

THE CHAMBER NEWS

A Publication of the Grand Rapids Chamber

Winter 2023



PASSING THE TORCH

Leadership lessons from past, present, and future board chairs

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP

Executive coaching for more authentic leaders and happier employees

BUILDING A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Identifying scalable solutions for the housing shortage

GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER

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WINTER 2023

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The Grand Rapids Chamber leads the business community in creating a dynamic, top-of-mind West Michigan region. Together with over 2,600 member businesses, we work to expand the influence, access, and information required to actively encourage entrepreneurial growth and community leadership. We offer the connections, resources, and insights needed to develop strong leaders, engage a diverse workforce, foster an inclusive and welcoming community, and advance a vibrant business environment that nurtures economic prosperity for all.

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EDITORIAL & DESIGN STAFF

Andy Johnston
Senior Vice President of Advocacy & Strategic Engagement

Maddie Finn
Director of Marketing & Events

Elizabeth Cyr
Communications Manager

CONNECT WITH US:



250 MONROE AVE NW, SUITE 150
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49503

WWW.GRANDRAPIDS.ORG



DEAR CHAMBER MEMBERS,

AS WE LOOK TO THE YEAR AHEAD, the Grand Rapids Chamber is well-equipped with data and subject matter experts to remove barriers for your business and advance our business community's priorities, which are:

- **A Vibrant Business Climate**
- **A Talented Michigan**
- **A Place to Call Home**

We are thrilled to have announced several important initiatives and reports to this work, and some yet to come.

They include:

- **An Ease of Doing Business Study:** Look to this report on where we stand and what else we can do to support business growth.
- **State of Grand Rapids Business Forecast:** Our experts have prepared a comprehensive forecast that will be delivered on January 31 to provide insights into the business landscape for the coming year.
- **Economic Impact of New Americans:** This data makes it clear to the business community and policymakers that immigration is a force for good and a real solution to workforce needs.
- **Untapped Potential Child Care Report:** Accessible and affordable childcare is key to unlocking Michigan's economic potential and recouping nearly \$3B in lost activity while better meeting the needs of working parents and job providers.

Our work is not possible without dedicated business leaders like you, as well as the inspiring individuals featured in this publication, from fearless entrepreneurs to Chamber Champions like Jeff Connolly, Jen Crowley and James Byl.

Our team is passionate about advocating for businesses. We have made great strides in areas such as housing, childcare, leadership development, and business growth. However, there is much more work to be done to build a brighter future for our community.

I am filled with excitement for 2024. I hope this publication serves as an inspiration for you to connect and engage, and if you haven't been to our newly expanded offices, I hope to see you there soon.

Thank you for your continued support and investment. Together, we will contribute to the creation of a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for everyone.



RICK BAKER, PRESIDENT & CEO
GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER



Greg Simsa and Tim Emmitt, partners at Bridge Leadership Solutions, utilize one of the Chamber's meeting rooms.

A HOME (OFFICE) AWAY FROM THE HOME (OFFICE)

BRIDGE LEADERSHIP SOLUTIONS, a consulting firm based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has been struggling to find a permanent office space since being founded in March of 2023.

Tim Emmitt, partner at the firm, shared his team's challenges of finding a space while many companies are shifting to remote work.

"We have been looking for space to rent, but we couldn't find anything that fit well for us. A lot of companies are going remote or downsizing, so the smaller spaces we're looking for are being gobbled up."

In the meantime, the Grand Rapids Chamber has been their landing spot as they set a trajectory towards growth serving clients mainly in West Michigan. Emmitt shared that having a centralized location at the Grand Rapids Chamber has been especially convenient.

"Probably 90% of our businesses are within 20 minutes of downtown Grand Rapids. It's so centrally located, it's nice."

The amenities and perks at the Chamber's office are also huge for his team's productivity.

"I'm a big whiteboard guy. I love the floor to ceiling whiteboards at the Chamber. My partner, Greg Simsa and I will come in and after just a couple hours and we'll fill the whole thing. Being able to connect to the TV monitors and work on projects has been phenomenal, too."

"There's a lot of energy here, we've been able to network with some other Chamber members and even received a referral through those relationships."

As an experienced executive and consultant for the past 12 years, Emmitt is looking forward to growth and what comes next for his organization.

"As we add more and more people to our team, we're going to hold on to the thing that makes us unique – we have years of experience as executives leading organizations and have extensive experience in strategy, operations, finance, and pricing. We're going to hang on to that."



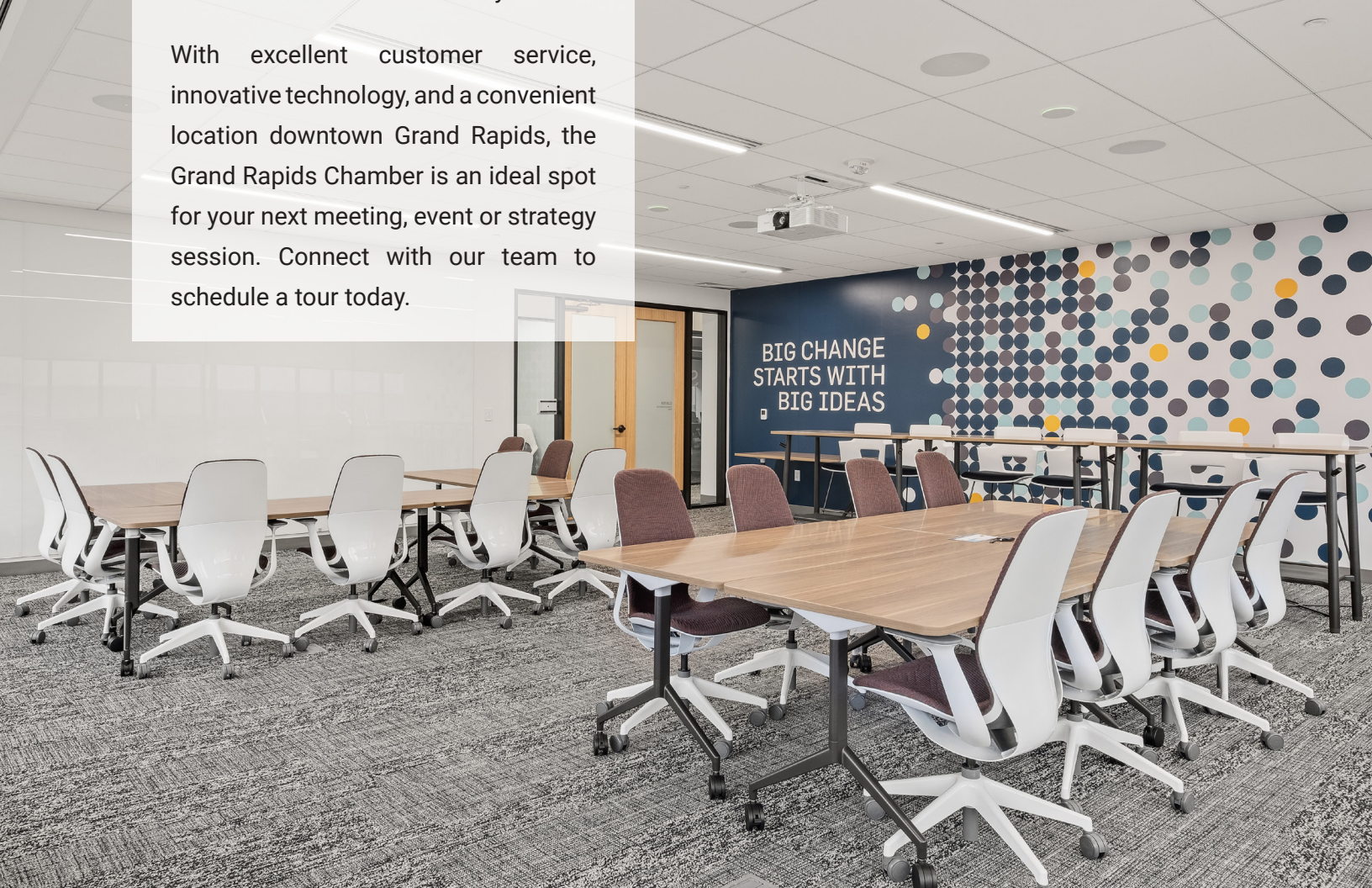
When asked about his favorite part about working at the Chamber, Emmitt humorously quipped, "I love it here, don't tell anybody about it." ■



COME WORK WITH US!

Since the completion of the Chamber's office expansion in July 2023, utilization of our coworking space and private rooms have doubled. More than 50 companies rent private meeting rooms each month, for an average of more than 100 room rentals monthly.

With excellent customer service, innovative technology, and a convenient location downtown Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Chamber is an ideal spot for your next meeting, event or strategy session. Connect with our team to schedule a tour today.





BUILDING A PLACE TO CALL HOME

THE U.S. IS FACING A HOUSING CRISIS.

Record unaffordability, near-record housing shortages and major barriers to first-time homeownership are all shown in the State of the Nation's Housing 2023 report from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

Regionally and locally, we are also facing this crisis. The Kent County Housing Needs Assessment shows that 35,000 units are needed in Kent County alone.

This critical housing shortage impacts every person at every price point, whether from an accessibility, affordability, or mobility perspective. Housing is the foundation for every quality-of-life measurement and is critical to attracting and retaining talent.

Housing Next is determined to make positive change in West Michigan, and Executive Director Brooke Oosterman is leading the charge.

Housing Next is a regional partnership with a mission to increase housing supply in Kent and Ottawa Counties. The organization collaborates with local governments, developers and nonprofits to advocate for crucial policy changes and move housing supply solutions forward.

“All people and all places need equitable housing choices at all price points,” Oosterman said. “We’ve heard over the last year and a half that housing is a huge barrier for many in our community. We know we can make a difference, and Housing Next is focused on identifying scalable solutions to the housing shortage.”

KEY STRIDES MADE IN 2023

Oosterman was hired as Housing Next’s director of policy and communications in March 2022. Her promotion to executive director in July 2023 is a testament to her impactful leadership through the organization’s expansion of services into Kent County.

“
**All people and all places
need equitable housing
choices at all price points.**
- BROOKE OOSTERMAN
*Executive Director,
Housing Next*
”

Over the last year, huge strides were made in gap financing, with both Ottawa and Kent Counties launching their revolving loan funds. This involved stakeholders who helped provide insight into parameters of the fund, execution, and approval of contracts with the local CFDI and collaboration to fill the pipeline.

In 2023, Housing Next was designated as the lead to create a regional housing plan for West Michigan as part of Michigan’s first Statewide Housing Partnership. With co-leads The Right Place, Inc. and Urban League of West Michigan, Housing Next brought stakeholders from across a 13-county region together to set priorities for housing solutions specific to West Michigan. This action plan was submitted to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA).



“With 13 counties, our regional housing partnership is the largest, and it is also incredibly geographically diverse,” Oosterman said. “I’m proud to say that we had engagement from all 13 counties. We have urban, rural, and suburban representatives involved in work groups, allowing us to look at the issue more holistically than assuming our recommendations will fit in every community.”

There were also huge wins in state legislation, providing yet another critical tool for residential development. Tax increment financing, or TIF, for residential development expands eligible uses by amending the Brownfield Redevelopment Financing Act to incentivize rental and homeowner housing projects that provide affordable housing units in their projects.



Brooke Oosterman

“I am excited to see real life demonstration projects come online as a result of the new tools available, and I look forward to showcasing best practices in the region,” Oosterman said.

“As we work to attract and retain great talent in West Michigan, business leaders can use their voices to support housing projects and policies and advance housing solutions,” Oosterman continued. “You can also financially support the work of Housing Next or invest in the local revolving loan funds to provide lower cost capital.”

Learn more about Housing Next at housingnext.org. ■

PASSING THE TORCH

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM PAST,
PRESENT & FUTURE BOARD CHAIRS



JEFF CONNOLLY, JEN CROWLEY & JAMES BYL are three names making business happen in West Michigan. From leading companies to inspiring professionals across the region, these leaders are spearheading initiatives at your Grand Rapids Chamber and are working tirelessly to support our business ecosystem.

Meet these three leaders below and hear leadership lessons from their experiences.



JEFF CONNOLLY

IMMEDIATE PAST BOARD CHAIR, CHAMBER CHAMPION

Jeff Connolly serves as the senior vice president and president of West Michigan & Upper Peninsula for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. He recently completed his term as 2022 board chair for the Grand Rapids Chamber and has continued to be deeply involved in the Chamber’s initiatives.

For over 17 years, Connolly has been active with the Grand Rapids Chamber, holding numerous positions on the board, committees and the foundation. In 2023, Connolly entered the “hall of fame” as a Chamber Champion for his dedicated service to the community.

Connolly has seen the organization ebb and flow over the years, but his favorite initiative was seeing the Grand Rapids Chamber Foundation step up during the pandemic.

“We’re continuing to evolve as a community, and the Chamber has evolved as well. We’ve had a foundation for many years, but through the Covid-19 pandemic, we were able to use the foundation to help distribute funds and support local businesses.”

Connolly also reflected on his board experience and how different leadership styles have shown up over the years. He has worked closely with the Chamber’s current board chair, Jen Crowley, as she transitioned into the role.

“Jen is part of a long legacy of not just good and respected leaders, but highly engaged leaders. There’s a delicate balance between being a strong leader and knowing when to let others step up. Jen’s energy as board chair has been electric, and I’m excited for what’s next.”



JEN CROWLEY

CURRENT BOARD CHAIR

Jen Crowley serves as the co-owner and chief marketing officer for Highland Group and is nearing the end of her term as the Grand Rapids Chamber’s 2023 board chair.

During her time on the board, she served in roles related to budget and finance, public policy, governance, compensation and more. Additionally, Crowley has been involved with several councils and initiatives throughout the years, including serving as the Create Great Leaders council chair in 2015-16.

Now, nearing the end of her one-year term, she’s looking back on her experience and reflecting on the progress the Chamber has made under her leadership.

“This was a BIG year for growth – the new office space, the first full year of the Center for Economic Inclusion, expanding the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, advancing housing policy, welcoming new Americans, childcare advocacy and more. The Chamber is busy supporting the business community,” says Crowley.

While growth is a great thing, the 2023 board chair is even more focused on leaving a lasting impact for years to come.

“My hope is that in five or ten years, when we look back at the work that the Chamber is doing now, we will see that impact in the community. Are new Americans being welcomed? Have we made meaningful progress on housing affordability and accessibility? Are more people able to create wealth and opportunity through owning or running a business? I want to make a difference that lasts.”



JAMES BYL
INCOMING BOARD CHAIR

James Byl serves as the owner and president of both Multi-Automatic Tool & Supply Company and Belding Tool & Machine, and will be taking the reins when his board term begins in January 2024.

Byl has been involved with the board for the past 6 years and has held roles on the Executive Board and the Political Action Committee at the Grand Rapids Chamber.

In his new role, Byl is looking forward to serving the community and helping to cultivate a vibrant downtown.

“There are so many great organizations to be involved with here in Grand Rapids, but for me, particularly as a business owner, the heart or essence of a city is its culture and vibrancy.”

“I believe the Grand Rapids Chamber is THE organization for helping businesses thrive.”

Byl is eager to get started in 2024 and hit the ground running, especially in a major election year.

“It’s going to be a really big year. I am looking forward to some good political endorsements, another great lineup of programs, and more progress in housing and the many things the Chamber is doing to elevate our city. Personally, I’m looking forward to getting to know all the Board members better, and also the various committee members.” ■

GET PLUGGED IN:

Hear more about the board’s vision for 2024 and what’s next for our region at the Grand Rapids Chamber’s 136th Annual Meeting: the State of Grand Rapids Business on Wednesday, January 31.



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2023 ADVOCACY IN REVIEW

BY MARCUS KEECH, *Director of Government Affairs,*
Grand Rapids Chamber

2023 USHERED IN A NEW GOVERNING MAJORITY in Lansing. For the first time in nearly 40 years, the Democratic Party took control of the entire Legislature and the Governor's Office. With this change of leadership came wild swings in policy priorities.

Delivery and installation expenses are no longer subject to sales and use taxes, due to a package of legislation championed by State Rep. Pat Outman (R), as long those services are separately stated on the invoice. This priority ended a tax scheme that was not in keeping with the spirit of Michigan's sales tax by extending it to services.

Expansion of the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act will include protections of the LGBTQ+ community within the anti-discrimination law. This inclusion codifies the decision of the Michigan Supreme Court and was a decade-plus priority of the Chamber.

Expanding tax increment financing (TIF) to support **workforce housing** was a top priority that now allows for locally-controlled support for housing development.

Transformational projects in Kent County have taken many steps forward this year, both with Brownfield incentives and the House passage of HB 5048. HB 5048, championed by State Rep. John Fitzgerald (D) and with bipartisan support from West Michigan legislators, will provide Kent County and certain cities the ability to locally consider and ask voters to approve an increase to the excise tax for hotel/motel rooms to invest in significant tourism/entertainment/economic development projects. The proposed Acrisure Amphitheater and the Grand Rapids soccer stadium are two projects that could benefit.

The Grand Rapids Chamber advocated for FY 2023-2024 appropriations that have a significant impact on our business community. Funding included \$54,750,000 for the **Going PRO Talent Fund**, \$5,000,000 for pro-housing zoning reforms, \$5,000,000 to retain international students and entrepreneurs, and \$3,400,000 for the MI Tri-share child care program.

The Grand Rapids Chamber has taken a leading role with partnering business organizations to form the Great Lakes Growth Coalition (GLG). GLG is tasked with highlighting significant



policy concerns that have been proposed by the Legislature, currently focusing on the topics of **workplace mandates, energy policy, local regulations, and independent contractors.**

Advocating in opposition of many proposed policies, the Chamber team continues to speak with lawmakers to educate on the dangers of enacting anti-growth and anti-business policies:

- Repeal of local preemption (SB 171 & HB 4237) will create a dangerous system that opens the opportunity of all 1,800 units of government throughout Michigan to create a patchwork of regulatory policies.
- Bad faith legislation (SB 329 & HB 4681) will open up opportunities for frivolous legal challenges to insurance companies that will ultimately lead to higher insurance rates for both businesses and individuals across the state.
- Paid leave mandates (SBs 332-33 & HBs 4574-75) would create a one-size-fits-all state administrated paid leave mandate financed by a \$1-\$1.5 billion payroll tax on every worker and business in Michigan.
- The ability to become an Independent Contractor has been put in jeopardy through HB 4390. This legislation would ultimately establish a mechanism to make it more difficult to identify as an independent contractor and therefore considered an employee. Similar legislation in California has led to more than 150 “carve-outs” that has only damaged individual freedoms to become your own employer and an entrepreneur.
- So-called “polluter pay” legislation that would significantly impact the ability to safely return contaminated sites to active, vibrant use. Michigan's remediation practices have a strong history of success, and the proposed bills will likely heavily restrict investment and cleanup.

The Grand Rapids Chamber will continue to act as fierce advocates for business on issues that enrich a thriving and diverse business climate. If you have questions, please reach out to our team. ■

THE CHAMBER OUT & ABOUT



Chamber President & CEO Rick Baker poses with Fred Cauley, CEO of Lee Industrial Contracting at their expansion in Walker



Kentwood Office Furniture celebrates customers with help from Chamber member One Bold Step



Chamber team members Drake Lambright & Amanda Hentsch celebrating at the Clique Espresso Catering ribbon cutting



Chamber team members celebrate the grand opening of Scholar downtown Grand Rapids



Chamber's Yadira Garza-Malone snaps a selfie at the GRPM Expansion Campaign Kick-Off with friends from Fifth Third Bank and DTE Energy



Chamber Senior VP Omar Cuevas breaks ground with Fulton Family Dentistry and their partner Huntington National Bank



Members celebrate at the Create Great Leaders annual fundraiser



The Chamber's Marketing & Events team attends the ACEE Events & Communications Conference in Tulsa, OK



Chamber and KeyBank leaders pose at a breakfast with Christo Brand, Nelson Mandela's former prison guard turned friend



Members of the Chamber's Women Resource Group volunteer to cook dinner at Grace's Table



Chamber Board Chair Jen Crowley and Chamber team member Claire Colley cheers after the Grand Rapids Policy Conference



The Chamber team unwinds over happy hour at New Holland Brewing Company's The Knickerbocker

THE CHAMBER OUT & ABOUT



Housing Next Executive Director, Brooke Oosterman, celebrates with her husband, Jon, after being recognized as one of the 40 Under 40 Honorees



The Chamber's Executive Leadership Team poses with Alisha Cieslak during their annual planning meeting at Gordon Food Service



Retail, Retention & Attraction Specialist, Rich App, tours Vicinity Energy with General Manager Jesse Douglas and Stacy Bare



Chamber team member Shawnee Eder poses with Stacy Geerts, co-owner of women-owned Chamber member Basket Boutique



Chamber President & CEO Rick Baker welcomes new GRCC President Charles Lepper



Chamber colleagues from US Chamber, Muskegon and White Lake tour NOAA in Muskegon with Congresswoman Scholten



Chamber team members get a visit from Crash the River Rascal of the West Michigan Whitecaps



The Chamber's Diversify Your Spend Expo connects minority-owned businesses with procurement partners



Chamber team members and Ambassadors enjoy a cup of coffee while celebrating the grand opening of Anna's House on Northland Drive



Chamber VP Joshua Lunger poses at the State of the County with County Commissioner Chair Stan Stek and Josh Spencer with Kent County



Chamber Ambassadors enjoy a night out cheering on the West Michigan Whitecaps



Chamber Senior VP Andy Johnston poses with Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist II



Jose Gonzalez, top left, pictured with colleagues and family members.

FROM QUITTING TO OWNING

JOSE GONZALEZ'S STORY OF BUSINESS GROWTH & CONNECTING TO THE MOSAIC BUSINESS COLLECTIVE

IN 1998, JOSE GONZALEZ quit his restaurant job after his request to have New Year's Eve off was denied.

In the meantime, he took a 2-week temporary job as a flooring installer. Two weeks in the flooring industry turned into two months, which turned into two years, and soon, Gonzalez found himself committed to an industry in which he had both passion and skill. He became dedicated to perfecting his craft.

His diligence paid off when in 2010, Gonzalez co-founded Preferred Flooring with the goal to become the best installation team in the area. Since its formation, Preferred Flooring has progressed to a full-service flooring company.

"We started with nothing. For generations, my family was in a rut," Gonzalez said. "My family's struggles were my biggest inspiration. Someone needed to break the mold and change the mindset, and being the oldest brother, I felt it was my responsibility to rewrite our path."

As first-generation entrepreneurs, there was a lot of learning to do. Preferred Flooring joined as members of the Grand Rapids Chamber in 2018.

"We knew we had no clue how to scale up, and the Chamber offered programs and educational opportunities beyond the flooring industry," Gonzalez said. "We wanted to surround ourselves with like-minded individuals."

In Grand Rapids, stats show that less than 1% of businesses bringing in \$250k or more a year are owned by a person of color. 98% of business revenue in Grand Rapids comes from white-owned businesses.

The Chamber’s Center for Economic Inclusion (CEI) was launched in 2022 to make a change in these numbers.

“Successfully starting and growing a firm requires access to capital and social connections,” said Dalen Mendiola, Director of Business Growth at the Grand Rapids Chamber. “The CEI is a holistic approach, connecting entrepreneurs to already existing services and providing opportunities through programs and services needed to scale.”

A program of CEI, the **Mosaic Business Collective** is a professional group for business owners and company decision-makers from underrepresented minority groups. Gonzalez participates in the Mosaic Business Collective along with 13 other individuals.

“As a small business in the construction industry, Preferred Flooring will always face issues around employee retention. Our onboarding process requires a lot of time, funds, and effort. We often won’t see a return on a new employee for about a year,” Gonzalez said. “Discussing issues like this with the Mosaic Business Collective helps shed light on best practices. It’s refreshing that others are willing to share their experiences in an effort for all involved to have continued success in whatever industry we are in.”

Through the Mosaic Business Collective, leaders can grow the foundation of their business, get more involved in strategic advocacy, and foster powerful connections that bring them and their companies to the next level.

“Our goal is to see these leaders flourish and grow to the point where they’re in the seats of county and city commissioners, leaders in their industries, and others are looking up to them as examples,” said Mendiola. “When you think of the big names in our city, we want diverse names to come to mind.”

“It’s been great to have exposure to individuals I may not have had the chance to meet with on my own,” said Gonzalez. “I appreciate the opportunity to speak my peace about what can impact our community and the future of small businesses – positively or negatively.”

Gonzalez stressed the importance of other business leaders getting involved in the Mosaic Business Collective.



Chamber members at the Diversify Your Spend Business Expo.

Stats show that less than 1% of Grand Rapids businesses bringing in \$250k or more a year are owned by a person of color.

“The potential is there. We just need more involvement from other community leaders. You don’t have to own a business to have great input. With more participation, we can operate at a higher level of efficiency across all stages of business.”

For information on the Mosaic Business Collective, visit grandrapids.org.



UNMASKING ECONOMIC IMPACT

USING DATA TO INFLUENCE REGIONAL PRIORITIES

FROM IMMIGRATION TO CHILDCARE, major cultural shifts have changed the outlook of our region’s economy, and the Grand Rapids Chamber has been leading data-driven efforts to build a better environment for business.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF NEW AMERICANS IN KENT COUNTY

On Monday, September 11, the Grand Rapids Chamber and the West Michigan CEO Council released a report: [Economic Impact Report of New Americans in Kent County](#).

In the report, data shows that new Americans contribute nearly 1.6 billion dollars to our economy and play a crucial role in our region’s labor force, business creation, and consumer spending power.

Between 2014 and 2019, the population of Kent County increased by 5.2 percent, and the immigrant population grew by 27.2 percent, with 38.2 percent of the total population growth in the county being attributable to immigrants. Despite making up 8.9 percent of the county’s overall population in 2019, immigrants represented 10.5 percent of its employed labor force. In 2021 alone, immigrants in the county held \$1.6 billion in spending power, paid \$318.8 million in federal taxes, and paid \$173.9 million in state and local taxes.

Amount earned by immigrant households in 2021:

\$2.0B

\$318.8M went to federal taxes

\$173.9M went to state & local taxes

Leaving them with **\$1.6B** in spending power, or **9.1%** of all the spending power in the county.

“Talent and population growth are top issues for business,” said Rick Baker, President & CEO of the Grand Rapids Chamber. “Cities and regions do not grow without immigration. Led by our CEO Council, this report will drive initiatives, support a thriving West Michigan and drive our economy and community forward.”

Findings from this report will inform decision makers and business leaders as the Chamber works to create a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for all. ■

58,400

The number of immigrants living in Kent County, Michigan in 2021.

Nearly **2,300** immigrant entrepreneurs generated

\$48.1M

in business income in Kent County.

NEW AMERICANS IN KENT COUNTY: RUBEN RAMOS, R&R MECHANICAL

Although Ruben Ramos was born in the United States, his family moved to their village in the Sierra Madre Mountains in Mexico when he was a baby. When the family moved to Grand Rapids in 1990, the Hispanic population was small. Ramos was 10 years old. “I consider myself an immigrant because I basically had to learn the language and the culture and felt like an outsider,” he says.



Now, 33 years later, Ramos runs a business in Grand Rapids with his twin brother, Rolando. Launched in 2008, R & R Mechanical Services installs and services heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems in residential and commercial buildings. The company trains and hires dozens of tradespeople and has 30 full-time employees with benefits.

“There hasn’t been a year that we haven’t grown,” says Ramos.

One of the biggest challenges has been finding qualified applicants, as workers in the trades are in short supply across the nation. The brothers found a solution by providing entry level on-the-job training. Not only does the model create a pool of dedicated workers, but it also gives the brothers a chance to invest in their community. “We give back by providing a career path for a lot of people,” he says. “They give back to us because they stay longer.”

The Ramos brothers have stayed in Grand Rapids, which has developed a reputation for welcoming immigrants from around the world.

The Hispanic community has grown over the past three decades, and Ramos says he appreciates how the community and local government acknowledge Hispanic Heritage Month. He encourages the city to empower immigrant communities by supporting programs that give entrepreneurs access to funding.

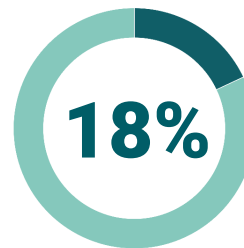
“A lack of capital is a hurdle for new startups,” he says. “Finding ways to connect investors with entrepreneurs would make Grand Rapids a stronger hub for development.”

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL IN MICHIGAN

On Tuesday, September 5, the Grand Rapids Chamber released the [Untapped Potential in Michigan Report](#), which dissects the impacts of a strained childcare system on our workforce.

In partnership with the Michigan Chamber, the U.S. Chamber Foundation, and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, the report found that Michigan’s economy is losing \$2.88 billion annually due to barriers of childcare.

As part of that lost revenue, businesses themselves are losing ~\$2.3 billion due to employee absenteeism and turnover (and costs associated) because of issues with childcare.



Parents who plan on leaving their employers in the next year due to childcare issues.

-\$2.88B

Annual loss to Michigan’s economy due to barriers of childcare.

Additional findings included that 18 percent of surveyed parents plan on leaving their employers over the next 12 months due to childcare issues and 14 percent of surveyed already left a job in the past 6 months due to childcare.

When childcare options are slim, our workforce suffers. The Grand Rapids Chamber is continuing to work in tandem with private and public partners to help address childcare needs in West Michigan. ■

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP

EXECUTIVE COACHING FOR MORE AUTHENTIC LEADERS AND HAPPIER EMPLOYEES



TALENT remains the number one issue facing our business community. Following The Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting, organizations must continue to address significant challenges: acquiring and retaining talent, addressing employee burnout, and supporting their employees holistically.

While there are many factors that contribute to employee happiness, management is one that will always be on the list.

You've heard it before: **people leave managers, not companies.** One in two employees have left a job to get away from a manager and improve their overall life at some point in their career, according to Gallup's State of the American Manager report.

So how can you ensure you are equipping your managers with the skills and confidence to lead effectively and maximize talent retention?

The Grand Rapids Chamber's suite of leadership programs is designed to do just that.

Authentic leaders don't just discover and develop their team's strengths – they use their own strengths to be relatable, genuine leaders who consistently help others learn and grow.

Leadership Transformed: Executive Leadership Coaching was launched in 2023 and is led by facilitator Erin Fisk, LMSW. The program is rooted in strengthening the skills that already exist in our community's senior leaders. Through the Enneagram assessment, wisdom from guest speakers and connection with peers, leaders will gain clarity of their intrinsic leadership.

"There are plenty of skills-based leadership programs out there. This program was unique in that it helped me identify my authentic leadership style," said **Megan Erskine**, CEO of Catherine's Health

Center, and graduate of the inaugural cohort in Spring 2023. "As a leader, it is okay to be vulnerable and human. There is strength in leading with heart and authenticity."



Megan Erskine
CEO of Catherine's Health Center



Members of the Leadership Transformed spring 2023 cohort with guest speaker Robert Heath, Sr.

Today, vulnerability in leaders is welcomed and encouraged. Data shows that the top trait Gen Z workers value in leaders and managers is empathy and honesty, and Gen Z workers are more comfortable than their older counterparts in sharing about their emotional and mental health needs. Millennials are more likely to vocally share concerns about work/life balance, the challenges of caregiving, and mental health struggles than Gen X and Boomer workers.

Leaders who create space for vulnerability build work environments where people feel welcome to be themselves. When people are willing to be authentic at work, they're also more willing to take creative risks, share perspectives and make valuable contributions without fear of consequence.

Authentic leaders don't just discover and develop their team's strengths – they use their own strengths to be relatable, genuine

leaders who consistently help others learn and grow. Leaders who focus on their strengths see improvements in their performance and in that of their employees, including employee engagement, retention, and productivity.

When people apply their strengths, they are:

- **6x more likely to be engaged in their jobs**
- **3x more likely to report having an excellent quality of life**
- **6x more likely to strongly agree they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day**

“It was very uplifting to watch fellow classmates identify their motivations, vulnerabilities, and boundaries,” Erskine said. “People left the program with a greater understanding of who they are and what kind of leaders they wanted to be.”

In addition to the skills and knowledge participants gain throughout the course, they also gain new perspectives and connections from their classmates.

“Leadership can be very lonely – it was wonderful to be around other leaders in a safe and trusted space,” Erskine continued. “There is so much value in interdisciplinary education and networking.”

For more information on Leadership Transformed and the Chamber's full suite of leadership program offerings, visit grandrapids.org/leadership. ■

34TH ANNUAL ATHENA AWARDS FINALISTS

At the 34th Annual ATHENA Awards Celebration on September 20, 2023, the Grand Rapids Chamber recognized the individuals and organizations who are challenging, inspiring and innovating within our community to empower and encourage the inclusion of women.

More than 450 community leaders came together to celebrate the finalists and recipients at the ATHENA Awards Celebration.

The 34th Annual ATHENA Awards recipients are as follows:

- ATHENA Leadership Award: **Rosalynn Bliss**, Mayor, City of Grand Rapids
- ATHENA Young Professional Leadership Award: **Evelyn Esparza-Gonzalez**, Executive Director, Hispanic Center of Western Michigan
- ATHENA Organizational Leadership Award: **Steelcase, Inc.**



The **ATHENA Leadership Award** is presented to an outstanding leader who is honored for professional excellence, community service and for actively assisting women in their attainment of professional excellence and leadership skills. The 2023 finalists include:



SONALI ALLEN
Mercantile Bank



SHOROUQ ALMALLAH
GVSU Richard M. and Helen DeVos Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation



SARA ARMBRUSTER
Steelcase, Inc.



ROSALYNN BLISS
City of Grand Rapids



LATESHA A. LIPSCOMB, JD
Amplify GR

The **ATHENA Young Professional Award** is presented to an emerging leader who demonstrates excellence, creativity and initiative in their business or profession; serves as a role model for young women personally and professionally; and provides valuable service to improve the quality of life for others. The 2023 finalists include:



RENIDA CLARK
West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology



EVELYN ESPARZA-GONZALEZ
Hispanic Center of Western Michigan



STELLA MICHAEL
Priority Health | Corewell Health



ALLIE WALKER
Truscott Rossman



CARRIE WILSON
Freedom Construction

The **ATHENA Organizational Leadership Award** recognizes an organization that supports, develops and honors women leaders. These organizations create a culture that encourages women to achieve their full leadership potential and give back to the larger community of women and girls by supporting leadership initiatives. The 2023 finalists include:



GET INVOLVED

The Grand Rapids Chamber leads the business community in creating a dynamic, top-of-mind West Michigan region. Together with over 2,600 member businesses (80 percent of which are small businesses with fewer than 50 employees), the Chamber works to expand the influence, access, and information required to actively encourage entrepreneurial growth and community leadership.

Business leaders are the visionaries, job creators, community builders, and the engines of our economy. When you join the Chamber, you'll enjoy more opportunities to grow your organization, advance our community, and access a generous package of exclusive perks and member benefits.

GET INVOLVED

Visit www.grandrapids.org



“

My Chamber membership has helped me connect with other businesses for professional opportunities and has given my business visibility and reputation in other communities. I have a deep gratitude to the Chamber, where all voices get elevated.

”

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS

136th Annual Meeting: The State of Grand Rapids Business

Wednesday, January 31 | 7:30 - 10:30 a.m.

At our 136th Annual Meeting, you'll hear about how the Grand Rapids Chamber is working to inform, connect and advocate for West Michigan businesses and support business growth, build strong relationships, and create a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for all.

Grand Rapids Policy Conference

Tuesday, April 16 | 11:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

The Grand Rapids Policy Conference provides a platform to discuss Grand Rapids' vibrant future. Join us to hear about these key issues from national and local thought leaders, including housing, public safety, transformational projects, and becoming an active lifestyle community.

MEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

100+ YEARS

Ball Park Floral & Gifts
BISSELL Homecare, Inc.
Consumers Energy
Crosby & Henry, Inc.
Davenport University
DTE Energy
Fifth Third Bank
Pratt Industries
Siegel Jewelers
Steelcase, Inc.

75+ YEARS

American Red Cross of West Michigan
Employers' Association
Ernst & Young LLP
Ferris State University - GR
Gordon Food Service, Inc.
Grand Rapids Label Company
Grand Rapids Rubber Products Co.
Grand Rapids Symphony
Greater Regional Alliance of Realtors
Metcalf & Jonkhoff Funeral Service, Inc.
MLive Media Group / The Grand Rapids Press
Model Coverall Service, Inc.
Owen-Ames-Kimball
PNC Bank
Raymond James & Associates
SpartanNash
United Way, Heart of West Michigan
Warner Norcross + Judd LLP
Wheeler Upham, PC
Wolverine Building Group, Inc.
Wolverine Coil Spring Co.
YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids

50+ YEARS

Amway
Brann's Corporate Offices
Deloitte
Eikenhout, Inc.
Foremost Insurance Company
Harvey Cadillac Lexus
Henry A. Fox Sales Co.
Kent Intermediate School District
Kent Rubber Supply Co.
Krell Paper Stock Co. Inc.
Lacks Enterprises, Inc.
Manpower
Master Finish Co.
Meijer, Inc.
Mika Meyers PLC
Morrison Industrial Equipment Co.
Nexben
Rhoades McKee PC
University of Michigan Health - West
Williams Distributing Co.

40+ YEARS

AHC+Hospitality
Aquinas College
Arc Kent County, Inc.
Automatic Door Service
Bazen Electric Co.
Berends Hendricks Stuit Insurance Agency Inc.
Betz Industries
Blue Care Network of Michigan
Brown & Brown, Inc.
Cascade Engineering, Inc.
Crystal Flash

Custer
D.A. Blodgett - St. John's
Dan Vos Construction Co. Inc.
DeWys Metal Solutions
DoubleTree by Hilton Grand Rapids Airport
Dover Pumps & Process Solutions Segment, Inc.
Eastbrook Homes, Inc.
Economic Club of Grand Rapids
EPS Security - (Engineered Protection Systems, Inc.)
Fishbeck
Forest View Psychiatric Hospital
FOX 17
Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids, Inc.
Grand Rapids Community College
H & H Management & Development
Hobart Sales & Service
Holland Home Corporate Office
Hope Network
Hungerford Nichols CPAs + Advisors
iHeartMedia, Inc.
Joe Carlson Well Drilling, Inc.
Kent County Treasurer
Kentwood Office Furniture
Lach Diamond, Inc.
Lake Michigan Insurance Agency
Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital
Miller Canfield
Monsma Marketing Corporation
NPF Investment Advisors
Oldenburg Co. Inc.
P & F Supply Company, Inc.
PADNOS
Perforated Tubes, Inc.
Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services
Plante Moran, PLLC
Progressive AE
Reliance Community Care Partners
Robert W. Baird & Co. Inc.
RoMan Manufacturing, Inc.
Seaman's Air Conditioning & Refrigeration, Inc.
Sharpe Cars
Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge, PC
Stifel, Nicolaus & Company, Incorporated. Member
SIPC & NYSE
The Rapid
UFP Industries, Inc.
Urban League of West Michigan
Varnum LLP
WGVU Public Media
Witte Travel & Tours
Wolverine Printing Co.
WOOD TV8 / WXSP / WOTV
WZZM 13 / 13 On Your Side - TEGNA
Marketing Solutions
Youngblood Automation, LLC

30+ YEARS

ACSET / West Michigan Works!
Acton Institute for the Study of Religion
and Liberty
Algoma Products, Inc.
Anderson Keegin & Associates, Inc. / OI Global
Partners
Apex Spring & Stamping Corporation
Applied Innovation
Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan Inc
Autocam Medical
AxiosHR
Baker Holtz

Broadway Grand Rapids
Buist Sheet Metal Co.
Capitol Group Consultants LLC
Comerica Bank
CU Answers
D & K Engineered Construction, Inc.
D & M Metal Products
Delta Dental of Michigan
DeMaagd & Richter Agency, Inc.
Dickinson Wright PLLC
Direct Supply, Inc.
Disability Advocates of Kent County
Doyle & Ogden, Insurance Advisors
Eckhoff and DeVries Painting & Wallcovering, Inc.
Elevated Technologies, Inc.
Erhardt Construction
Escape World Travel
Financial Advisory Corporation
Fitzgerald's Men's Store
Flex Administrators, Inc.
Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park
Frey Foundation
Gerald R. Ford International Airport
Girl Scouts of Michigan Shore to Shore
Grand Rapids Christian Schools
Grand Rapids Community Foundation
Grand Rapids Public Library
Grand Rapids Public Museum
Grand River Gastroenterology, PC
Grand Valley Metropolitan Council
Grand Valley State University
Great Lakes Commercial Finance
Handorn, Inc.
Hedrick Associates
Holiday Inn Grand Rapids Downtown
i3 Business Solutions, LLC
IKUS Life Enrichment Services
Interphase Interiors, Inc.
J. Mark Systems, Inc.
John Ball Zoo
Lincoln Pines Resort, Inc.
Literacy Center of West Michigan
Macatawa Bank
Meals on Wheels Western Michigan
Mortgage 1, Inc.
Nationwide Transportation Services, Inc.
New Hope Baptist Church
Nu-Wool Co., Inc.
Office Depot - Walker
Old National Bank
Overhead Door Co. of Grand Rapids
Paws With A Cause
Professional Maintenance of Michigan
Rehmann
Rest Lawn Memorial Park
San Chez--A Tapas Bistro
Scarlett, Inc.
Senior Neighbors
Serv-U-Success
SeyferthPR
Thum Insurance Agency, LLC
Timothy Group
TowerPinkster
Two Men and A Truck Grand Rapids
Variable Concepts, Inc.
Western Michigan University in Grand Rapids
Whitecaps Professional Baseball Corporation
YWCA West Central Michigan

20+ YEARS

A.D. Bos Vending Services
Accident Fund Insurance Company of America
ADAC Automotive
Advantage Benefits Group, Inc.
All-Flo Plumbing LLC
Alternative Pathways, Inc.
Andrews Hooper Pavlik PLC
Armbrecht & Wierenga Orthodontics, PLC
Barnes & Thornburg LLP
Barr Engineering Co.
BASIC Payroll Plus
Beacon Hill at Eastgate
Best Leasing Services LLC
Bethany Christian Services
Bio-Chem Laboratories, Inc.
Boys & Girls Clubs of Grand Rapids Youth Commonwealth
Business System Solutions, Inc.
C2AE
Camp Roger
Center for Physical Rehabilitation
Central Michigan University
Century A & E
Clean Rooms International, Inc.
Colliers International
Comcast Business
Council for Educational Travel USA (CETUSA)
Craig's Cruisers Family Fun Centers
CWD Real Estate Investment
Dégagé Ministries
Daane's Development Co.
DAC Industries, Inc.
DK Security
DLN Integrated Systems, Inc.
Dominican Sisters - Grand Rapids
Dykema Excavators
Edge-Sweets Company
EHTC PC CPAs & Business Consultants
Elders' Helpers
EV Construction
First Community Bank
Fixall Electric Motor Service, Inc.
Formax Manufacturing Corp.
Furst Cleaning Service LLC
Gerald R. Ford Job Corps Center
Gerald R. Ford Museum
Gilda's Club Grand Rapids
Gordon Water Systems
Grand River Builders, Inc.
Grand Valley Auto Parts
GYMCO, Inc.
Habitat for Humanity of Kent County Inc.
Hearty Fresh, Inc.
Higher Ground Rock Climbing Centre LTD
Home Repair Services of Kent County, Inc.
Hughes Management, LLC
Hull Lift Truck, Inc.
Huntington Bank
IBOA International, Inc.
iChiro Clinics
JadePig Ventures, LLC
Kent District Library
Knappe Industries, Inc.
Kuyper College
Lakeshore Scale, Inc.
Lambert & Co.
Life EMS Ambulance
Lighthouse, An Alera Group Company
Little River Casino Resort
Major Pipeline, LLC

Make-A-Wish Foundation of Michigan
Martin Commercial Properties West Michigan, LLC
McAlvey, Merchant & Associates
Mel Trotter Ministries
Mercantile Bank of Michigan
Monsma Landscape & Maintenance, Inc.
Mor Electric Heating Associates, Inc.
Morris Builders, Inc.
NAI Wisinski of West Michigan
Nederveld, Inc.
New York Life Insurance Co.
Northpointe Bank
NTH Consultants, Ltd.
Onion Crock of Michigan
Outfront Media
Parker Excavating Gravel & Recycle, Inc.
Patriot Realty
Plunkett Cooney
Primerus
Profile Films
Promotional Impact
Rapid Green Group
Reliable Energy, Inc.
Rockford Construction
Ronald McDonald House of Western Michigan
Saskatoon Golf Club
Service Express
Signature Associates
SoundOff Signal
SpringHill Suites Grand Rapids North
Studio C
Supply Chain Solutions, LLC
Team Financial Group, Inc.
Thompson Remodeling, Inc.
Trinity Health
Universal Sign, Inc.
University Club of Grand Rapids
Van Andel Arena & DeVos Place/ASM Global
Vector Tech Group
Vervint
Voisard Asset Management Group
West Michigan Cabinet Supply Inc
West Michigan Document Shredding LLC
Westgate Bowl
WilliamCharles Search Group
Williams & Works, Inc.
Wolverine Worldwide, Inc.

15+ YEARS

Action Plumbing & Mechanical
Adamy Valuation Advisors
Aggressive Tool & Die, Inc.
Alger Pediatrics, PC
Applause Catering + Events
Arbor Circle
Barber Creek Sand & Gravel, Inc.
Black River Lawn and Landscape, LLC
Bredeweg & Zylstra, PLC
Bruce Heys Builders, Inc.
Buist Electric, Inc.
Buffalo Wild Wings
Burr & Company
Byron Center Manor
Cascade Charter Township
Cascade Hills Country Club
Centric Laboratories
Chase Creative
Cherry Health
Chervon North America, Inc.
Chop House
Covenant Developments
Crystal Mountain

David's House Ministries
DPT Solutions
Dyna-Plate, Inc.
Edgeline Resources LLC
Ellis Parking Co., Inc.
Express Employment Professionals
FASTSIGNS of Grand Rapids
FCI Automation
Foster Swift Collins & Smith, P.C.
Fritz Wahlfield Construction Company
Fusion IT LLC
Gazelle Sports
Gilmore, Inc.
GL Resources, Inc.
Grand Rapids Iron & Metal
Grand Rapids Polishing & Buffing, Inc.
Grand Wealth Management
Granger Construction Company
Growtrust Partners
Highland Group of Grand Rapids
Hospice of Michigan - Greater Grand Rapids
Independent Bank
Innovative Software Solutions
Intaglio, LLC
Integrated Architecture
Keil Lasik Vision Center
Kennari Consulting
Kent Country Club
Lafleur & Godfrey LLC
Lakeshore Home Health Care Services, Inc.
Langerak Roof Systems
Management Business Solutions
Martha's Vineyard
Matthysse, Kuiper, DeGraaf Funeral Directors
Michigan State University College of Human Medicine
Mico Industries, Inc.
MVP Sports Clubs
New West Michigan Industrial, Inc.
Noordyk Business Equipment, LLC
Office of the Vice President for Government Relations, University of Michigan
Patten Monument Co.
Phillip Elenbaas Millwork Inc.
Pipp Mobile Storage Systems, Inc.
Powell Relocation Group
PROCARE Landscape Management
Progressive Surface
R.E.D. Stamp Inc.
Real-Time Perspectives
Regal Financial Group LLC
Robinette's Apple Haus & Winery
Rockford Ambulance
RT London Co
Samaritas
Savant Automation, Inc.
SecurAlarm Systems, Inc.
Senior Advisors of Michigan, Inc.
SIBSCO
Specialty Tool & Mold, Inc.
Star Truck Rentals
State Spring Service
Sun Title Agency
Swift Printing & Communications
Symplicity Communications, Inc.
Terryberry USA
Total Fire Protection, Inc.
Van Manen Petroleum / Pacific Pride
Visiting Angels of West Michigan
Wedgwood Christian Services
West Michigan Sports Commission

**GRAND
RAPIDS
CHAMBER**

250 MONROE AVE NW, SUITE 150
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49503

LEADING WHAT'S NEXT

Grand Valley State University is committed to being a valued talent pipeline and knowledge resource for Grand Rapids area businesses from technology to health and everything in between. Our corporate partnerships strengthen the community and our relevant undergraduate, graduate, and degree completion programs make for a well-educated workforce ready for whatever is next.

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