

THE CHAMBER NEWS

A Publication of the Grand Rapids Chamber

Summer 2024



INNOVATIONS IN TALENT ACQUISITION

Diane Maher on Vocational Village and second chances

**NAVIGATING THE GEN Z
WORKFORCE WAVE**

THE FUTURE OF WORK
How AI can help businesses thrive

GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER

The Grand Rapids Chamber leads the business community in creating a dynamic, top-of-mind West Michigan region. Together with over 2,800 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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SUMMER 2024

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DEAR CHAMBER MEMBERS,

IT DOESN'T GET BETTER THAN THIS! It's summer in West Michigan and an exciting time to be a part of our business community.

Our growing region has so much opportunity in front of it, and your Chamber is here to help you, your business, and our community reach its full potential.

Our Chamber prides itself on fostering a welcoming, prosperous West Michigan for all. As this issue highlights, one of the ways we support this mission is by **helping you attract, retain and develop talented individuals** that will create a brighter future. And, as you will read in our cover story, members like **Diane Maher, President and COO of DP Fox**, are leading the way in building strong talent pipeline by partnering with Vocational Village to hire returning citizens.

We are committed to being your talent partners and advocates. If something in this issue sparks your interest, if you are not taking advantage of our **leadership programs** or resources like **Tri-Share** and the **Going Pro Talent Fund**, please contact us and we would be happy to connect you.

Cultivating talent and a great community does not happen by accident. It happens by the choice and action of our people. One thing you can do to

support this vision is **vote yes on the Kent County Lodging proposal on August 6** to support the creation of transformational community assets.

I am grateful to work with such amazing individuals through the Chamber as we prepare our companies and the next generation for the future. I hope this newsletter serves as an inspiration for you to connect and engage.

Thank you for your investment in us as we work toward a more prosperous West Michigan for all.



**RICK BAKER, PRESIDENT & CEO
GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER**



WHAT'S NEXT FOR A GROWING GRAND RAPIDS

BY JOSHUA LUNGER, *Vice President of Government Affairs, Grand Rapids Chamber*

GRAND RAPIDS EMERGED FROM THE PANDEMIC more resilient and facing several exciting opportunities.

While it can be easy to focus on our challenges, Grand Rapids can be optimistic and grateful for our position as cities work to adapt to new norms. Many communities across the country are envious of the things happening in West Michigan.

We can also learn a lot from what other metros have done well – and what they have done poorly.

In April, we welcomed Amy Taylor, President of Columbus Downtown Development Corporation, to speak at the Grand Rapids Policy Conference. Amy highlighted the factors that helped Columbus become the leading city for growth in 2023.

The good news? Their successes are aligned with our strengths. Amy attributed their growth to investment in amenities and public spaces, residential development and a vision driven through public-private partnerships. Amy also spoke about the need to intentionally address public safety issues in ensuring spaces stay accessible, active, and attractive to investment.

In the next decade, greater downtown Grand Rapids will undergo a transformation not seen in a decade. The benefits of the amphitheater and soccer stadium extend far beyond their physical footprints and will catalyze private investment in nearby property and along the river.

Downtown is a regional asset. A healthy downtown is the heart of regional growth, tourism, entertainment, employment, and supporting the growth of neighboring cities. As Walker Mayor Gary Carey put it, "When downtown sneezes, the outside towns catch a cold."

Leaders of Grand Rapids suburbs are also finding ways to raise the quality of life and discussed how they plan to attract more visitors and residents. Kentwood is building a community center and exploring an expansive public park, Wyoming continues to make progress on their City Center projects, and Walker is designing a new library amongst numerous other projects.

But it is important that at the center of it all, the downtown area is vibrant and safe. Leaders from Dallas, Texas highlighted the same when discussing the reasons for their growth – that the 'named city' has a positive ring.



WHERE DO WE NEED TO FOCUS OUR EFFORTS?

A group of local community, philanthropic and business leaders traveled to Houston in March. We learned how Houston went from being in the top 10 worst performing cities for homelessness to being a national leader in getting the most vulnerable off the street and into permanent housing.

Learning from our peers shows that we have many of the same components that made them successful, and we need to focus on alignment and early progress. This will enable our system to build momentum and further improve outcomes on a path to dissolving homelessness. Like many community challenges, the issue is complex with no simple solution. We can make consistent progress by having a mindset towards action.

Marc Eichenbaum, Special Assistant to the Mayor on Homelessness Initiatives for the City of Houston told our group: "Move fast, modify as needed."

WHAT'S AHEAD?

Whether we are talking about transformational projects or meeting important community needs, the results elsewhere prove Grand Rapids has the right assets and is positioned to thrive. While it can be helpful to look back, it is time to start looking forward and raising our community's quality of life and stature.

A recent Forbes article highlighted Grand Rapids' efforts and praised our ability to rally the community and address difficult issues head on. We should nurture these strengths as we look at the great things the next generation will bring to our metro. ■

GRAND RAPIDS BY THE NUMBERS:

418,000+

GUESTS PROJECTED TO VISIT DOWNTOWN HOTELS IN 2022

203,644

POPULATION OF GRAND RAPIDS IN 2022

~ 40K

INDIVIDUALS VISIT DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS FOR BUSINESS MEETINGS & CONFERENCES EACH YEAR

BUSINESSES ARE OPENING IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA

2X FASTER

THAN THEY WERE CLOSING IN 2021

28,950,507

INDIVIDUALS VISITED GRAND RAPIDS IN 2021

KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING!
DESTINATION KENT

 **VOTE YES**

ON AUGUST 6

KENT COUNTY LODGING PROPOSAL
THE TAX YOU DON'T PAY!



STACY BARE: A VISION FOR ADVENTURE

STACY BARE is the Executive Director of Friends of Grand Rapids Parks. He is a former semi-professional outdoor athlete, National Geographic Adventurer of the Year, U.S. Army veteran and former landmine clearance technician. He also led the first team to ski off the tallest peak in Iraq, has made a few outdoor films, has written for a few outdoor publications, and loves calling Grand Rapids and the Great Lakes home with his family.

As we kick off summer in West Michigan, we caught up with Bare on his vision for an active, adventurous region. Learn more below.

What is your vision for the future of Grand Rapids and West Michigan?

More than anything, my vision is for a city and region that plays together outside, laughs a lot, and welcomes others to our beautiful piece of the planet.

I want to see Grand Rapids and West Michigan as the #1 adventure destination in the Midwest and top 10 nationally. We do that by building off all the amazing things already here and the incredible work of so many who have gotten us to this point. The trail builders, park designers, tree planters, land conservancy groups, and many more.

We can add 100+ miles of natural surface trail throughout the region, starting with 15 miles right here in Grand Rapids. This can ensure 90% of residents are no more than a 10-minute walk or drive from a trail. Everyone has access to shade, forests are healthy, and pollinator and butterfly habitats stretch from parks to front yards.

I also picture car-free access to lakes and campgrounds, standing surf waves, skate parks, and trails integrated into the new

stadium and amphitheater to host the X Games.

What does it mean for Grand Rapids to be an active lifestyle community?

A city that plays together outside! We are happier, healthier, and more resilient even in downturns of the economy. We take care of each other and know each

other because we have created connections to ourselves, our neighbors, and the city itself. We volunteer outside, we have thriving programs for youth and adults, and the gear locker at Roosevelt Park Lodge keeps growing because of heavy use.

The work already being done in Grand Rapids and throughout West Michigan will echo throughout the state, spurring even greater growth of the network of trails, parks, water access, and events.



Stacy Bare

How would this vision benefit our community?

Beyond increased health and happiness, attracting and maintaining talent, and increased tourism revenue, the data is very clear on the benefits.

For every \$1 invested in trails, we see a return of \$2.50 in economic investment year over year, with a \$3 health savings for residents. Dollar per dollar, I am not sure of any better investment for economic development and community-wide health care!

The investments in outdoor recreation speak for themselves. It is the #1 thing people without kids look for when they make a move, and it is #2 for people with kids behind the quality of schools. Utah recognizes it is the top reason tech companies and tech workers chose to come to Utah, and don't leave even for higher salaries elsewhere. Arkansas, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota are all doubling down on investments in outdoor recreation.

Businesses, families, and individuals will want to come to Grand Rapids and stay here because it is a wonderful place to be. There is a vibrant outdoor industry scene with established and new brands choosing to make West Michigan home and using our great state as their backdrop in advertising campaigns.

We must ensure, however, that everyone has access to trails and the outdoors, not just a select few.

What can the business community do to drive this vision forward?

It will take all of us to make this vision happen.

I love the community spirit in West Michigan. We are lucky to have a very engaged business community in the outdoors. We get great volunteer support and sponsorship for our tree planting and adopt-a-park / habitat restoration programs already.

But what I would love to know from the business community is what do you, your employees and your customers want outside?

From that, we need businesses to work with and encourage philanthropy and government to get involved supporting the financing, building and maintenance of it all. Trails, parks, and the features throughout—there are opportunities for naming rights and legacy projects. What's better advertising than having a world class trail or park with your name in it? We already have some great examples with Merrell Trail and Perrin Flow Trail.



The businesses who lead and participate will be in the best position for talent attraction and retention. Who wouldn't want to work for those companies investing in our great outdoors?

What's next?

There are always plenty of opportunities for volunteer work and support in our parks and planting trees, but big projects include working with the mountain bike community to raise \$300,000 for a new 3-mile trail network at Ball Perkins.

The International Mountain Bike Alliance (IMBA) awarded us a Trail Accelerator grant this year. We were one of five grantees nationwide to get this grant, which will allow us to work with the community to design a trail concept for those 15 miles of new trail I mentioned in at least 6 different parks.

Later this summer or fall, we will bring together different community members to build out a shared vision and plan of what everyone thinks the outdoors should look like in West Michigan.

Anything else you want to add or share?

Call me! Let's go hike, bike, paddle, plant a tree, clean up a park, or grab a coffee and talk about how good it is and how great it can be in West Michigan. I'd love to hear how you and your company would like to get involved. ■



INNOVATIONS IN TALENT ACQUISITION

FOR BUSINESSES ACROSS THE NATION, overcoming the talent shortage feels like a challenge that may never end. Companies continue to grapple with understaffing, high turnover rates, and costly recruitment, even years after Covid-19 transformed the labor market.

The West Michigan population may be growing, but talent resources are still limited. Even with remote options, the rise of AI and inflation are transforming how and where we work. Amidst these shifts, local businesses are coming up with creative strategies to address their talent shortages.



NONTRADITIONAL AVENUES TO FIND TALENT

PARTNERING WITH FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

One nontraditional talent solution some companies are turning to is partnering with correctional facilities and Vocational Village, a first-of-its kind training program spearheaded by the Michigan Department of Corrections, it offers incarcerated individuals an opportunity to grow their careers.

Vocational Village offers a wide variety of skills and trades training, including welding, carpentry, automotive technology, electrical and more.

By participating in the program, companies not only address their talent shortages but also support the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals into society.

Companies like DP Fox Ventures have embraced this program to help staff their automotive technician roles. **Diane Maher, President and Chief Strategy Officer for DP Fox Ventures**, has led her company's involvement with the Vocational Village program and has hired around 15 villagers over the past seven years.



“My first visit [to vocational village] was transformational and eye-opening. The village gives them a chance at being successful and improving their lives, and we as a society should be focused on the same thing.”

“We were looking for automotive technicians, and we learned that Vocational Village had a program where they were allowing inmates to learn skills while they're incarcerated,” said Maher. “My first visit there was transformational and eye-opening. The village gives them a chance at being successful and improving their lives, and we as a society should be focused on the same thing.”

“I would highly recommend anyone goes to visit the place to understand the need for the programming. First off, because talent is hard to get, but second, because everybody deserves a second chance at life.”

INVITING INTERNATIONAL TALENT

Immigrants make up nearly 20% of the U.S. workforce, but we are still falling short of tapping the skills and potential of these newcomers.

As a result, nearly 2 million immigrants with college degrees in the United States – one out of every four – are unable to find work or default to low-skilled jobs.

To close this gap, organizations like Global Detroit are serving as catalysts to build connections between immigrants and employers.

Global Detroit's Talent Retention Initiative has connected over 4,000 international students with hundreds of employers across Michigan, filling critical talent gaps. Additionally, the organization hosts workshops, networking events, job fairs and other career-building offerings to attract and retain top talent for local companies.

West Michigan businesses are also tapping international talent, citing that it benefits the company, the employees, and the region as a whole.

Geoffrey Miller, CEO of Grand Rapids Chair Company, shared insights into the pivotal role immigrants have played in his workforce, underlining their impact on the company's fabric.

"Immigrants are a driving force for innovation and productivity, contributing significantly to the success of the Grand Rapids Chair Company," says Miller.

Deksia, a forward-thinking marketing firm, has also welcomed international workers onto their team, creating a stronger talent pool and providing meaningful work to international students and recent grads.

training of new employees, existing staff training and development, and U.S. DOL Registered Apprenticeships.

Companies can apply to the Going PRO Talent Fund during multiple rounds of applications each year. Find details on Michigan.gov or through West Michigan Works!

INVESTING IN DIGITAL SKILLS

Digital Skills are one of the most critical needs in our workforce development today, with 92% of all jobs requiring some sort of digital literacy.

"If you go into it with eyes wide open, you'll have an incredibly loyal, dedicated, hardworking, intelligent staff member at the end. The teammates that have been working with us are just freaking awesome humans."

- AARON VANDERGALIEN, CEO, DEKSIA

"They're hungry, they're engaged, they're excited to be part of the community and the culture and would love the opportunity to stay," says **Deksia CEO Aaron Vandergalien**. "Our experience has been that the international students who work with us will often outwork our natural-born citizens."

Vandergalien's advice for employers who are navigating the international hiring process is to be aware of the costs, but know it will likely be worth it in the end.

"If you go into it with eyes wide open, knowing that it might be an expensive journey, you'll have an incredibly loyal, dedicated, hardworking, intelligent staff member at the end. The teammates that have been worked with us are just freaking awesome humans."

OTHER RESOURCES TO UPSKILL TALENT

Beyond traditional recruitment methods, upskilling initiatives are also helping local companies bridge gaps.

THE GOING PRO TALENT FUND

The Going PRO Talent Fund provides funding support to companies looking to improve the skills of their employees.

Companies can apply to the talent fund to receive competitive awards for training, leading to increased employee productivity and retention. Funding can go towards supporting on-the-job

The Grand Rapids Chamber's Government Affairs team is working to raise awareness on the digital skills divide and highlight regional solutions that aim to improve the digital skills of the workforce throughout our region.

Connect with our team to learn how you can help develop the digital skills your employees need to thrive.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING FOR YOUR TEAM

The Grand Rapids Chamber's talent programs provide some of the top training in the region for leadership and talent development.

Ranging from entry-level learning to trainings for top executives, the talent programs will support your employees and help them build the skills and relationships they need to succeed.

Connect with our talent team to find programming that suits your talent goals.

Innovations in talent acquisition are crucial for navigating today's hot labor market.

By embracing nontraditional avenues, leveraging international talent, and investing in upskilling initiatives, businesses can not only address their immediate talent needs but also foster diversity, inclusion, and growth within their communities. ■



COME WORK WITH US!

Looking for a spot to host your next offsite meeting? The Grand Rapids Chamber has a variety of meeting rooms to suit your needs! With excellent customer service, innovative technology, and a convenient location downtown, 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.



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Attracting better talent starts with having better benefits, and we're ready to help.
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THE CHAMBER OUT & ABOUT



LGR'24 has a special meet & greet with GVSU President Philomena Mantella



Chamber team member Jenny Waugh receives the volunteer of the year award along with Patricia Martinez Tejada from Disability Advocates



JaeEun Yun from Byron Center Christian School was the winner of the first National Civics Bee hosted in West Michigan



The Women in Leadership cohort takes a break to witness the solar eclipse



Chamber team member Samuel Sanestin visits Gumballs Boutique, a DBE certified minority and woman owned business



RSI Manufacturing in Muskegon receives the first DBE certification as a tribal-owned business



The Chamber team celebrates President & CEO Rick Baker's 60th birthday with sweets from Nothing Bundt Cake



LGR'24 visits the Fulton Farmers Market as a supplemental learning opportunity to their Economic Vitality session



Chamber team member Monica Mendez poses with fellow Brilliance Award finalists



Chamber team members Rich App and Claribel Ortiz attend the Business Resource & Finance Fair in May



The Chamber's Membership and Development team joins the Association for Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) Sales & Revenue Conference



Chamber team members Connor Smithee and Trevor Blood congratulate Fulton Family Dentistry as a DBE certified minority and woman owned business

THE CHAMBER OUT & ABOUT



The Blue Beacon Brokerage team celebrates the opening of their new office with a ribbon cutting



The Chamber Ambassador Council meets at Arts Marketplace at Studio Park



Chamber team members Summer Sharrard-Neering and Monica Mendez join eightWest to highlight the ATHENA Awards nominations



More than 30 leaders from the YMCA completed a customized leadership training with the Chamber



Housing Next's Brooke Oosterman poses with Bev Thiel of Habitat for Humanity of Kent County at the 50 Most Influential Women Luncheon



The ATHENA Action Committee gather for coffee at DBE certified minority and woman owned business Kaffiene Place



Members network at the February ATHENA Leadership Forum



The Chamber team celebrates Monica Mendez as a finalist for the 2024 Brilliance Awards



Key partners break ground on the Acrisure Amphitheater



Members of the OutPro Council pose at the OutPro Celebration in March



Chamber team member Andy Johnston with members Shelley Irwin and Dave Bilardello before running the Amway Riverbank Run



The Chamber was a proud sponsor of the Best of Grand Rapids Party in May



LEADERSHIP GRAND RAPIDS ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: KARA VAN DAM

A WEST MICHIGAN BOOMERANG, **Kara Van Dam** (LGR '23) moved back to the area in 2021 to join Grand Valley State University as Vice Provost for Graduate and Lifetime Learning. With more than 20 years of experience in academic affairs, partnership building, and curricular and program design, Kara was thrilled to come back to the area she considers home and join the university led by President Philomena Mantella.

Over the past three years, she has worked with colleagues across GVSU to better support adult learners. These institution-wide efforts have tripled the number of incoming adult students in the past year alone. Today, Kara serves as the Chief Executive of GVSU Omni, which expands access to a GVSU education for adult learners across the state.

Learn more about Kara's journey and how she's working to create talent development solutions below.

Although originally from the Grand Rapids area, your experiences have brought you many places – from Maryland to D.C. to Chicago, among others. What led you back to West Michigan in 2021?

It was the opportunity to join Grand Valley State University in this position that led me back to West Michigan. I was struck

with President Mantella's strategic vision. She's an incredibly progressive thinker – she thinks big scale on reach, equity, and access to education. And I was inspired by the university's vision. Leaning into working adults and military-affiliated learners, as well as corporate partnerships and extending our regional campus network was very much in line with my professional expertise and passions.

It was a combination of being excited about the scope of the role and being able to do work in a community I've always loved. I've moved around a lot, but Grand Rapids has always been home. I love Michigan – and I'm one of the weirdos who really loves winter, too.

In February, GVSU announced the Omni program, which you developed and are leading as Chief Executive. Tell us more about the program and how it came about.

In my three years as vice provost for graduate and lifetime learning, we were thinking about the best way to strategically put us forward in spaces for working adults and military-affiliated learners, and really expand our regional network. It became clear that GVSU Omni would be a great direction to take the institution, allowing us to bring the Grand Valley experience to more people.

GVSU's Omni is designed to help Michigan residents advance in their careers through an educational experience that is flexible, fast, and trustworthy. Omni combines an expertly taught curriculum with flexible learning, allowing adult learners anywhere to advance their education on a schedule that works with their life and work commitments.

Grand Valley has always been engaged in talent pipeline work, and Omni creates a scaling mechanism where we can partner with more providers, reach more students, and upskill more employees. We're very focused on the talent marketplace and thinking not just about where the needs are today, but where are they going to be in five years. What are some of the new industries that are evolving? As one example, AI is going to change everything.

Omni is really a platform for us to be more nimble, more flexible, and able to pivot faster to meet these talent needs.

You were a Leadership Grand Rapids Class of 2023 graduate. Tell us about your experience in LGR.

Leadership Grand Rapids was the singular most important experience in helping me understand my hometown. I left Grand Rapids at the age of 17, and what I did not know about Grand Rapids was a lot. Returning 30 years later, my mindset and lived experience were obviously different, and I needed to re-learn the area through a new lens.

The program helped me build relationships across the city and across all sectors. It gave me a deep understanding of the complexity of industry here, and it helped me understand the systems, structures, people, and organizations that are trying to tackle some of our toughest problems in our city.

LGR really puts the responsibility on leaders to say, look, this is our city. We are accountable and need to step up to create better housing, better schools, better relationships with law enforcement, how we think about basic needs, social determinants of health and access to services, how we think about access and equity and racism. I came out of every session so full, often grappling with how to process all I had learned.

One of the most jarring sessions was on basic needs and the true ramifications of poverty. I come from a privileged background; I've always known that, but what I did not understand about the impact of poverty was shocking and humbling. I have a deeper empathy for the trauma that accompanies the scramble to secure basic needs in a confusing bureaucracy, and how doing everything right doesn't result in everything going right.



Leadership Grand Rapids Class of 2023

How has this experience shaped your view of Grand Rapids?

In some ways, Grand Rapids is the perfect size for a program like LGR. We're big enough to be complex, but we're small enough that individuals can get things done, leveraging those networks.

I now have a depth and breadth and understanding of how much richer and interesting Grand Rapids is. I'm a huge cheerleader for Grand Rapids – I love it. I never want to live anywhere else. ■

Learn more about GVSU's Omni program at gvsu.edu/omni.



THE FUTURE OF WORK

HOW AI CAN HELP BUSINESSES THRIVE IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

BUSINESSES TODAY are facing a multitude of workforce challenges. From finding and retaining top talent to keeping up with the ever-changing skillset demands, many companies are struggling to adapt. But what if there was a solution that could not only address these challenges but also propel businesses forward? Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize the way we work, and businesses that embrace this transformation will be well-positioned for success in the years to come.

STREAMLINE RECRUITING WITH AI

In today's competitive job market, attracting and retaining top talent is a constant battle. The traditional methods of recruiting and screening candidates are time-consuming and often ineffective.

AI can streamline this process by:

- **Writing targeted job descriptions:** AI can analyze vast amounts of data to identify the skills and experience most relevant to a specific role. This allows businesses to create targeted job descriptions that attract the right candidates.
- **Smart resume screening:** AI-powered resume screening goes beyond keywords. It understands the context of a candidate's experience, minimizing the chance of missing highly qualified individuals who might use different phrasing on their resume. This frees up HR professionals to focus on more strategic and important tasks, like interviewing the most promising candidates.

By leveraging AI, businesses can create a more efficient and effective talent acquisition process, giving them a significant edge in the quest for talent.

BUILD A FUTURE-PROOF WORKFORCE WITH AI

The pace of technological change is relentless, and the skills that were once in demand may quickly become obsolete. AI can help businesses address this challenge by:

- **Identifying skill gaps:** AI can collect and analyze data on past, present, future, industry, society, technology events and trends. Businesses can then use these insights as rationale when planning and creating their workforce of the future.
- **Predicting labor needs:** AI can forecast future labor needs based on business growth projections and industry trends. This allows businesses to proactively develop talent pipelines and avoid costly skills shortages.

By using AI to identify and address skill gaps, businesses can ensure that their workforce has the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the digital age.

THE FUTURE OF WORK: A HUMAN-AI PARTNERSHIP

The future of work is not about humans versus machines; it's about humans and machines working together. AI has the potential to revolutionize the way we work. By automating tedious tasks and providing data-driven insights, AI can propel businesses forward. And those that embrace this technology today will be poised for success in the years ahead.

Here are some key takeaways for businesses looking to get started with AI:

- **Focus on collaboration:** AI should be seen as a tool to enhance human capabilities, helping us work smarter.
- **Start small and scale up:** Identify specific areas where AI can automate tasks and improve efficiency. Look for areas where insights from your data could improve decision-making.
- **Invest in your people:** Upskill your team to leverage AI effectively and develop training programs to help employees adapt to new technologies.

Humans and AI, working together, can create a more productive and prosperous future of work. As technology continues to evolve, we can expect even more innovative applications to emerge, reshaping the way we work. ■



This article was written by Ryan Johnson, Director of Data Science at Twisthink. You can contact Ryan at ryanj@twisthink.com or learn more about Twisthink at [twisthink.com](https://www.twisthink.com).





NAVIGATING THE GEN Z WORKFORCE WAVE

IN TODAY'S COMPETITIVE JOB MARKET, attracting and retaining top talent can be challenging.

Gen Z will soon take over the workplace as the most populous generation on earth, and employers need to get ready to adapt to this powerhouse group.

So how should employers support their younger counterparts? From embracing remote work to emphasizing purpose-driven initiatives, here are some innovative approaches to attracting Gen Z talent.



ALLOW REMOTE OR FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS

Hold off on the back-to-office mandates. 58% of recent graduates said work-life balance is the most important aspect of a job, and employers should be prepared to support flexibility. Gen Z highly values independence, work-life balance and the ability to work from anywhere.

HIGHLIGHT A GREATER PURPOSE AND IMPACT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Showcase your company's commitment to social responsibility, sustainability, and making a positive impact in your community. Around 70% of Gen Z-ers around the world say they're involved in a social or political cause, so make sure to show your employees how their work aligns with a higher purpose.

CRAFT PERSONALIZED CAREER PATHS FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES

Develop career development plans that cater to your employees' interests and aspirations. Offer continuous learning opportunities, mentorship programs, and skill development initiatives. Trends like "quiet quitting" and the "act your wage" movement have shown that Gen Z is willing to hold their employers accountable and ready to jump on new opportunities.

EMPHASIZE TECH AND INNOVATION

Demonstrate your company's commitment to innovation and embracing the latest technology. As the "the first digital natives" in our society, Gen Z-ers are digitally savvy, and they aren't willing be held back by dinosaur computers and software.

PROMOTE INCLUSION

Foster a diverse and inclusive workplace culture where all voices are heard and respected. In the U.S., Gen Z is just 52% white, which brings new perspectives to business, politics, culture and more.

BE AUTHENTIC & HONEST

Be authentic in your branding and marketing efforts. As fierce internet scrollers, Gen Z-ers have learned to vet information quickly and can quickly spot inauthenticity.

OFFER MEANINGFUL BENEFITS

Gen Z may be young, but they've seen a lot in their young adult lives. After facing a pandemic and rapid inflation, this generation has reported higher stress levels and a higher emphasis on mental health and wellness than other groups. Consider offering company benefits that speak to these needs: loan assistance, mental health programs, discounted gym memberships and more.

By adopting these solutions, companies can not only stay competitive but also foster a workplace culture that values diversity, innovation, and social responsibility while supporting the next generation of leaders.

Want to help your Gen Z employees get plugged in further? Check out the Grand Rapids Chamber's Emerging Leaders program to help young professionals grow as leaders and become actively engaged in the community. ■

NATIONAL CIVICS BEE

THE GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER proudly announced JaeEun Yun from Byron Center Christian School as the winner of the first 2024 National Civics Bee® hosted in West Michigan. This initiative aims to encourage more young Americans to engage in civics and contribute to their communities. The top three finalists received trophies and a ticket to the State Civics Bee:

THE WINNERS:

- **1st Place: JaeEun Yun, Byron Center Christian School, \$500 prize**
- **2nd Place: Micah Sitte, Jenison Junior High, \$250 prize**
- **3rd Place: Jude Westra, East Grand Rapids Middle School, \$150 prize**

All participants went home with an iPad and certificate.

“It was really interesting to study and I learned a lot of new stuff,” said Yun. “It was a really great experience for me, and I think it’s good for students to participate in this.” Yun focused on education solutions and funding for private schools in his essay and discussion in the final round of the competition.

“You could tell they studied and worked really hard to identify an issue in their community, how it was connected to government, and what they could do to be a part of the solution,” said Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss. “I think they’re all potential future leaders.”

Organized in partnership with The Civic Trust® of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the competition in Grand Rapids inspired middle schoolers to become better informed about American democracy, to engage respectfully and constructively in the community, and to build greater trust in others and institutions.

“Advancing civic engagement and leadership is one way we can create a more prosperous West Michigan,” said Senior VP of Advocacy and Strategic Engagement Andy Johnston. “It was inspiring to see middle schoolers demonstrate their civics knowledge and ideas to create stronger communities.”

THE PROCESS:

Middle school students from the region were invited to submit a 500-word civics essay. The top writers went on to compete in the live quiz portion of the event to test their civics knowledge, which was judged by Grand Rapids Chamber CEO and President Rick Baker, Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss, and the Director of the GVSU Hauenstein Center Megan Rydecki.



Participating schools included:

- Byron Center Christian School
- Cross Creek Charter Academy
- Dutton Christian School
- East Grand Rapids Middle School
- Jenison Junior High
- Riley Street Middle School
- Rockford Middle School
- Trinitas Classical School

GET INVOLVED

The Grand Rapids Chamber leads the business community in creating a dynamic, top-of-mind West Michigan region. Together with over 2,800 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



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The Grand Rapids Chamber continues to be the number one organization that businesses can rely on for advocacy, bold programming, inclusivity, talent development, and beyond.

*Wesley Trimpe
iCor Solutions*

”

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS



35th Annual ATHENA Awards Celebration

Wednesday, October 8 | 3:30 - 5:30 p.m..

The ATHENA Awards Celebration honors those who embody, encourage and promote the inclusion of women. Join us for an afternoon of celebration, inspiration, networking, and announcing our ATHENA award recipients.



Diversity & Talent Summit

Tuesday, November 12 | 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

The Diversity & Talent Summit focuses on the different avenues available to attract and retain the right workforce in today's competitive marketplace. The summit includes breakout sessions featuring subject matter experts who will share proven strategies on how to address the talent shortfall in innovative ways.

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
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 Association of REALTORS
Grand Rapids Label Company
Grand Rapids Rubber Products Co.
Grand Rapids Symphony
MLive Media Group / The Grand Rapids Press
Model Coverall Service, Inc.
OAK
PNC Bank
Raymond James & Associates
SpartanNash
United Way, Heart of West Michigan
University of Michigan Health-West
Warner Norcross + Judd LLP
Wheeler Upham, PC
Wolverine Building Group, Inc.
Wolverine Coil Spring Co.

50+ YEARS

Amway
Behler-Young Company
Brann's Corporate Offices
Deloitte
Eikenhout, Inc.
Harvey Cadillac Lexus
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
Monsma Marketing Corporation
Morrison Industrial Equipment Co.
Nexben
Rhoades McKee PC

40+ YEARS

AHC+Hospitality
Algoma Products, Inc.
Aquinas College
Arc Kent County, Inc.
Automatic Door Service
Bazen Electric Co.
Berends Hendricks Stuit Insurance Agency Inc.
Betz Industries
Brown & Brown, Inc.
Cascade Engineering, Inc.
Crystal Flash
CU Answers
Custer
D.A. Blodgett-St. John's
Dan Vos Construction Co. Inc.

DeMaagd & Richter Agency, Inc.
DeWys Metal Solutions
DoubleTree by Hilton Grand Rapids Airport
Dover Pumps & Process Solutions Segment, Inc.
Doyle & Ogden, Insurance Advisors
Eastbrook Homes, Inc.
Economic Club of Grand Rapids
EPS Security - (Engineered Protection Systems, Inc.)
Fishbeck
Forest View Psychiatric Hospital - Universal Health Services
FOX 17
Goodwill Industries of Greater Grand Rapids, Inc.
Grand Rapids Community College
Grand Valley State University
H & H Management & Development
Hobart Sales & Service
Holland Home Corporate Office
Hope Network
Hungerford Nichols CPAs + Advisors
J. Mark Systems, 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
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 Companies
Reliance Community Care Partners
Robert W. Baird & Co. 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

30+ YEARS

AACSET / West Michigan Works!
Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty
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
Barr Engineering Co.
Broadway Grand Rapids
Buist Sheet Metal Co.
Comerica Bank

CWD Real Estate Investment
D & K Engineered Construction, Inc.
D & M Metal Products
Delta Dental of Michigan
Dickinson Wright PLLC
Direct Supply, Inc.
Disability Advocates of Kent County
DK Security
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 Valley Metropolitan Council
Great Lakes Commercial Finance
Handorn, Inc.
Hedrick Associates
Holiday Inn Grand Rapids Downtown
i3 Business Solutions, llc
IKUS Life Enrichment Services
Interphase Interiors, Inc.
John Ball Zoo
Knappe Industries, Inc.
Lincoln Pines Resort, Inc.
Literacy Center of West Michigan
Macatawa Bank
Meals on Wheels Western Michigan
Mor Electric Heating Associates, Inc.
Nationwide Transportation Services, Inc.
NTH Consultants, Ltd.
Nu-Wool Co., Inc.
Office Depot - Walker
Old National Bank
Onion Crock of Michigan
Overhead Door Co. of Grand Rapids
Parker Excavating Gravel & Recycle, Inc.
Paws With A Cause
Rehmann
Rest Lawn Memorial Park
San Chez--A Tapas Bistro
Scarlett, Inc.
Senior Neighbors
SeyferthPR
Thum Insurance Agency, LLC
Timothy Group
Van Andel Arena & DeVos Place/ASM Global
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 LLC

Applause Catering + Events
Armbrecht & Wierenga Orthodontics, PLC
Barnes & Thornburg LLP
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
Bruce Heys Builders, Inc.
Business System Solutions, Inc.
C2AE
Camp Roger
Center for Physical Rehabilitation
Central Michigan University
Century A & E
Chop House
Clean Rooms International, Inc.
Comcast Business
Council for Educational Travel USA (CETUSA)
Craig's Cruisers Family Fun Centers
Crystal Mountain
Degage Ministries
Daane's Development Co.
DLN Integrated Systems, Inc.
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids
Dykema Excavators
EHTC PC CPAs & Business Consultants
Elders' Helpers
ESCO Group, Inc. dba Edge-Sweets Company
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
Gilmore Inc.
Gordon Water Systems
Grand River Builders, Inc.
Grand Valley Auto Parts
Habitat for Humanity of Kent County Inc.
Hearty Fresh Inc.
Higher Ground Rock Climbing Centre LTD
Home Repair Services of Kent County Inc.
Hull Lift Truck, Inc.
Huntington Bank
IBOA International, Inc.
iChiro Clinics
Independent Bank
JadePig Ventures, LLC
Kent District Library
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
Martha's Vineyard
Martin Commercial Properties West Michigan, LLC
McAlvey, Merchant & Associates
Mel Trotter Ministries
Mercantile Bank of Michigan-Corporate Headquarters
Monsma Landscape & Maintenance, Inc.
Morris Builders, Inc.
NAI Wisinski of West Michigan
Nederveld, Inc.

Northpointe Bank
Outfront Media
Patriot Realty
Profile Films
Promotional Impact
Rapid Green Group
Regal Financial Group L.L.C.
Rockford Construction
Ronald McDonald House of Western Michigan
Saskatoon Golf Club
Signature Associates
SoundOff Signal
SpringHill Suites Grand Rapids North
Studio C
Supply Chain Solutions, LLC
Team Financial Group, Inc.
Terryberry USA
Thompson Remodeling, Inc.
Total Fire Protection, Inc.
Trinity Health
Universal Sign, Inc.
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
Allen Edwin Homes
Arbor Circle
Barber Creek Sand & Gravel Inc.
Betten Imports, Inc.
Black River Lawn and Landscape, LLC
Buffalo Wild Wings
Buist Electric, Inc.
Burr & Company
Byron Center Manor
Care Resources
Cascade Charter Township
Cascade Fresh Cleaning Services
Cascade Hills Country Club
Centric Laboratories
Chase Creative
Cherry Health
Chervon North America, Inc.
Clarity Realty
Configura, Inc.
Covenant Developments
Criterion Manufacturing Solutions
Crystal Clean Auto Detailing LLC
Danielle Rowland, State Farm
Dave Cole Decorators, Inc.
David's House Ministries
DP Fox Holdings, LLC/Fox Motors
DPT Solutions
Dyna-Plate, Inc.
Edgeline Resources LLC
Ellis Parking Co., Inc.
Empire Solutions
Exalta Health
Express Employment Professionals
FASTSIGNS of Grand Rapids
Foster Swift Collins & Smith, P.C.
Fritz Wahlfeld Construction Company

Fusion IT LLC
Gazelle Sports
Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation
GL Resources, Inc.
Grand Rapids Iron & Metal
Grand Rapids Polishing & Buffing, Inc.
Grand River Bank
Grand Wealth Management
Granger Construction Company
Growtrust Partners
Highland Group of Grand Rapids
Hospice of Michigan - Greater Grand Rapids
Hylant, LLC
In the Image
Innovative Software Solutions
Intaglio, LLC
Integrated Architecture
Keil Lasik Vision Center
Kennari Consulting
Kent Country Club
Kids Food Basket
Lafleur & Godfrey LLC
Lakeland Pallets, Inc.
Lakeshore Home Health Care Services, Inc.
Langerak Roof Systems
Management Business Solutions
Matthysse, Kuiper, DeGraaf Funeral Directors
Michigan Auto Law
Michigan Certified Development Corporation
Michigan Legislative Consultants
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
Optisave LLC
Patten Monument Co.
Phillip Elenbaas Millwork Inc.
Pipp Mobile Storage Systems, Inc.
Pleune Service Company
Porter Hills
Powell Relocation Group
PROCARE Landscape Management
Progressive Surface
RED Stamp Inc.
Robinette's Apple Haus & Winery
Rockford Ambulance
RT London Co.
Savant Automation, Inc
SecurAlarm Systems Inc
Senior Advisors of Michigan, Inc.
SIBSCO
Specialty Tool & Mold, Inc.
State Spring Service
Sun Title Agency
Swift Printing & Communications
Symplicity Communications, Inc.
Tabletting Inc.
Thorview Electric, LLC
Van Manen Petroleum/Pacific Pride
Visiting Angels of West Michigan
Wedgwood Christian Services
West Michigan Door Co.
West Michigan Sports Commission

CONGRATULATIONS

to the Leadership Grand Rapids Class of 2024!

Pete Battey
Kary Bosma
Michael Catching II
Breanna Challicombe
Meg Chamberlin
Ashley Chrysler
Benjamin Cochran
Lyndsie Cole
Michelle Covington

Jennifer Drake
Joe Dyer
Jordoun Eatman
Brandon Erhart
Megan Erskine
Yadira Garza-Malone
Regan Gibson
Hannah Greening
Raul Hernandez Guzman

Britt Hegarty-Darrow
Mei Hua
Jim Hueseman
Sara Jorgensen
Julie Kendrick
Kim Koeman
Tom Lagone
Melissa Meitz
Katie Merideth

Carly Munoz
Justin Noordeloos
Brooke Oosterman
Patrick Parkes
Tyler Petersen
Pete Rigney
Buzz Seifert
Melissa Powell Sheppard
Kim Skeltis

Katy Tigchelaar
Miloš Topić
Laticia Trice
Calvin Wiersma
Carrie Wilson
Patrick Witucki
Erik Wolenberg



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