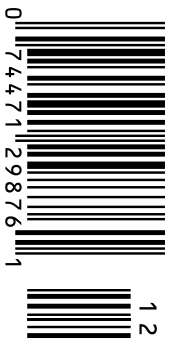
OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

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YEAR IN REVIEW

A Look At Some of the Best Happenings This Year in Southwest Michigan



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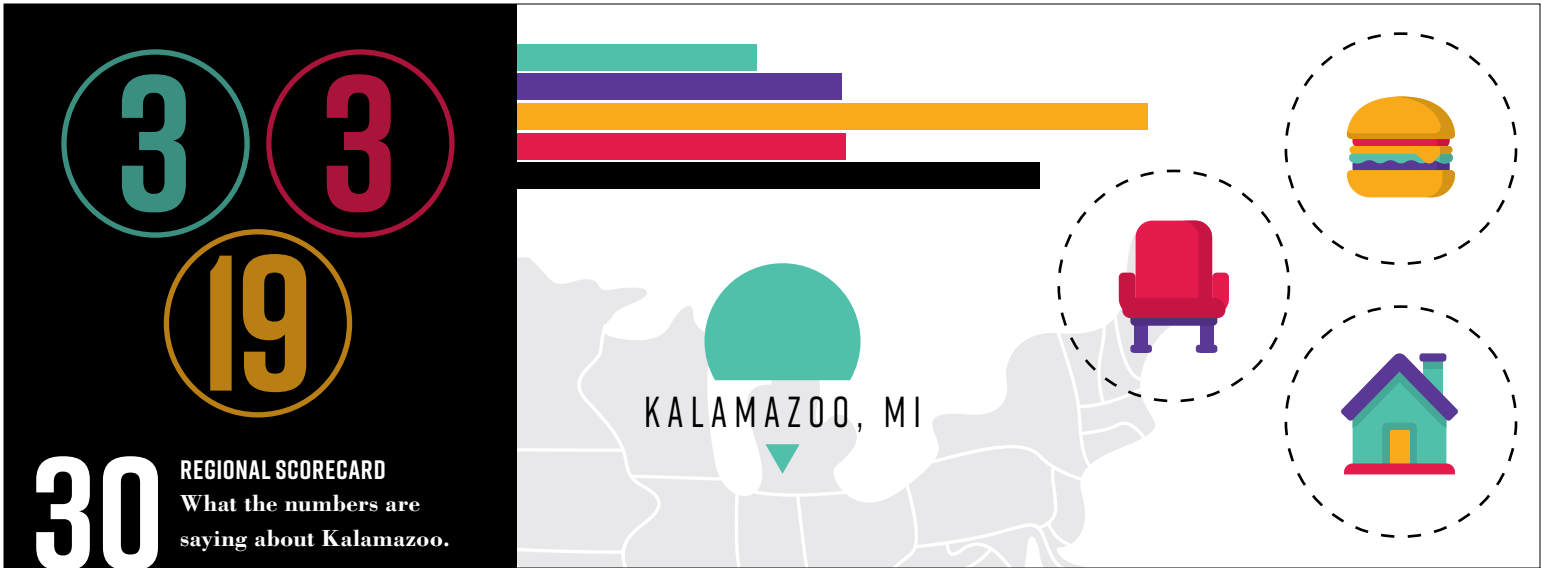
*"Pleasure in the
job puts perfection
in the work."*
— Aristotle



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OUR HOPE IS THAT THE READERS OF 269 MAGAZINE WILL BECOME ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD AROUND THEM AND JOIN OUR MISSION TO MAKE SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN THE PLACE TO BUILD A HOME, GO TO WORK, AND BRING DREAMS TO REALITY.

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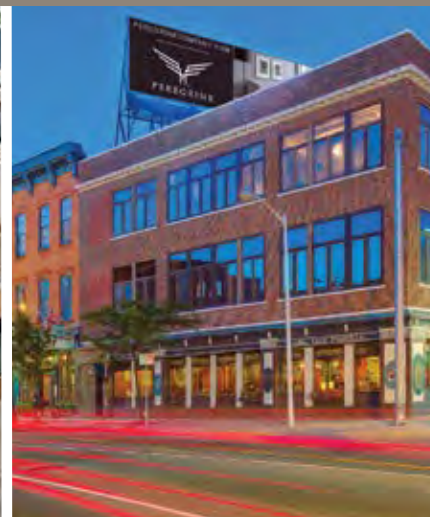
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BY HEATHER BAKER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGLER



Your Guide to Our Wonderful Workplaces

TUNE IN TO THE BEST PLACES TO WORK IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

“

IF YOU KNEW ME, IT YOU REALLY KNEW ME, YOU WOULD KNOW THAT I...

If you're reading this issue of 269 MAGAZINE, my guess is that you know a thing or two about employee engagement. So, you'll probably recognize this question that is often used as an ice-breaker at team events.

Here's my answer: "If you knew me, if you really knew me, you would know that I ... love sitcoms."

It doesn't matter if it's a story about a lovely lady bringing up three very lovely girls or six well-dressed friends who seem to spend more time at a coffee shop than at work. And it doesn't matter if they're from the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, or 00s. Sitcoms are my guilty pleasure; I find them addictive, relaxing, and, of course, completely amusing.

You could say all those hours spent in front of the television are wasted, but I challenge you: There's a lot you can learn from sitcoms. For starters, you can learn that our workplaces have come a long way from the 1960s. Back then, ashtrays on desks were the norm in the office where Rob Petrie of the "The Dick Van Dyke Show" spent his workday hours.

Mary Tyler Moore took the WJM-TV office by storm and shook things up in the 70s. Women were leaving the Carol Brady image at home—literally—to show up for work in unprecedented numbers. Mary helped define a new vision for the female in the workplace that transcended the stereotypical secretarial role as she landed a job as an associate producer in Minneapolis.

In the early 80s, women were beginning the conversation, and rather loudly, that it was high time for equal pay and

recognition. Loni Anderson's smart portrayal of Jennifer Marlowe on "WKRP in Cincinnati" poked fun at those who weren't quite ready to get their own coffee or made assumptions about office roles.

There was no keeping Murphy Brown down in the 90s. She shattered glass ceilings for women everywhere. Murphy called upon us to face tough human resource issues in the workplace, although many like harassment and mental illness continue to be wrestled with today.

In the 00s, everyone wanted to be in the cast of "The Office." But, I'd wager that most of us wouldn't actually tolerate working at Dunder Mifflin for more than a week. The poor management style of Michael Scott and toxic office environment he emboldened made us all keenly aware that things have changed in the workplace for the better.

Today, many of our workplaces celebrate diversity, consider overtime pay a no-brainer, and take traditional benefits like parental leave to the next level in the form of paid gym memberships and curated engagement events. That's apparent as NBC's "Superstore" throws all these things in our face to the nth degree.

In this issue of 269 MAGAZINE, you'll find only the best office stories. You'll find out why the team at The Kalamazoo Promise

cares so much about its mission. You'll learn that Imperial Beverage is so invested in its employees that it devotes an entire week to appreciating them. You'll see how building a foundation of trust has made TowerPinkster a top firm in both industry and business. And, you'll get a glimpse of what it's like to arrive at Greenleaf Trust, a top place to work in the nation, for your first day on the job.

Get ready to have some fun. It's time to turn the page and enjoy reading about those who earned recognition as our 2019 Wonderful Workplaces!

Oh, and if there is one thing that I can agree with Michael Scott on, it's this: "An office is a place to live life to the fullest, to the max, to ... An office is a place where dreams come true."

READ ON,

Heather

Tell us about your favorite workplace sitcom. @269Mag with #269Sitcoms!

“I want to know what’s going on, but I don’t have time to keep up on current events.”



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THERE'S NO BETTER VIEW INTO WORKPLACE CULTURE THAN THROUGH THE EYES OF AN INTERN. SO, WE ASKED LOCAL INTERNS,

“What stands out for you about the corporate culture you are experiencing?”

USE YOUR VOICE @269MAG WITH #COMMUNITYCOMMENT



JOHN VARY
SURVEYOR INTERN,
WIGHTMAN

It's great working at Wightman because you can tell how much they invest in the people who work there. We do so many fun, engaging things both in and out of work. It's a great feeling to be supported by a company in every aspect of your life. You can tell they really care about you.



BIUSH KHANAL
QUANTITATIVE ANALYTICS AND
STATISTICS INTERN, ZOETIS

In academia, I'm used to a different culture. We work in small centers with direct supervisors and do the research for others to implement. But, at Zoetis, I am getting a lot of experience working in real-world scenarios. I work with data that directly affect customers, which forces me to be more responsible. Here, we are doing the research, and whatever we find, we get to implement. So there's a direct relation to the customers who are able to give us feedback on our performance.



ALANNAH CHENEZ
PROJECT ENGINEERING INTERN,
MANN+HUMMEL USA

I was surprised to see how relaxed and easy to talk to everyone is [at MANN+HUMMEL]. It makes conversations so easy to have. It isn't the way I imagined corporate to be. It seems that at MANN+HUMMEL, anyone with enough ambition can get to where they want to go.



DWIGHT BOWMAN II
OUTBOUND SALES INTERN,
CONSUMERS CREDIT UNION

Consumers Credit Union's culture has been great to be a part of because, at the end of the day, it's all about working with people who are relatable to me, [share] my values, and make the overall work culture welcoming and inclusive.



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Wonderful Workplace
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Wonderful Workplaces

OUR 2019 PICKS MAKE WORK COUNT

BY JAKE FREDERICKS
AND HEATHER BAKER

PHOTOS
HANNAH ZIEGLER

34%



OF U.S. WORKERS ARE CONSIDERED "ENGAGED." THAT'S THE HIGHEST LEVEL SINCE GALLUP BEGAN REPORTING THE NATIONAL FIGURE SINCE 2000.

SOURCE: "EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT ON THE RISE IN THE U.S.," GALLUP, 2018.

Did you know that you will spend about one-third of your life working?

The editorial team at 269 MAGAZINE did the math: You will work approximately 85,000 hours over the course of your lifetime. Don't you want those hours to be well spent? To feel like you're a part of something important? To be recognized and rewarded for your contribution?

One might think that working hours are entirely separate from personal hours. But the time you spend in the workplace affects how you will think, act, and feel in all aspects of life.

That's why we believe it's important to celebrate those organizations in Southwest Michigan that are dedicated to maximizing employee enjoyment, purpose, and growth. Our 2019 Wonderful Workplaces picks are here! On the following pages, we highlight regional workplaces that help their employees work and live with purpose. We know we're inspired by them, and we hope you are too.



Greenleaf Trust

Invests in the Right People

WEALTH MANAGEMENT FIRM
KALAMAZOO, MI

In the wealth management field, where clients' assets are passed from generation to generation, relationships matter.

"We're like doctors in a way," says Kimberly Dudley, human resource specialist at Greenleaf Trust. "Our clients are sharing deep, personal details about their finances with us, and that's not something you disclose to just anybody." To combat the rampant turnover common to the field and keep relationships strong through the years, Greenleaf Trust decided to make a huge investment in its most valuable asset: its team.

One aspect of Greenleaf Trust's strategy has been to keep team members engaged, but Dudley believes the wealth management firm's exceptional hiring and onboarding practices have garnered the biggest returns. "We spend an incredible amount of time to find the right people to bring on board—it can take [several months]" she says. "But once you hire someone, they're part of the family, so we want to make sure they're a perfect fit."

"Once you hire someone, they're part of the family, so we want to make sure they're a perfect fit."

KIMBERLY DUDLEY, HUMAN RESOURCE SPECIALIST

The search for candidates begins with pre-screening calls conducted by Greenleaf Trust's in-house recruiter. The company doesn't outsource this job because it selects for values first and skills second. Only someone who works at Greenleaf would know

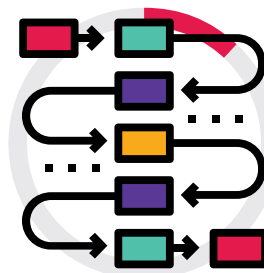
its culture deeply enough to be qualified to make this determination.

Then, candidates complete competency and strengths assessments that are designed to determine if their abilities meet the needs of the particular team they would join. By this point, Dudley estimates that only two or three candidates would remain, and all that's left is the final test: The team-fit interview. "We bring them in to meet five people they would be working closely alongside," she says. "There needs to be a consensus. Everybody needs to feel good about the decision."

When the search is over, the onboarding process begins. "You have this window of opportunity when somebody starts [in a position] to really bring them in," says Dudley. "If you miss that, it's tough to go back." First, an introductory email is sent out to the whole Greenleaf Trust team, welcoming the lucky new-hire who made it over the hiring hurdles. Along with that, the firm sends a welcome plant, and—if a new family member is relocating—meals, baked goods, and a few helping hands to unload the moving truck.

On their first day of work, every new team member is greeted with warm smiles and a goody bag filled with their favorite treats. Also on their desks is an agenda for their first weeks. Though every agenda is tailored to the individual—no matter which location they call home—each begins with a meeting with the firm's President, Mike Odar, who will walk them through the company's history.

"In the past, when we were particularly busy, we tried putting off the onboarding process until things settled down," says Dudley. "It didn't end well. Our new team members need that time to get to know everyone, build relationships, and learn about our culture. We have an amazing process."



ONLY 12% OF EMPLOYEES STRONGLY AGREE THEIR ORGANIZATION DOES A GOOD JOB OF ONBOARDING.

SOURCE: "DESIGNING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE," GALLUP, 2018.



MANAGERS
ACCOUNT FOR A
70% VARIANCE
IN TEAM
ENGAGEMENT.

SOURCE: "STATE OF THE AMERICAN MANAGER: ANALYTICS AND ADVICE FOR LEADERS," GALLUP, 2015.

TowerPinkster Draws Up Blueprints for an Unshakable Team

ARCHITECTURE, ENGINEERING AND DESIGN FIRM
KALAMAZOO, MI

TowerPinkster, a West Michigan-based architectural firm, is behind the top-to-bottom composition of buildings across the state.

This creativity-centric company tackles architecture, engineering, interior design, landscape, security, and technology projects. But to keep its team in tip-top shape, TowerPinkster has also constructed a workplace environment that towers above the rest. For CEO Bjorn Green, the company's stand-out culture is built on a foundation of good working relationships. "It all starts with trust," he says. "When employee relationships grow from a strong foundation, the ways in which they will collaborate are boundless."

That all-important trust between teammates begins to take shape even before an employee's

first day on the job. As soon as a new hire accepts the position, a team-wide email is sent out with the individual's photo and background information detailing their likes, dislikes, and passions. "We want to get to know each other as people. We want to know if you like dogs or cats, what your favorite pizza topping is, and what grades your kids are in," says Green. The get-to-know-you process, however, doesn't end after the first week of work. "We want our team members to feel like they're a part of the TowerPinkster family, but we want to get to know their families too," he says.

To bring everyone a little closer together, employees, their spouses, and their little ones look forward to fun-filled company-wide events

"Culture is always worth it. When employees are happy, it shows through in our work as we create remarkable outcomes for our clients, and that's always the goal."

BJORN GREEN, CEO

throughout the year. In the summer, everyone working at TowerPinkster's Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo offices converge for a family picnic that Green refers to as a "little family reunion." And for



Halloween, TowerPinkster team members and their kids dress up for some spooky trick-or-treating. "Hopefully no one gets too scared," he laughs, remembering a time when a miniature Stay-Puffed Marshmallow Man became a little uneasy when he came face-to-face with a team member who coincidentally chose an identical costume.

"We're all working collectively towards the same goal, so it's critical that we can trust each other. You have to carve out time for togetherness," says Green. "Culture is always worth it. When employees are happy, it shows through in our work as we create remarkable outcomes for our clients, and that's always the goal."



Community Investments Pay Off Big for **BKC**

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS
KALAMAZOO, MI

For over 25 years, BKC, formally known as Brink, Key & Chludzinski, has been serving Southwest Michigan by providing accounting excellence in solutions for personal and business needs.

And though this full-service firm has a roster of tax, audit, accounting, and consulting experts, each of its team members is passionate about serving their community directly through volunteerism and philanthropy. “We know that we grow along with the people we serve,” says Director of Business Development Sarah DeVoll. “BKC’s guiding mission is to foster success for our clients, our team, and our community.” She says that each of those three focuses is equally important—the success of any one area is contingent upon that of the other two.

BKC’s team members practice what they preach and have even crunched the numbers to back it up. Together, the 28 employees at the firm volunteer over 1,000 hours of their time to local non-profit organizations each year. “A lot of us grew up or went to college here,” says DeVoll. “We all have a personal stake in our community.” In fact, BKC is represented on over a dozen boards in Southwest Michigan, and DeVoll herself serves as executive chair of the Kalamazoo division of the March of Dimes.



75% OF U.S. WORKERS EXPECT THEIR EMPLOYER TO SUPPORT GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS IN NEED IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES.

SOURCE: GLASSDOOR, 2017.

The hours invested not only pay dividends for the community but also strengthen the firm’s internal and external bonds. “When we’re volunteering, we’re meeting clients, shaking hands with potential clients, interacting outside of a professional setting, and showing that we actually care,” says DeVoll.

“A lot of us grew up or went to college here. We all have a personal stake in our community.”

SARAH DEVOLL, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Through volunteerism, team members have the opportunity to express themselves and their passions as individuals. “I have a heart for babies, but we have some huge animal lovers here as well,” she says. “Everyone is committed to a different cause, and we love

to see that side of our teammates.” When an event approaches, like the Salvation Army’s Thanksgiving drive or the March of Dimes’ March for Babies, the BKC team rallies to support each other’s causes.

And when tax season strikes and clients are filing furiously, BKC takes the opportunity to put those passions on full display with a friendly competition. Each week team members who contribute five dollars or more to a charity fund can do their work in jeans on Friday. In addition to the denim privileges, donors can also cast a vote for their favorite cause, with the total proceeds going to the winning organization.

“We work hard for our clients every day, but we believe it’s important to have experiences outside of yourself,” says DeVoll. “It opens your eyes to how fortunate you are and makes you recognize how important community really is.”



Unlock Your Professional Destiny at Consumers Credit Union

CREDIT UNION
KALAMAZOO, MI

Consumers Credit Union knows all about growth. Over 300 employees work at the credit union's 20 West Michigan offices, with more joining its ranks every year.

Jennifer Smith, senior recruiter and human resources specialist, credits the Consumer's team for the organization's success. "We've found that if we have happy and engaged employees, we'll have happy and engaged members," she says. "And I believe one of the biggest keys to engagement is professional growth."

As part of the team's evaluation process, employees at Consumers fill out a "passion and purpose" form. The document identifies what a team member is particularly good at, what they love doing, and where they want to take their career. "We build those goals together at a 'Performance GPS' meeting that allows us to draw up a path designed to help the team member navigate their career at Consumers," explains Smith.

The credit union's team members can also follow internal career pathways mapped out in a company-wide playbook. "A career here is not an upward ladder—it's an intertwining lattice," Smith says. "There are all kinds of

learning opportunities available to get you [where you want to go]." In fact, if an employee wants any kind of professional development, all they have to do is ask.

"A career here is not an upward ladder—it's an intertwining lattice."

JENNIFER SMITH, SENIOR RECRUITER & HR SPECIALIST

One of the many learning opportunities offered at Consumers Credit Union is called "Grab an Assignment." This program enables a team member to temporarily take over a job in a different department. "What's great about this opportunity is that it benefits the employee, because they're learning a new skill set and exploring career avenues, but it also benefits Consumers because we're building bench strength," says Smith. Team members who opt into Grab an Assignment help a different team a few hours a week—and if they find that the new position suits them, they just might update their career path. "It's really cool to be able to watch someone we hired thrive in a position I wouldn't have imagined," she says. "We have all kinds of stories like that throughout the organization."

In fact, Smith's own career path is one of these stories. After graduating from college, she started at Consumers Credit Union as a teller. "At that point, I didn't know what I wanted to do exactly," she says. "I learned the company's foundation and commitment to growing its people." Over time, Smith made a move to the Consumers marketing department. She later discovered a passion for recruiting, which landed her in her current position.

As a result of its professional development strategy, Consumer's Credit Union enjoys an incredibly high retention rate. Its engaged team members know they are right where they need to be to pursue the careers of their dreams.

TEAMS WHO SCORE IN THE TOP

20%

IN ENGAGEMENT HAVE

59%

LESS TURNOVER.

SOURCE: "STATE OF THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE," GALLUP, 2017.



Eat, Drink, and Be Merry in the Imperial Beverage Family

BEVERAGE DISTRIBUTOR
KALAMAZOO, MI

Since the repeal of prohibition in 1933, Imperial Beverage has had a presence in Michigan.

Today, over 80 years later, it keeps good cheer flowing in every county in the state. With new bars, breweries, and tasting rooms drawing ever-bigger crowds to Southwest Michigan's downtowns, the company is enjoying a renaissance not seen since its early days.

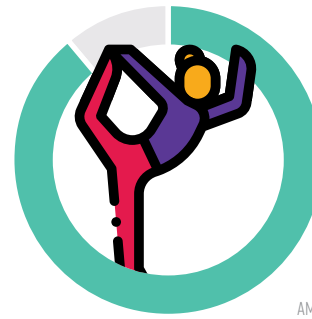
A visit to Imperial Beverage's warehouse in Kalamazoo finds an ever-expanding treasure trove of libations with aisle upon aisle of beer, wine, spirits, nonalcoholic drinks, and even whipped liquors. With the recent addition of spirits to its shelves, the company's inventory has expanded to over 9,000 brands. Human Resources Manager Lindsay Cekola says that Imperial's strategy for growth hinges on its ability to maintain a small-business feel. While it's true that team members love being able to take home free cases of beer every Friday and order company-covered Ubers on demand, the close relationships they share across departments keep them coming to work with a smile.

"Everyone here knows each other. Our warehouse workers are best friends with sales reps, and executives are friends with drivers," she explains. "To make us more of a family unit as we expand, we organize huge events." As Imperial Beverage knows well, nothing brings people closer than sharing a laugh (and a drink).

In the summer, the Imperial team heads out on togetherness excursions to uncork their bottled-up workday stress. They go camping, cheer on the Detroit Tigers, and have been known to ride a mechanical bull or two. One of the highlights of every summer is the "Beers on First" picnic, a company-wide softball tournament. On this one day a year, the usually chummy Imperial Beverage team is divided. "It's super competitive," says Cekola. "We play a full tournament and rent out T-shirt cannons and bounce houses for the whole family." Six months later, Imperial's holiday celebration is also a hit. Like most family holiday parties, it's kid-focused, featuring gingerbread and movies like "Elf."

Cekola believes events like these help Imperial Beverage maintain the close-knit culture that has been the key to its ongoing success. "We owe it all to our employees," she says. "To thank our team every year, the company organizes another celebration: Employee Appreciation Week, and last year, we had a 'Dress as Your Favorite Drink' day. One of our warehouse associates wore a Plungerhead [Wine] costume and worked all day with a toilet plunger on his head."

If you were to ask any of Imperial's 390 employees to tell you their favorite part of the job, they would likely say the friendships they form with their good-humored coworkers. And the company intends to keep it that way.



89% OF WORKERS AT COMPANIES THAT SUPPORT WELL-BEING INITIATIVES ARE MORE LIKELY TO RECOMMEND THEIR COMPANY AS A GOOD PLACE TO WORK.

SOURCE: "WORK AND WELL-BEING SURVEY," AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, 2017.

"Our warehouse workers are best friends with sales reps, and executives are friends with drivers."

LINDSAY CEKOLA, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER





Breaking It Down and Building It

Up With **AVB**

CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT FIRM
PORTAGE, MI

To witness the growth of Southwest Michigan is to see AVB's team in action.

The company is a leader in both residential and commercial development, and its people are driven by a passion for creating great places to live and work. "We have a desire to build things that most people might not think are even possible," says Chief Operating Officer and Principal Greg Dobson. "I can't pick a favorite [project]. It's like picking a favorite kid; you can't do it."

Like children, AVB's projects take a long time to grow up—Dobson says that the company's recent Corner@Drake development in Kalamazoo took 25 years from land acquisition to completion. To keep its team

members on track as they take on massive, multi-year undertakings, AVB has adopted a unique mode of operations.

Behind the day-to-day operations of the organization, in much the same way as an operating system manages the functions of a computer, is AVB's Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS). "It's a business management system that allows you to break down big, scary-sounding objectives into bite-sized pieces," explains Dobson. Under this system, every employee is assigned specific goals

"We have a desire to build things that most people might not think are even possible."

GREG DOBSON, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER & PRINCIPAL

and responsibilities. Each week, progress towards these goals is assessed with a trusted mentor while allowing for the individual's course to be adjusted if needed. With an organizational system like EOS, AVB can not only build hundreds of houses along with huge community hubs but also build up its team members at the same time.

89% OF HUMAN RESOURCES LEADERS AGREE

THAT ONGOING PEER FEEDBACK AND CHECK-INS

ARE KEY FOR SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES.

SOURCE: SHRM/GLOBEFORCE EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION REPORT, 2019.

By meeting regularly, team members can divide their yearly or quarterly goals into manageable daily responsibilities. "I also have a set of accountabilities," says Dobson. "The EOS gives us clear direction on what we're supposed to do and how we're going to be judged so we can coordinate big projects together and complete them on schedule."

AVB uses EOS like scaffolding that allows the company to reach even greater heights. "Our EOS also helps us lead employees through stages of professional development," says Dobson. "With clear, quantifiable goals, it takes the guesswork out of what that next career stage is going to look like and when someone is ready to make the leap." The real-time feedback and guidance from EOS provide AVB structure to stay the course and coordinate its long-term projects.

So, when any AVB employee drives past a newly constructed neighborhood, they can point to a physical representation of their daily efforts and be proud of what their team has accomplished together.



Only the Best Benefits for the Team at

Nulty Insurance

INDEPENDENT INSURANCE AGENCY
KALAMAZOO, MI

Knock on the doors of Nulty Insurance, and you'll find a staff of experts in personal and business insurance, as well as employee benefit services, waiting to welcome you.

Helping clients prepare for whatever the future might bring is the company's top priority. But when it comes to looking out for its own employees, Nulty Insurance makes sure that its team members are covered too.

"There are many spokes on the wheel of wellness," says Director of Marketing Adam Burke. "We want to touch on every single one." For Nulty, this means that on top of offering excellent traditional benefits, the company also provides first-class physical, mental, and financial wellness programs.

Years ago, Nulty Insurance started getting serious about physical health. It tore down its cubicles and purchased stand-up desks for every team member who wanted one. Then, it began paying for gym memberships in full, providing a yearly \$150 allowance for wellness-related events like marathons, and switching to flex-time. "People know they can take some time during the day to go to fitness classes," says Burke. "You'll see them change into their gym clothes and come right back after they get a workout in." He reports that



70% OF EMPLOYERS HAVE IMPROVED THEIR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHY BEHAVIORS.

SOURCE: "HOW TOP EMPLOYERS ARE CONTROLLING HEALTH CARE COSTS, FOCUSING ON WELLBEING," WILLIS TOWERS WATSON, 2018.

the new benefits have had a significant impact on the health of his teammates—one employee credits the stair-stepper Nulty provided for helping her lose almost 40 pounds.

The company also believes that emotional and mental wellness bears the same importance as physical. It began by adding an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to its list of benefits and inviting mental health professionals to speak on the seriousness of issues like anxiety and depression. Plus, for some therapeutic

"There are many spokes on the wheel of wellness. We want to touch on every single one."

ADAM BURKE, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

relaxation, Nulty welcomes a masseuse to its office each month for 30-minute stress-melting massages. "We treat our people as human beings, not just employees," says Burke. "Sometimes, it means being unconventional."

One of the other uncommon ways Nulty takes care of its team is by taking financial health into account. Whether team members are just entering the workforce or looking towards retirement, the company has found that hosting financial education classes and 401k counseling has relieved the financial worries that might hang over the workday.

"Health, mental, and financial wellness mean something different for everyone," Burke says. "The labor market is tight right now, and we have to make sure that our team is well cared for." For an annual check-up of Nulty's cultural health, its staff participates in an engagement survey conducted by Humanex Ventures. "One of the questions on the survey asks, 'Would you recommend your workplace to someone you know?'" Burke says. "Our goal is to provide the benefits and support our team needs to respond with an enthusiastic 'yes!'"



The Kalamazoo Promise

Is on a Mission

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
KALAMAZOO, MI

The Kalamazoo Promise (The Promise) is known far and wide as one of the nation’s premier community development programs, and education is just one of its team’s many purposes—and passions.

The Promise employs specialists who come to work every day eager to break down the barriers that stand between Promise Scholars and success, and its roster represents a plurality of backgrounds, cultures, and ages that reflect the diversity of its community. “Every one of our team members is creative, passionate, and brings something different to the table,” explains Executive Director of Community Relations, Von Washington Jr.

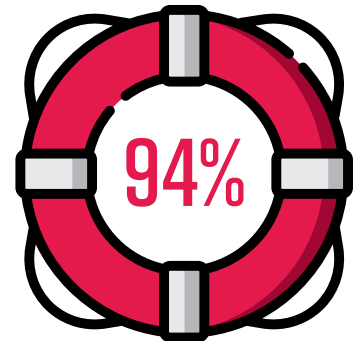
Passion is a big part of the selection process at The Promise—the organization hires those who come with a deep-rooted devotion to its mission and empowers them to let their love for the community define their roles. Team members help students find successful careers and maximize community collaborations to help groups address pressing issues, including clean water, shared prosperity, and generational poverty.

Each week, employees bring their passions to a full-team huddle to discuss the week that was and the days ahead. “When we’re in the huddle, we’re all looking at different perspectives,” says Amy Terzino, culture operations manager. “Essentially, we have an invisible student in the middle. We’re all working toward the common goal of improving that student’s life.” Not only do team members talk about what’s on the horizon for the coming week, but they also share personal challenges and successes. As Terzino puts it, “Sometimes we get tears in the huddle. But mostly, we get cheers.”

“Sometimes we get tears in the huddle. But mostly, we get cheers.”

AMY TERZINO, CULTURE OPERATIONS MANAGER

The team supports each other through good times and bad. To keep everything in perspective, it embarks on “Culture Walks and Culture Talks” twice a year. Over lunch and on a stroll through the community, employees have the chance to confide in a mentor. Washington says the intent is to develop closer



OF EMPLOYEES AT HIGHLY ENGAGED COMPANIES SAY THE PEOPLE THEY WORK WITH HELP EACH OTHER OUT.

SOURCE: “THE BEST PRACTICES OF THE NATION’S ELITE EMPLOYERS,” BEST AND BRIGHTEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR, 2019.

bonds within the team with some one-on-one time while providing the opportunity to address the hurdles employees face in and out of the office. “We ask the difficult questions. There are no taboos,” he says. “Sometimes, people are afraid to ask for help. It takes a level of authenticity on the part of everyone here so we can open up and be ourselves.”

By encouraging team members to be their true selves in the workplace, The Promise creates an environment where everyone can bring their authentic and unadulterated perspectives, passions, and strengths to bear for the benefit of the Kalamazoo community. Its team is truly on a mission.

An Interconnected Culture at CTS Telecom

TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY
GALESBURG, MI

An office nestled in a beautiful wooded corner of Galesburg, MI, may seem like an unlikely place for the headquarters of a high-tech internet company.

Inside, CTS Telecom's technical skills and vast network empower it to compete with and win against the largest multinational corporations in their business. CTS also has another competitive edge—a committed and supportive team that is as bright and connected as its fiber-optic network.

“We Answer the Call” is their motto, and CTS's culture of team recognition and togetherness is obvious to any visitor. Chief Financial Officer Heather Haydo explains that the key

to maintaining that culture is to bring all those smiling faces together regularly. For example, the full CTS team gathers for a daily morning meeting at the company's headquarters. “We take that time to review the plan for the day, but more importantly, give recognition and thanks for a job well done,” she says. These meetings allow for interactions between teams that would otherwise rarely be in the same building while providing the perfect opportunity to celebrate stand-out moments together.

With high-fives in the hallway, office Olympics, and spur-of-the-moment celebrations, dull moments are few and far between at CTS. But fittingly, the CTS team has a bit more high-tech way to celebrate the stand-out work of their coworkers. “The most popular form of recognition we have is an app called Kudos,” says Haydo. “It looks and feels a lot like social media. Employees create posts and give recognition and points to each other for going above and beyond.” The team has since renamed its program “Chewdos” in honor of its mascot, Chewy T. Squirrel. “In our business, squirrels sometimes chew on and damage fiber optic cables,” she explains. CTS team members collect their “Chewdos”

throughout the year and exchange them for prizes, including cash, gift cards, and CTS swag.

More often than not, team members choose branded shirts over cash incentives. “We are all truly invested and proud of working here,” Haydo says. “Almost 20 percent of our workforce has been here for over 20 years—the fact that we have such high employee retention speaks for itself.” Whether providing

“Almost 20 percent of our workforce has been here for over 20 years—the fact that we have such high employee retention speaks for itself.”

HEATHER HAYDO, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

tech support, setting up custom phone systems, transferring data around the world, or locating a squirrel bite, the team at CTS Telecom supports each other through it all. Every employee knows their hard work will be seen, recognized, and rewarded, making them more than willing to go the extra mile for each other, and each of the company's clients.



89% OF EMPLOYEES AT WINNING COMPANIES SAY THEIR ORGANIZATION PROMOTES A POSITIVE CULTURE.

SOURCE: “THE BEST PRACTICES OF THE NATION'S ELITE EMPLOYERS,”
BEST AND BRIGHTEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR, 2019.



Community Is A Way Of Life At First National Bank of Michigan

BANK
KALAMAZOO, MI

A visit to First National Bank of Michigan, located in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo, comes with a complimentary cup of locally brewed coffee and warm smiles from familiar faces.

“We have customers who come in every day,” says President and CEO Dan Bitzer. “We think of everyone who walks in as family.” And because much of its team has worked together for the entire 13 years the bank has been in the community, its internal environment is much the same.

“First National Bank of Michigan is a community bank, and a community bank means just that,” Bitzer says. “We’re here to service the customers and the community the best we can, and it starts with our employees.” The company has 87 employees spread across branches in Grand Rapids, Holland, Kalamazoo, and a loan production office in

Lansing; in each market, all decisions are local, made by a local management team and Board of Directors so the bank can always do what’s best for its community.

But it’s not only business decisions that First National Bank of Michigan sources locally. Just as it doesn’t buy the coffee served in its lobby from the grocery store, it purchases its pens, staplers, paper, and other office supplies

“At the end of the day, we’re here to serve our community—every decision is made with that in mind.”

DAN BITZER, PRESIDENT & CEO

from local vendors. “It’s very important to us to support where we live, work, and raise our families,” says Bitzer. Staying true to this value, the bank purchases everything it can, down to branded mugs and clothing, from local businesses.

PURPOSE-ORIENTED
EMPLOYEES ARE

54% MORE LIKELY

TO STAY AT A
COMPANY FOR MORE
THAN FIVE YEARS AND

30% MORE LIKELY

TO BE HIGH
PERFORMERS THAN
THOSE WHO WORK
FOR A PAY CHECK.



SOURCE: IMPERATIVE WORKFORCE PURPOSE INDEX, 2015

As Kalamazoo has grown in recent years, so too has First National Bank of Michigan’s location there with its team of 43, leaving it a little cramped for space. But when it came time to search for a new location, the bank never dreamed of leaving its city. When team members packed up their desks in October, they didn’t have to go far—its new location was right next door!

“We did a full renovation of the building,” says Bitzer. “We did it for our team, but also the community. We spent extra dollars to make sure the whole block looks first-class for Kalamazoo.” Plus, ever thinking of its local community, First National Bank of Michigan made sure to hire only local contractors and subcontractors to complete work on its new digs, something Bitzer says was no easy task.

“Our team members and our customers like to see us put money back into the city,” he says. “At the end of the day, we’re here to serve our community—every decision is made with that in mind. Nothing could be more important to us.”



Get Up and Get Outside at

Landscape Forms

DESIGNER & MANUFACTURER OF
CUSTOM ENVIRONMENTS

KALAMAZOO, MI

It should come as no surprise that at Landscape Forms—one of the world’s premier manufacturers of outdoor site furnishings, lighting, and structures—people like to get outside.

The company’s benches, streetlights, bike racks, and more can be found everywhere from the Kalamazoo Mall to Barbados to London. “Chances are you’ve seen [our products] and not even realized it,” says Jim Marshall, vice president of culture. “My family is embarrassed to travel with me because I’ll be lifting the lids on trash cans to see our sticker on the bottom.”

Landscape Forms, Marshall explains, constantly tries to find new ways to make the outdoors a place where people can learn, work, play, and relax. “We like to say that we’re all designers here,” he says. “We often wax poetic about how we’re artful problem-solvers.”

The company found that the best way for a team to break out of conventional thinking is to break out of the traditional workplace. “At Landscape Forms, when we’re trying to figure out how will we build a new product, we want to collaborate,” says Marshall. “If you walk through our offices, you’ll see whiteboards all over and drawings pinned up on the walls. But for me, if I have an undisturbed hour outside with the breeze blowing, I can get so much more done.”

Although the company’s outdoor campus has plenty of benches, chairs, and tables, the most sought-after outdoor space to work in is its Upfit outdoor space. “Upfit came out of our study of human behavior and insights into how people work and interact outdoors,” says Marshall. The structure is outfitted with whiteboards and power outlets as well as automated louvered roofing that automatically adapts to weather changes. Designed for spaces like university campuses, hospitals, and public parks, Landscape Forms’ own Upfit structure is the most popular on-site workspace for both meetings and focused independent work. “When people ask, ‘Where are we meeting?’ chances are, it’s the Upfit tables,” says Marshall.

“For me, if I have an undisturbed hour outside with the breeze blowing, I can get so much more done.”

JIM MARSHALL, VICE PRESIDENT OF CULTURE

Imbedded in Landscape Form’ credo is the ambitious goal of doubling every six years. Though this may seem aggressive, it’s a mark the company has been more than able to meet during its 50-year history by smashing preconceptions and encouraging creativity. “No matter your role at Landscape Forms, we want you to break the mold,” says Marshall. “We have to constantly shake things up. We want people getting out from behind their desks and going outside. Even in our manufacturing plant, we never bolt anything down because everyone knows it’s not going to be there in six months.”



**43% OF THE BEST PLACES TO WORK OFFER
MEDITATION/RELAXATION AREAS FOR EMPLOYEES.**

SOURCE: “THE BEST PRACTICES OF THE NATION’S ELITE EMPLOYERS,
BEST AND BRIGHTEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR, 2019.”





87% OF EMPLOYEES
 EXPECT THEIR
 EMPLOYER TO
 SUPPORT THEM IN
 BALANCING WORK
 AND PERSONAL
 COMMITMENTS.



SOURCE: GLASSDOOR, 2017

WSI Finds Time for Work and Life

STAFFING AND RECRUITMENT FIRM
 KALAMAZOO, MI

WSI’s mission is to “empower people to live their best lives.”

As a staffing and recruitment firm, this means helping people find a profession where they will be successful and fulfilled; however, the company’s guiding purpose also translates to the way it treats its internal staff. Culture Manager Lauren Rogalski puts it this way, “We know that WSI is just a part of our employees’ lives, but we don’t demand that it be the main focus. We believe that you should be able to have fun here while still being happy in your outside life.”

To guarantee an optimal work-life balance for its team, WSI holds that family will always come first. “Family will always take precedence over work,” says Rogalski. “We blur the lines between work and family. It’s not abnormal to see kids sitting in offices with their parents who are trying to finish something up.” WSI’s no-questions-asked policy when it comes to family ensures that its employees never feel guilty leaving an hour early to be at the bus stop or a dance recital.

In the summer months, kids are welcome to tag along to Kalamazoo Growlers games attended by the company and its annual party. And though everyone on staff looks forward to these events, most would say their favorite perk is WSI’s policy for summer Fridays. After logging 40 hours in a week, WSI employees have the option to take the rest of the day off after lunch time. “I love it,” says Rogalski. “It totally changes your weekend. You get to really spend that time with your family and with your kids. We’re a hard-working team, so you’re probably already working your 40 hours before noon on Friday. It’s a great reward.”

In all seasons, WSI understands that sometimes it’s impossible to leave your lives at the door before coming in to work. “We spend a lot of time

“We spend a lot of time together. We’ve been through a lot of ups and downs here with our coworkers.”

LAUREN ROGALSKI, CULTURE MANAGER

together,” she says. “We’ve been through a lot of ups and downs here with our coworkers. Our team celebrates together, but we also come together when times are tough. We stop by, make sure they know



that we’re there, and we’re willing to do everything we can to make it easier for them.” One time, when an employee’s husband was preparing for his first year of teaching at a local school, WSI sponsored a drive to collect school supplies to fill his classroom. Rogalski says it was one of the most successful collections she has seen.

For WSI, connecting its clients to the right jobs requires making sure its employees can live their best lives inside and outside of work. “We really just want to put people in a place to be as successful as they can be,” says Rogalski. The company’s guiding philosophy is that teams are engaged only when they know the people they work with and care about their lives in and out of the workplace.



Honor Credit Union Finds Big Value in Intentional Spaces

CREDIT UNION
BERRIEN SPRINGS, MI

In business for over 85 years, Honor Credit Union has only had a unified headquarters since 2016.

With its team scattered across Benton Harbor and St. Joseph in rented buildings, “We had a lot of different people going different ways,” says Brand Manager Stacey Dodson. “We were having a harder time pulling together as one.” Leaning into its values of collaboration, transparency, and teamwork, Honor Credit Union built a brand-new hub in Berrien Springs to bring its employees together under one roof.

Now that it could design a new space from scratch instead of squeezing into rented space, Honor Credit Union did not waste this opportunity to make the new office feel like home. “Everything about the building—inside and out—was intentional,” says Dodson. Even the smallest details, like the color schemes and artwork, were chosen to reflect the credit union’s values and brand. “For example, there’s glass everywhere for a reason,” she explains. “We’re a financial institution, but we’re one that’s transparent.”

In the spirit of transparency, Honor Credit Union designed multiple creative spaces for its employees, embracing an open office concept. Now, its individual teams are grouped together, but they all work side by side. Dodson says that the layout—with marketing working in the call center next to IT—increases collaboration

between teams. But when someone needs a little privacy, they can always step into a conference room or sit on a comfy and secluded couch. “I love the fact that we can embrace both [privacy and collaboration],” she says. “I write a lot in my role, and sometimes I just need a quiet spot to work.”

Walking through the credit union’s offices, the atmosphere is electric in the shared

“There’s glass everywhere for a reason. We’re a financial institution, but we’re one that’s transparent.”

STACEY DODSON, BRAND MANAGER

spaces, with vibrant art on the walls and team members working together. But you don’t have to go far to find a secluded corner couch or the coveted “spaceship” private booth on the top floor. Even more popular is the bookable relaxation room, complete with a massage chair. “We’re growing, we’re busy, and we are on the go constantly,” says Dodson. “We know how important it is to get the mental reset you need to do good work.”

Honor Credit Union refuses to take a cookie-cutter approach to its clients’ financials or the workplace. “To help our members achieve their financial dreams, we decided to break the traditional workplace mold, giving employees the option to work the way they can be most effective,” says Dodson.



SOURCE: “ENGAGEMENT AND THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE,” STEELCASE GLOBAL REPORT, 2016.



At Tekna, Transparency is Part of the Design

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FIRM
KALAMAZOO, MI

The headquarters of the full-service product development firm Tekna is a hive of activity, with industrial designers, mechanical engineers, graphic designers, and creatives of every kind huddled around computer screens and sketching out new ideas on whiteboards.

The space—with ceilings high enough to allow for an airplane to be suspended above the design team—leaves plenty of room for big ideas, but Tekna’s openness is more than physical.

For professionals of many different disciplines to rally around one vision for a product, Tekna believes that authenticity is an absolute necessity. “We celebrate everyone’s quirks

and even their weirdness,” says Senior Design Researcher Sarah Hollingsworth. “It’s how we have meaningful relationships. We’re just ‘real’ with each other.”

Keeping it real seems to be working. As its client list expands, Tekna has been adding more and more perspectives to the mix—the team has almost tripled in the five years of Hollingsworth’s tenure. And the firm shows no sign of slowing down.

“We celebrate everyone’s quirks and even their weirdness. It’s how we have meaningful relationships.”

SARAH HOLLINGSWORTH, SENIOR DESIGN RESEARCHER

Tekna’s authenticity extends beyond its walls, too, defining interactions with clients and partners. Hollingsworth says that in the consulting world, it’s easy to go through the motions on a project, even if you don’t believe in the product. “Some firms may spend a client’s money even if they don’t think the idea will be profitable. We find that short-sighted,” she explains. “When you’re playing the long game, you need to be honest with everyone.”

HIGHLY ENGAGED
TEAMS ARE
21% MORE PROFITABLE.



SOURCE: “STATE OF THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE,” GALLUP, 2017.

For creatives, it can be hard to let people get a look behind the curtain before designs are polished, but the transparency throughout the creative process is what sets Tekna’s culture apart.

“There’s something really risky about being that up-front and authentic,” says Hollingsworth. “It forces you to be vulnerable.” She believes that, by laying out what she calls the “creative messiness” throughout a project’s lifespan, the firm is able to work through problems and design a product that’s even better than expected. “Meaningful relationships create meaningful solutions,” she says. “Our team is not an assembly line. We make the most of our diverse skillsets and our clients’ input all the way through.”



At **Gibson,** Employees Do the Right Thing

RISK MANAGEMENT ADVISORS & CONSULTANTS
KALAMAZOO, MI

Gibson is always thinking ahead. Whether providing insurance to cover illness and injury or even building a succession plan for a family business, the company is dedicated to managing risk.

Gibson recently expanded its presence in the region. One of the company's values, "Pursue Growth," is the force guiding this expansion. However, its belief in growth applies to more than just business decisions. "Professionally, I have team leaders pushing me to pursue the next step in my education and designations," says Client Manager Laura Van Dyke.

Van Dyke grew up in Marshall, Michigan, and joined Gibson's team in South Bend, Indiana, after graduating college. Four months later, the Kalamazoo location opened

its doors. "I thought I was way too new to ask to move," she says. "I was so surprised how flexible my team leaders were in making sure that if I wanted to move closer to family, I was able to do that."

Van Dyke's experience not only speaks to Gibson's guiding principle "Do the Right Thing" but also its most defining value—to "Own Your Future." In the spirit of owning the future, Gibson operates with an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) that gives its team part-ownership and a genuine interest in the company's success. With the ESOP comes the responsibility and power to make decisions like a stakeholder. "There's a lot of accountability in getting results for clients and taking care of them," Van Dyke says. "I know that if I take responsibility for something with a client, I've got leadership support."

"Professionally, I have team leaders pushing me to pursue the next step in my education and designations."

LAURA VAN DYKE, CLIENT MANAGER

The company also gives its team complete control over its work-life balance with flex-time and unlimited paid time off. Its team

EMPLOYEES WHO FEEL THEIR VOICE IS HEARD ARE **4.6 TIMES MORE LIKELY** TO FEEL EMPOWERED TO PERFORM THEIR BEST WORK.



SOURCE: "WHY EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY NEED TO BE SMB PRIORITIES," SALESFORCE, 2018

is so results-oriented and client-focused that these policies are never abused. "Actually, the biggest challenge is to get people to take a vacation!" Van Dyke says. But when it's finally time to take a break and celebrate a job well done, the team is sure to make time for togetherness and investing in the community—like by building bunk beds for kids in need.

By staying true to its founding principles, Gibson has set itself up for success both inside and out. As Van Dyke says, "We never let our clients or our team down."

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According to the Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services 2019 Individual and Small Group network filings, excluding out-of-state and Upper Peninsula providers. Network varies by plan.

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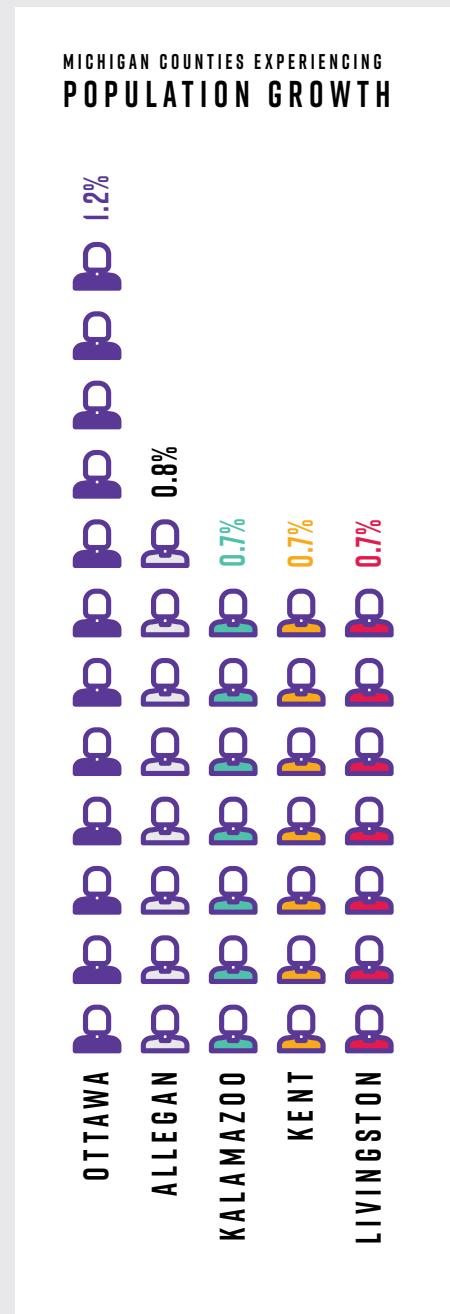
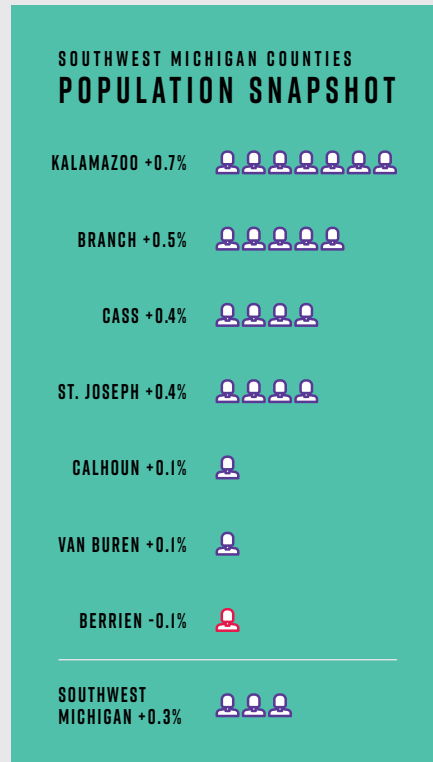
3

Do you know what these numbers mean?

The team at 269 MAGAZINE did some digging to give you the inside scoop on what these numbers reveal about the city that sits in the middle of Southwest Michigan: Kalamazoo.

3 POPULATION¹

Did you know that Kalamazoo County ranks among Michigan's top three counties with positive population growth? While the metropolitan regions of Detroit and Grand Rapids lead the pack of Michigan's fastest-growing places, Southwest Michigan—driven by increases in Kalamazoo County—is more than keeping pace!



SOURCES:

1. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU ESTIMATES

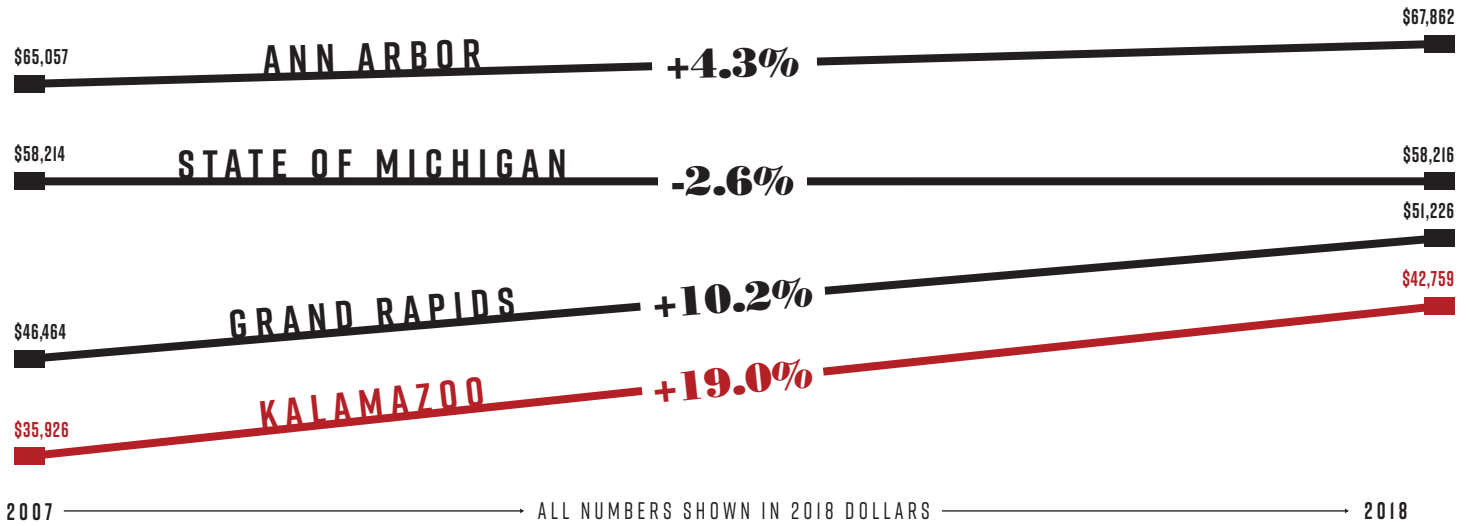
2. U.S. CENSUS' AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

3. COST OF LIVING INDEX FOR QUARTER 3, 2019 BY THE COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH

19 INCOME²

Median household income is on the rise in three of the cities where Michigan is seeing population growth—Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Ann Arbor. Not only is Kalamazoo among the only three cities in the state with income growth, but it also leads the pack with income increasing 19 percent over the last 11 years!

MICHIGAN CITIES SHOWING POSITIVE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME GROWTH

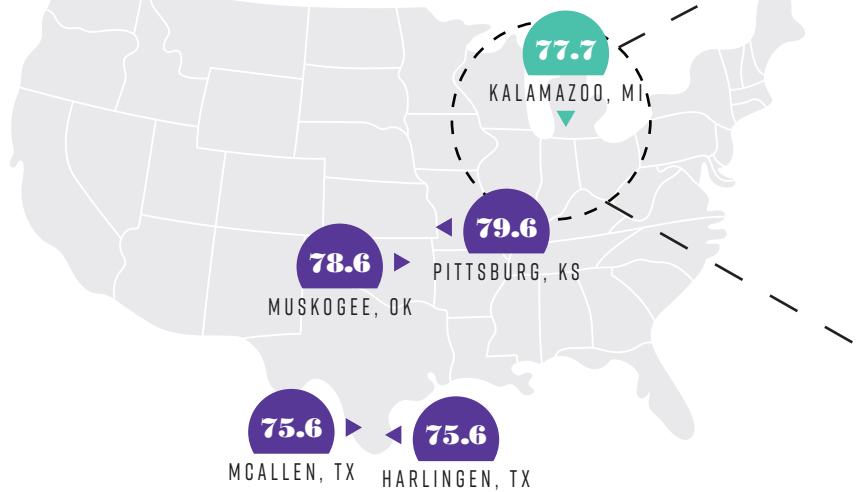


3 COST OF LIVING³

Top that with having the third-lowest cost of living (COL) in America, and it's easy to see that Kalamazoo's future is bright! The city's affordability is making it a key attractor for people and businesses alike.

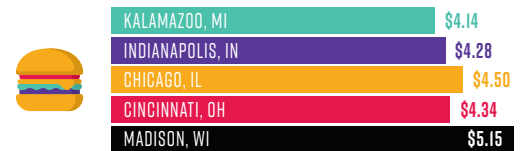
Want to know what things really cost? Here's how a few Midwest neighbors stack up against each other when pricing dinner, movie, and a place to call home.

AMERICAN CITIES WITH THE LOWEST COST OF LIVING (COL)

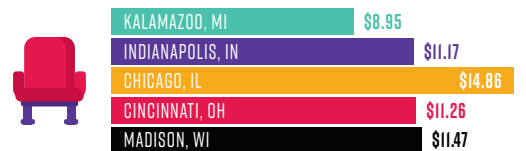


IN MIDWESTERN CITIES, THE AVERAGE COST OF...

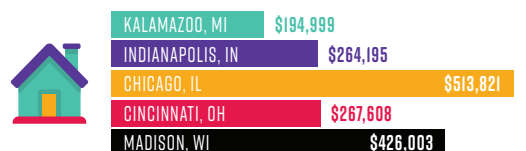
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PHOTO KATHRYN DAVIS

THIS IS NO DESK JOB

I'm working with the operations and product integration team here at Getman to figure out how we can make the floor run more efficiently. When we're building a truck, we get parts like fenders and battery boxes. Before each piece gets put on the truck, it needs to be tacked and welded together. I'm designing fixtures for the welding tables that allow the welders to work without stopping to do hand measurements. Then I write the standard work instructions, so anybody would be able to build these fixtures the same way I did.

ALWAYS NETWORKING

In eighth grade, I did Borgess Run Camp and met Derek Getman, who is part of the family that founded this organization. When you're running long distance, you get to know a lot about someone. So, once I decided on studying engineering, he ended up being a great contact.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

When I get to the office, I usually take a lap around the shop floor. I work one-on-one with the welders, so I'll go down and see what they're working on. If they are working on a fixture, I'll stay down there to observe and take notes. Otherwise, when I'm at my desk, I'm writing standard work instructions or designing fixtures with CAD (computer-aided design) software.

ADVICE TO FELLOW INTERNS

I think it's just important to remember that you have to keep an open mind. This was my first internship, so when I started, the first few weeks were hard and honestly scary. I thought I wasn't going to like working here because it was totally new to me. But as I kept going, I tried keeping a positive attitude. Now I'm loving it here.

THRIVING WITH THE RIGHT SUPPORT

I think Getman has done an outstanding job with this program. I'm part of a group of six interns that started together. We were able to do a CliftonStrengths workshop by Gallup to find out what our natural strengths are. From there, we spoke with a consultant who explained to us how we could use our talents here at Getman and in our personal lives. Also, my supervisor, Jason, has given me a lot of time to work independently. When he gives me a task, I have time to do my research, figure things out on my own—then I know which questions to ask if I need help.



MEET JOSIE

POSITION

Product Integration Intern at Getman Corporation

EDUCATION

Michigan Technological University

Major: Mechanical Engineering

Expected Graduation: December 2021



LOADS OF SUCCESS

THROUGH ADVANCED AUTOMATION AND A WINNING WORKFORCE, **CONTINENTAL LINEN SERVICES** TAKES ITS COMPETITION TO THE CLEANERS

BY GATHY KNAPP
PHOTO HANNAH ZIEGLER

A TYPICAL FOUR-PERSON HOUSEHOLD WASHES EIGHT TO 10 LAUNDRY LOADS EVERY SEVEN DAYS, ACCORDING TO UNCLUTTERER.

Averaging 16 pounds per load, this equates to lugging 144 pounds of dirty clothes to and from the laundry room each week. Contrast this vision to that of the 450,000 pounds of laundry serviced weekly at Continental Linen Services (CLS) in Kalamazoo, and the home laundry washer may feel less inclined to complain about the chore.

“Yes, we do a bit more than the average household,” agreed Senior Vice President and Owner Sarah Wrubel.

The company dates back to the pre-home-washer-and-dryer era of 1899, when CLS was called Kalamazoo Laundry Company. It mainly served homeowners and some hotels and businesses.

With the advent of home appliances, the company moved into more commercial work. In 1966, Wrubel’s grandfather, Ted Vander Meer, purchased the business and renamed it Continental Linen Services.

Wrubel described the evolution. “We began to lease linens for restaurants and hotels and uniforms for factories. Our service area grew and now includes all of Michigan, northern Indiana, and northwest Ohio. We’ve added lease-only textiles, restroom products, a direct sales division to sell garments, promotional products, and five more locations.”

CLS invested considerably in garment automation, evolving from hand barcoding to inserting radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags that contain vital tracking information. A recent \$2.5 million automation project introduced vacuum-sort technology for the company’s linen business.

A mechanical marvel, this technology starts with soiled laundry hanging in bags from a distribution line. It drops the laundry onto a sorting station. Articles are fed into a vacuum tube and sucked into a holding area or sent up a conveyor belt for further sorting. Full loads



are then automatically released into a sling once the proper washer-load weight has been identified. This sling then travels on a tubular monorail to the washers.

“Previously, we hand-sorted laundry into carts on the floor, which were then manually weighed and hoisted into overhead storage. Each sling was later walked to the washer,” Wrubel said. “This automation is huge for us. We now have complete control of load sizes, allowing the precise wash formula for optimum results.”

More automation is planned in the coming year. Increased capacity has led to sales growth and

new jobs in the areas of high-volume ironing, route sales, marketing, human resources, and administration.

“Family culture is important here,” Wrubel said. “We are trying to move more positions to first shift and accommodate part-time and non-traditional positions. I want to know everyone’s name and let them know they’re important.”

A wall-mounted family tree containing all team member names reinforces her words.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION

HOW THIS SQUEAKY-CLEAN PARTNERSHIP GROWS JOBS

For more than twenty years, Southwest Michigan First and Continental Lines Service (CLS) have joined forces to fill jobs created by the linen and uniform rental service provider in the Kalamazoo area. Deep relationships were forged by the duo during the exploration of incentives for equipment investments. The subsequent investments left CLS open to investigating workforce growth strategies with the regional economic development catalyst.

Hiring young, unskilled, and reskilled workers has helped CLS flourish during the extended period of full employment Southwest Michigan is experiencing. The company regularly takes advantage of internship, apprenticeship, and Going PRO trainings hosted by Southwest Michigan First. And, it jumped on board when the agency invited it to participate in Western Michigan University’s part-time job fair, where it had the opportunity to connect with non-traditional employees.

Since CLS is all about helping other companies deliver the best brand image possible with crisp uniforms, pressed linens, and winning welcome mats, the employer is completely focused on how its own mission plays out in its culture. It makes employee engagement and ongoing training top priorities. So, you’ve probably bumped into CLS team members eagerly learning from top-notch thought leaders at Catalyst University—one of the state’s largest annual leadership conferences—which is powered by Southwest Michigan First.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CLS,
VISIT CLSIMAGE.COM.



creating great places to live & work

AVB partnered with Mrs. O's Preschool to build their new school building in Portage. The team at Mrs. O's were driven by the desire to create a preschool experience that focused on age-appropriate developmental learning balanced with academics, play, and structured activities. The 3,932 square foot preschool features 2 immersive classrooms equipped with their own coat cubby areas, an outdoor playground, 3 teacher offices and a common café between the classrooms. The construction of the new school was on a streamlined schedule, to have it open for the fall 2019 school year. To accomplish this AVB recommended using prefabricated walls and slab on grad construction, which successfully completed the new school on time and on budget.



BUILD SOMETHING BETTER.

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TAPISTRY BREWING WEAVES PASSION INTO ITS BREWS



BY
KATIE HURST
PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
TAPISTRY BREWING

SINCE TAPISTRY BREWING'S DOORS OPENED IN 2013, OWNERS JOE RUDNICK AND GREG KORSON HAVE MADE IT THEIR SINGULAR GOAL TO TRANSLATE THEIR PASSION FOR THE ART AND CHEMISTRY OF BREWING INTO CREATING EXCELLENT CRAFT BEER.

From the brilliant orange can of its Belgian Witbier, Mr. Orange, to its award-winning Peck's Porter, Tapistry delivers a true sense of community and identity to the Michigan craft beer scene—along with amazing beers.

Rudnick and Korson, Michigan natives, have always shared a passion for homebrewing and craft beer. Prior to the launch of Tapistry, both worked for a local pharmaceutical company in engineering and finance, respectively. During this time, they were active participants in the local craft beer industry, gaining years of home and commercial brewing knowledge and regularly attending festivals and beer tastings.

These experiences reinforced what they knew all along: Rudnick and Korson wanted to bring their own interpretation of great craft beer to Michigan and beyond. They set out to do just that! The result was the first craft brewery ever established in Bridgman, Michigan—offering meticulously crafted, quality beers with a focus on style and a passion for hop-forward India pale ales.

The duo started a 15-barrel system on day one and now produces 3,000 to 3,200 barrels annually from their 3,700-square-foot production facility, also located in downtown Bridgman. Tapistry cans are on shelves and its beers are on tap at retail locations across the state.

Rudnick is particularly proud of the evolution of Tapistry's taproom and the inviting community space it has created. There are multiple indoor and outdoor spaces to support the sale of local art that you can buy right off the wall. The team is putting more than just beer into the hands of the Michigan craft beer community.

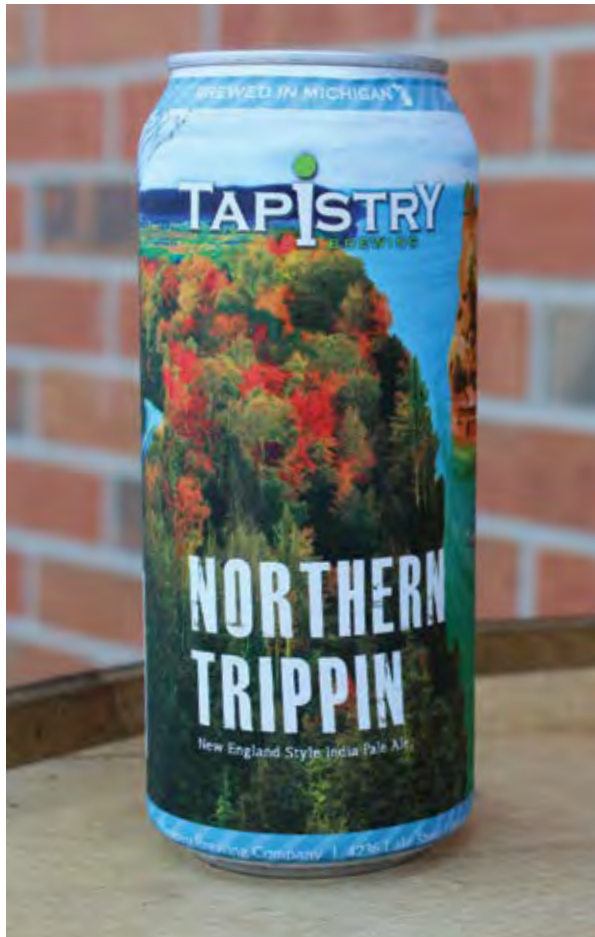
But, let's be honest, we need to talk about the beer! Tapistry is knocking it out of the park with year-round staples, including its brown sugar double IPA called Enigma, a light and refreshing blood orange Witbier that is appropriately named Mr. Orange, a West Coast-style IPA known as Reactor, and Peck's Porter—a Great American Beer Festival award winner.

“I feel that our proudest moments, as owners, are talking beer with our customers and seeing the smiles and excitement that our brand can create.”

JOE RUDNICK, CO-OWNER OF TAPISTRY BREWING

It's clear that Tapistry has a desire for high-quality, handcrafted beers focused on style. Another mainstay in the brewery's year-round lineup of Michigan-centric beers is Northern Trippin, a fruit-forward New England-style IPA that would be perfect to pack for your next long weekend “up north.” Whatever your tastes, Tapistry has a beer that will satisfy your craving for Michigan craft beer. And all taste great in mugs designed by hand in Fennville— just an hour's drive north—for Tapistry's mug club members.





“We are always proud to support the Michigan craft beer industry in any way we can, and Tapisty is doing it right.”

ADAM STEWART, BRAND MANAGER AT IMPERIAL BEVERAGE



“We are very proud of the beers that we produce,” Rudnick says. “In 2014, our English Robust Porter, Peck’s Porter, won a GABF [Great American Beer Festival] bronze medal, and this gave us a great feeling of accomplishment. However, I feel that our proudest moments, as owners, are talking beer with our customers and seeing the smiles and excitement that our brand can create. There isn’t a better feeling than watching others enjoy something that you enjoy as well.”

With the brewery approaching its seventh year of business, customers have a lot to look forward to—a new private rental space, 19 handcrafted beers on draft, take-out cans, and plenty of live entertainment with an inviting atmosphere for locals and visitors alike. And there’s no need to worry if you don’t want to brave the elements for the trip to Bridgman; Imperial Beverage distributes Tapisty to stores across nearly the entire state of Michigan, including Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, and Ann Arbor. When that inevitable snow day hits, you can make sure you’ve stocked up on your favorite Tapisty brews to enjoy at home.

“We are always proud to support the Michigan craft beer industry in any way we can, and Tapisty is doing it right,” says Imperial Beverage Brand Manager, Adam Stewart. “Their core beers—Enigma, Mr. Orange, Reactor, Peck’s Porter, and Northern Trippin—are always available on the shelf, and we look forward to helping more people enjoy them today, tomorrow, and in the future.”

Katie Hurst is a marketing 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.

With the brewery approaching its seventh year of business, customers have a lot to look forward to—a new private rental space, 19 handcrafted beers on draft, take-out cans, and plenty of live entertainment with an inviting atmosphere for locals and visitors alike.



How Do You Define a Degree?

THE MEANING OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION IS CHANGING

BY
LORA PAINTER
PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
WESTERN MICHIGAN
UNIVERSITY

A COLLEGE DEGREE IS NO LONGER JUST PREPARATION FOR A JOB.

“It’s preparation for a career, preparation to be a community citizen,” said Jennifer Bott, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Western Michigan University (WMU).

This change in the role of higher education means an increased need to communicate to students, families, and area businesses what colleges and universities can offer.

This can start with rethinking the school’s brand. “A brand is so much more than a logo or a tagline,” Bott said. “Over the course of 12 months, we’ve connected with more than 6,000 members of our community, and we’ve asked the question, ‘What does a Western Michigan University degree mean?’”

The answer is evolving, Bott said, but there’s consensus that the purpose of a degree goes beyond professional enrichment to include personal growth. So, Bott’s mission is to make sure students find their passions and use their skills to better themselves and their communities.

“A part of our brand is also the recognition that education doesn’t end when our students walk across that stage at Miller auditorium at graduation,” Bott said. “We’re thinking about interesting ways to leverage their experiences to help our students identify their futures.”

And that can start by helping students make informed choices about which majors and careers fit them.



“When students are ignited, they move through their education much more confidently and quickly, which we know helps reduce the cost.”

DR. JENNIFER BOTT,
PROVOST & VICE PRESIDENT FOR
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AT WESTERN
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Recent research from the National Center for Education Statistics found that about one-third of students enrolled in bachelor’s degree programs changed majors. The same study, which looked at 25,000 college students nationwide, also found that one in 10 students changed majors more than once.

It might be hard to put a firm number on the value of a college education. But data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows education can pay off—literally. The more you learn, the more you earn.

The BLS found that in 2018, workers with at least a bachelor’s degree earned more than the median weekly earnings of \$932. Weekly earnings for people with doctoral or professional degrees were more than triple those with the lowest level of education, which is less than a high school diploma.

To better help students find their passions and enter meaningful, lucrative careers, regional economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First partners with WMU Career Services to deliver Internship 101 several times a year. It is a workshop geared toward helping employers develop meaningful internship programs for students.

“In times of low unemployment like the one we are in now—Kalamazoo County’s jobless rate was at three percent in the fall of 2019—there is an increased need for students to help fill those jobs that are open,” said Kim Weishaar, chief financial officer of Southwest Michigan First. According to the Pure Michigan Talent Connect website, at least 12,000 open jobs are available in the region right now.

“Regional companies have open positions, but the region doesn’t necessarily have the numbers of talented individuals required to fill them,” Weishaar said. “So we are very fortunate that we have WMU and other partners in the community that are training workers with the skills to fill those jobs.”

With more than 41,000 students enrolled in higher education, Southwest Michigan is a hub for future professionals. A large university can mean a large talent pipeline for employers, which can be a significant factor in where a company chooses to set



up shop or expand, like when on November 6, FedEx publicly announced that it would be occupying a new distribution center to be built in Portage. Once at full capacity, this project is expected to provide opportunities for 924 full-time and contract employees.

Programs like Internship 101 help companies bring in interns, integrate them in company culture, teach them valuable skills, and—ultimately—hire them on as full-time employees. Several dates for the workshop are planned for 2020.

Weekly earnings for people with doctoral or professional degrees were more than triple those with the lowest level of education, which is less than a high school diploma.

“I think one of the things that’s really unique about internships is the opportunity to connect passion and career readiness a lot earlier,” Bott said. “Most institutions push junior year internships. We’re saying that’s too late. We need to equip our students with the vocabulary of their chosen profession sooner.

“When students are ignited, they move through their education much more confidently and quickly, which we know helps reduce the cost,” Bott said. “We’re so fortunate to have a partner in this with Southwest Michigan First. They are as deeply connected to our students’ success as we are, because that’s how our workforce evolves in our community.”



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



A TIME-TESTED WINNING PARTNERSHIP

MILLER JOHNSON'S INVESTMENT IN KALAMAZOO GOES BACK FOUR DECADES

MILLER JOHNSON HAS CALLED DOWNTOWN KALAMAZOO 'HOME' FOR 40 YEARS. Since 1979, the law firm has been a part of the planning, development, and growth of Southwest Michigan. Often, Miller Johnson has had its people and clients directly involved in the progress. So with four decades of experience under its belt, the firm considers not just its office, but its Kalamazoo 'home,' a wonderful workplace.

"Kalamazoo is rich with cultural pride, economic development, and the spirit of civic leadership," said Craig Lubben, Managing Member of Miller Johnson. "For our firm to have the trust of many of the leaders and influencers in this community is a privilege. Our number one priority for our clients is to simplify the challenges they face, not complicate them. We use our experience and talent to develop practical solutions. We hire problem solvers and not just scholars. We don't cite case law; we solve problems."

It's that service and robust client base that have allowed the firm to thrive. Healthcare and pharmaceutical device manufacturing have been industry staples in the region for decades. Miller Johnson has provided employment and labor counsel, litigation representation, and corporate legal services for many employers that many in the community rely on for their own care needs. The firm has partnered with technology and agribusiness leaders on workforce issues such as

immigration and employee benefits. Individuals and families have benefited from the renowned estate planning and family law practices of the full-service firm. The problem-solving skills of the firm have been utilized from the boardrooms to the beaches and courtrooms to living rooms.

"The development has stretched from South Haven to Coldwater," said Matt Van Dyk, a real estate attorney and Administrative Member of the Kalamazoo office. "Significant strides in economic, industrial, and educational opportunities through the work we do is what clients seek. Being able to understand and partner with our clients is the difference maker for them."

"Our number one priority for our clients is to simplify the challenges they face, not complicate them."

CRAIG LUBBEN, MANAGING MEMBER

Dynamics affect any relationship within every home and workplace. Miller Johnson's foundation is as strong now as it was when the firm opened its office in the Kalamazoo Building in 1979. Though the strength of the firm would be tested along



the way, including moves to the Cornerstone Building, Rose Street Market Building, and now the Radisson Plaza Hotel, it would take more conflict than any client, court, or even Mother Nature could create to find something they couldn't handle. These are attorneys.

"We've had our share of opportunities and challenges," said Lubben. "The devastating tornado in 1980 affected families, friends, and our firm. It's something anyone who experienced that day remembers to this day. The same can be said for many events over the years. We practice preparedness

in understanding our clients' needs. Though some things you can't ever totally prepare for, responsiveness and communication go a long way. Those are hallmark standards at Miller Johnson. It's part of our culture."

Ultimately a law firm's culture is its people. Miller Johnson wouldn't have 40 years to celebrate in Kalamazoo if it weren't for the right group in the right place.

"Our mission is to achieve outstanding results and provide superior service by, in part, attracting, developing and retaining exceptional people who have a passion for life," said Lubben. "There are no better examples of that than the individuals who work in and call Kalamazoo their home."

Lubben himself has worked in the Kalamazoo office since 1986. Deb Koppers, a Legal Administrative Assistant, has worked at the firm since its Kalamazoo office inception in 1979. David Buday, an Employment & Labor attorney, since 1989. Tami Carl, a Legal Administrative Assistant, since 1991. The list goes on and on. Julie Sullivan, Dan Perk, Sarah Willey, John Koryto, Rebecca Strauss. These are all names deeply committed to their clients and the Kalamazoo community. New additions, including Teresa Rajala, Blake Padget, Chris Rork, and Michelle Quigley, represent the future of the firm and continuing the legacy of connecting.

"We are intentional in our involvement in the community," said Willey, an Employment & Labor Attorney and member on the firm's Management Committee. "Our support and involvement



in everything, from running 5Ks and marathons to supporting performances and art exhibits, have a meaningful place in the enrichment of this town. Beyond exceptional legal service, we value and promote diversity of thought, background, and culture."

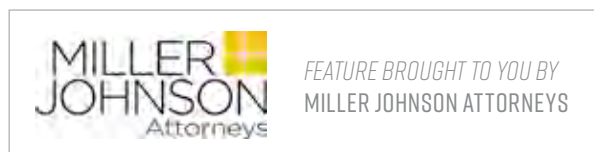
The firm continues to enhance its "Down to Earth, Down to Business" persona through leadership on more than 50 boards over the years, including the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Kalamazoo, Family & Children Services, the YWCA of Kalamazoo, many school districts, and legal aid associations. One of the biggest days of the year for the firm is MLK Day, when the office comes together to celebrate a Day of Service by providing volunteer support at various organizations in memory and honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Since 2009, Miller Johnson has recognized an individual in the firm for their personal effort in the community. The "Cummiskey Spirit of Service" Award is the highest-regarded honor in the firm. Lubben, Carl, and recently retired estate planning attorney Cathy Metzler have all been recipients of the accolade and directed grants on their behalf to local nonprofits.

"...putting our investment into Kalamazoo has produced a winning partnership for us for 40 years."

SARAH WILLEY, EMPLOYMENT & LABOR ATTORNEY

"Giving back to the communities we serve is our responsibility," said Willey. "We live and work next to our clients and their families so putting our investment into Kalamazoo has produced a winning partnership for us for 40 years."

For Miller Johnson, and for the community it serves, 'home' in Kalamazoo has worked wonderfully.



**Dedicated to clients and
community in Kalamazoo
for 40 years.**



Down to Earth, Down to Business.



LEADER²LEADER

The 269 MAGAZINE team sat down with two local leaders to talk trust, team development, emerging leadership, and more.

BY HEATHER BAKER | INTERVIEW JAKE FREDERICKS | PHOTOS TRISHA DUNHAM AND HANNAH ZIEGELER

CYEKEIA LEE

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AT THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE

LIZ SEMAAN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT BRONSON HEALTH FOUNDATION

WHAT DOES A GREAT LEADER LOOK LIKE?

LEE: A great leader is someone who includes the input and advice of their team members. I've always liked a democratic leadership style. A great leader is willing to listen to those who are closest to them and who can help inform and make decisions. An example is the great servant leadership and honesty of Martin Luther King Jr. He served and brought others along with him. When I think about some of the best pictures of Dr. King that I've seen, it's always been the ones of him arm in arm with a bunch of people on the front lines.

SEMAAN: A great leader has integrity. They are someone who is obviously learning and accountable for their actions. For them, the buck stops "here." They are really accountable for the actions of their team, as well.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP TEAM MEMBERS?

LEE: I believe in individualization. I am technically a therapist by trade, so I pay a lot of attention to people. Once I figure out an area that somebody wants to grow in, I try to find a seat at that table for them. I then tailor things to them as opposed to assuming that they want to learn some specific thing from me. It's important not to force someone to become what you want them to become—let them come into their own.

SEMAAN: Within Bronson, we are a small team of 10 to 11 folks. We are able to do staff development trainings on a quarterly basis with facilitators both from inside of our system and within the community. We focus on cultural competency, equity, and strengths, and how we can apply those within our team in our everyday work.

HOW ARE YOU ACTIVELY BECOMING A BETTER LEADER?

LEE: I journal a lot and write letters to my future self. I date them a month out and write things to myself like, "Hey, here are some things that I hope you tackle in the next couple days or that I want you to overcome." I'll forget about them. When I open the letters a month later, I think to myself, "Oh my goodness. We did these things!" I also listen to audiobooks when I first wake up so that I have positive thoughts and energy that set a tone for the rest of the day.

SEMAAN: I take advantage of the professional development opportunities that Bronson offers. I read books that are very specific to inclusion and diversity, short stories that spark conversations, articles on philanthropy in the healthcare industry, and stuff on leadership. And, I am super fortunate to have mentors and coaches that I'm close to and whom I can lean on. It also helped to be a mentor with Southwest Michigan First's First 50 program. It made me more conscious about what I'm doing as well.

HOW DO YOU ESTABLISH TRUST?

LEE: By listening. Actively listening. Listening not to react but listening with intent. I really try to listen to someone's needs and, in turn, hope that they're listening to me. I've found in the past that [I've become frustrated when] I've not had people listen to me. So now, when I interact with people, I tell myself that I need to "start by listening."

SEMAAN: By being transparent and authentic in the relationships that I'm building with those around me. Even when I can't share certain information, I am still able to acknowledge the climate or culture that's happening at that time.

WHAT SIGNALS "EMERGING" LEADERSHIP IN OTHERS TO YOU?

LEE: Innovative thoughts and ideas. I love when I see people who think outside of the box and are self-starters. That's when I know I can give somebody a task and they will just take off with it.

SEMAAN: When somebody brings me a problem with the recommended solution. It's when someone says, "I have an issue. I've thought it through. This is what I think we should do, but I need your guidance and support." It's also when I notice that they are willing to do the work and support and celebrate their teammates.

FIRST THINGS FIRST



FIRST WISH IF YOU FOUND A MAGIC LAMP?

LEE: I would end poverty.

SEMAAN: I'd love to know every language in the entire world.



FIRST JOB YOU REMEMBER WANTING?

LEE: A policewoman, so I could fight crime.

SEMAAN: A photographer. I even made my own makeshift darkroom at home.



FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET HOME?

LEE: I turn on Pandora and go into full out concert mode, singing with Destiny's Child and TLC.

SEMAAN: I hug my kids.

HOW DO YOU CURATE CULTURE?

LEE: We have playdates as a team. We've attended sporting events, held a soul food soiree for Black History Month, and filled out brackets for March Madness. We've played basketball and flipped up the scoreboards so people couldn't see the score to keep the competition friendly. Our playdates are a mix of work and play. During them, you get to learn more about your teammates while having fun. On our calendars, we call it a "promised play date."

SEMAAN: We exemplify what work-life balance looks like and what flexibility looks like. We're in a stage where 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. doesn't always work for everyone, especially those with young kids. We provide flexibility for our team to decide what their strategic priorities might be for that day or that week. This might mean our team members are working at 10:00 p.m. because they went on a field trip that morning. That decision is for them to manage. By allowing work-life balance, we have promoted a supportive culture and developed a team that's committed to the work that we're doing. We recognize the privilege that we have to do this. If you go across the street [to the hospital], they don't have that privilege. They have to take care of patients [24/7]. I know that flexibility is not allowed everywhere. We're fortunate.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP TWO LEADERSHIP GOALS FOR THE COMING YEAR?

LEE: I'd like to work on community collaboration to increase the number of partners with whom I have deep relationships. For example, when we attend events, our team needs to sit down with our partners to understand what their organization needs and likewise help them learn what we need so we can work better together. And I'm trying to be immersed in the community to engage students and families more. I want to make our community more inclusive.

SEMAAN: I've been working professionally and personally for the last two years in Bronson's cultural competency work. Now, I'm starting to get our team involved in understanding what cultural competency is and how we can be part of the solution when it comes to institutional racism and unconscious bias, especially in our healthcare setting. And, I really want to be more present with my team and family. I can get easily distracted with my workload and everything that's going on.



CYKEIA LEE

I am technically a therapist by trade, so I pay a lot of attention to people. Once I figure out an area that somebody wants to grow in, I try to find a seat at the table for them.

CYKEIA LEE



LIZ SEMAAN

By allowing work-life balance, we have promoted a supportive culture and developed a team that's committed to the work that we're doing.

LIZ SEMAAN



EATON POWERS IT UP AT HOME

HOW THE GLOBAL POWER MANAGEMENT COMPANY GETS INVOLVED IN GALESBURG

EATON'S VEHICLE GROUP HEADQUARTERS IN GALESBURG, MICHIGAN PROVIDES AUTOMOTIVE AND COMMERCIAL VEHICLE MANUFACTURERS WORLDWIDE WITH PRODUCTS AND SYSTEMS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO IMPROVE A VEHICLE'S OVERALL EFFICIENCY, PERFORMANCE, AND POWER.

Here in Southwest Michigan, we have a world-class facility that employs 600 people and fosters an environment that encourages excellence, work-life effectiveness, wellness, and actively engages in community activities.

WHAT'S REALLY UNDER ITS HOOD

Eaton's employees are experts in the automotive and commercial vehicle markets—but what we really enjoy is helping others and making Southwest Michigan a great place to live and work. We come together to make a difference in many agencies within our community, including Greater Kalamazoo Girls on the Run, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Gryphon Place, Comstock Community Center, Family and Children Services, and many more.



GLOBAL COMPANY. LOCAL MISSION.

Our vision is to empower local communities to improve the quality of life for everyone. Our mission is to strengthen Galesburg’s surrounding communities by partnering with local organizations to identify local needs, grant charitable funds, and encourage employee volunteerism. This year, we have given funding to 62 agencies.

Each November, Eaton hosts “Get Involved Galesburg,” a campuswide event encouraging local agencies that we fund to meet our employees and share information with them about their community purpose. This event is a great way for our employees to interact and become familiar with volunteering opportunities within our community. The attending agencies bring

games to play and swag to give away while we supply snacks and prizes. At the end of the event, our employees vote for the best booth based on interaction, display, and games; the winner receives additional funding for their agency.

Eaton also sponsors many events in our community. We have been a title sponsor of Housing Resources Inc.’s (HRI) “Walk to End Homelessness” for many years. For those who are not aware, HRI provides housing assistance in Kalamazoo County to those in need. Each March, we form a walk team and participate together as a group. The funds raised from the walk, along with donations from sponsors like Eaton, help HRI offer services and assistance to those in need in our community.



SERVICING ITS OWN ENGINE

Along with our commitment to making the community better, Eaton is also devoted to maintaining an engaging and thought-provoking work environment for our employees. Each year, we host events like bring your parent/person or bring your kid to work day, an employee appreciation picnic, and a ride-and-drive during which employees get together to drive and learn about our Vehicle Group’s products.

“The interns pump so much energy and continuous improvement into our campus.”

ANNETTE HOWARD, SENIOR HUMAN RESOURCES GENERALIST

And, some of the many opportunities Eaton offers internally are extensive internship and co-op programs for college students. Each year, we bring on several interns and co-ops to both our Galesburg and Marshall campuses. “The interns pump so much energy and continuous improvement into our campus. They think they are here to learn and have a job for the summer, but they do so much more for our campus,” says Annette Howard, senior human resources generalist at Eaton. The interns and co-ops are handed many compelling tasks throughout their time at Eaton, and they often execute them above and beyond what we imagine. We include them as part of our Eaton family and make sure they’re supported in a safe and inspiring learning environment.

WE MAKE WHAT MATTERS WORK

Fostering an inclusive company culture and contributing to the communities where we live and work are what matters. And we’re here to make sure what matters works.



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* At Eaton, we believe in brighter futures. That's why we're dedicated to being actively involved with Southwest Michigan organizations, and offering a great place to work for our employees. Locally, Eaton is continually designing and developing the next

generation of vehicle solutions that improve efficiency, safety and sustainability. Because this is what really matters. And we're here to make sure it works.

To learn more go to: [Eaton.com/whatmatters](https://www.eaton.com/whatmatters)

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from our family to yours!



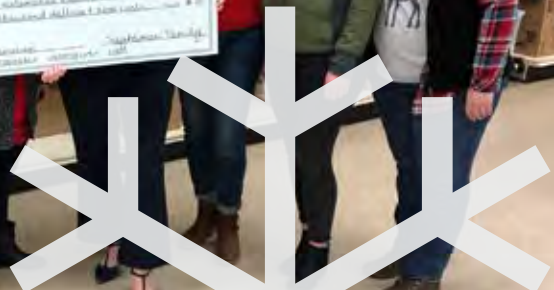
Each year the Wightman team does internal fundraising efforts to support area non-profits. In 2018, we were proud to donate to three great organizations and even more excited that in 2019 the Wightman Admin Team spent an afternoon giving back by volunteering their time at one of those organizations. As the Holiday season is upon us, we are excited to be presenting our donations to the 2019 charities... *it is all about the people and communities!*


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THE BEST
12
THINGS TO HAPPEN
IN 2019



The 269 MAGAZINE team set out to find the best of the **best happenings in Southwest Michigan in 2019**. We wanted to stop at 10, but added two more for good measure!

1. Graphic Packaging International selected Kalamazoo for its massive **\$600 million investment in facilities and equipment** to support the company's commitment to sustainable packaging.

2. FedEx announced that it will be delivering more than packages to Portage come late 2020. Once its \$40 million investment on a 37-acre site is complete, **this opportunity for 924 jobs** will be all boxed up!

3. Kalamazoo ranks in the **top three places in the U.S.** with the lowest cost of living!

4. Career and technical education got a big shout-out from Kalamazoo business and residents at the polls in November. **More than \$3.3 million in annual funding was approved** to expand CTE access for K-12 students, create a centrally located career center, and impact the future workforce for years to come.

5. Condé Nast Traveler named Southwest Michigan one of the **Best Places to Go in 2020** along with Dubai, Nashville and Tangier. Let's roll out the red carpet!

6. The Exchange Building is open for business! The **tallest building to rise from the Kalamazoo landscape in years** offers 133 luxury apartments and 60,000 square feet of commercial space.

7. More than **\$80 million will be invested at the Mill at Vicksburg** to give the abandoned paper mill a second lease on life. Once complete, it will welcome 221 jobs, hotel and residential space, microbrewery incubator space, a beer garden, public greenspace, and more.

8. The state of Michigan **transferred control of several downtown roads** to the City of Kalamazoo, making streets safer and easier to navigate for drivers and pedestrians. What's more, the move could pave the way for turning one-way streets into two-ways.

9. Make your reservations now! Kzoo Hotel Partners, LLC unveiled plans to **redevelop the historic Rose Street Market building in the city's downtown** into a 113-room boutique hotel, a 107-room extended-stay facility, and approximately 15,000 square feet of office and commercial space.

10. Western Michigan University broke ground on its **new student center and Arcadia Flats housing complex**. Can you hear all of those young broncos galloping to their new digs now?

11. Southwest Michigan is a great place to work! **Thirty-one regional companies were named national winners** by Best and Brightest Companies to Work For®.

12. Ka-ching! Kalamazoo's **19 percent income growth** was tops in the state!



BY RON KITCHENS
PUBLISHER

PHOTO ADAM ROSSI



It's Time to Graduate and Celebrate

BECAUSE THE CLOCK WAITS FOR NO ONE

EIGHT YEARS AGO, OUR TEAM AT SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST TRAVELED THE REGION, MEETING WITH THOUSANDS OF COMMUNITY LEADERS.

One thing became abundantly clear. As the warden in the movie “Cool Hand Luke” would say, “What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.”

The leaders knew their own communities but lacked knowledge of what was happening next door. And that’s why we created 269 MAGAZINE. Our simple desire was to celebrate the people, organizations, and ideas that impact our lives in Southwest Michigan.

In four years, we have featured 490 companies, 46 charitable groups, and 420 leaders. We’ve produced 580,000 words of editorial. That’s equal to nine business books!

Our simple desire was to celebrate the people, organizations, and ideas that impact our lives in Southwest Michigan.

We have won multiple awards and, more importantly, have heard from you, the readers, about how much you have been inspired by the people and places we’ve featured. And for that, I am truly grateful.

But as Geoffrey Chaucer said, “Time ... wait[s] for no man,” and neither does technology, which is why we launched “First & 42,” our digital daily. In just six months, “First & 42” has quadrupled its number of subscribers. It is clear that you want your information delivered in a timely, concise, and digital fashion. So we are declaring victory and investing more of our time and talent into growing “First & 42.”

That means putting 269 MAGAZINE on the shelf.

Times like these are bittersweet. It’s like a child leaving for college. The growth and success of “First & 42” has been nothing short of inspiring, and I cannot wait to see what the future brings. But for the past five and a half years, 269 MAGAZINE has been part of my weekly work plan, and I will truly miss it.

There are too many people to thank for their contribution to 269 MAGAZINE in this space. But I can’t write my final closing editorial without recognizing Heather Baker, our brilliant editor-in-chief, visionary leader,

and my friend. Without her vision and tenacity, none of this would have been possible.

In four years, we have featured 490 companies, 46 charitable groups, and 420 leaders. We’ve produced 580,000 words of editorial. That’s equal to nine business books!

And I also must extend my gratitude to you for your loyal readership. All of us at Southwest Michigan First thank you for coming along for the ride. We look forward to continuing the conversation with you through “First & 42!”

ALWAYS FORWARD,

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

None of us is as strong as all of us.



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