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THE MONTHLY BUSINESS NEWS MAGAZINE OF THE LANSING REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

OCTOBER 2025

Building a Workforce Ready for Tomorrow

PREPARING NEW HIRES IN GREATER LANSING



In This Issue

Life, Loss, and Legacy: Insights
from Centennial Group

10 Over the Next Ten Spotlight
on the Regions Rising Stars

Two Key Proposals Voters
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“
**As a region,
we must foster
communities
that want to
be part of the
solution by
investing in
both people
and place.**

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAMBER

The Workforce Challenge: Connecting People and Place

As Greater Lansing continues to grow and evolve, the region's future depends on the strength of our workforce, the vibrancy of our communities, and the partnerships between schools, businesses, and local leaders. Our 2025 State of the Region Benchmarking report highlights both progress and opportunity. We see strong GDP growth, expanding high-tech employment, and a robust pipeline of STEM graduates. At the same time, challenges remain, including population shifts, educational attainment gaps, and the need to retain talent in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

One of our greatest assets is our young, emerging workforce. Gen Z brings energy, creativity, and adaptability, and ensuring they are fully prepared to enter the workforce is critical. However, recent research suggests a disconnect between Gen Z's values and those most prized by hiring managers. According to a study by The Values Bridge and Becoming You Labs, just 2% of Gen Z prioritize achievement, learning, and a love of work—values companies most desire in new hires. Instead, self-care, authentic self-expression, and altruism top their list.

This disconnect is further complicated by the rise of AI automation, which is eliminating entry-level roles and disproportionately affecting Gen Z workers. Employers are now faced with a choice: adapt to the values of the 98%, or compete fiercely for the 2% who align with traditional workplace expectations.

Locally, the challenge is urgent. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2025 New Hire Readiness Report, 84% of hiring managers say most high school graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce. Employers consistently rank critical thinking, communication, and adaptability as essential skills, yet too few young adults leave school with these abilities fully developed.

The Chamber's report also emphasizes the importance of credentials and real-world experience. Nearly nine in ten hiring managers prefer candidates with industry-recognized credentials, and internships are seen as the most effective way for students to gain early-career skills. Soft skills—now often called “critical skills”—are equally vital. Over 90% of hiring managers prioritize problem-solving and communication, and 96% value financial literacy.

Schools and businesses serve as anchors for our communities and neighborhoods, providing education, opportunity, and stability. Strengthening connections between these institutions ensures that young people can explore career pathways early, gain meaningful experience, and develop the skills employers value most. Programs that combine classroom learning with internships, mentorships, and hands-on work experiences are essential for preparing students to succeed.

As a region, we must foster communities that want to be part of the solution by investing in both people and place. Greater Lansing's affordability, growing startup ecosystem, and nationally recognized universities make it an attractive region to live, work, and grow a business. But the promise of these assets is fully realized only if we continue to connect, collaborate, and invest in talent development.

We are proud to lead these efforts, advocating for policies, partnerships, and programs that strengthen our region. Together, we can ensure that Greater Lansing remains a place where businesses and people thrive.

Thank You Renewing Members

AC Hotel Lansing University Area
Adventure Credit Union - E. Jolly Rd.
Allegra Marketing Print Mail - Okemos
American Board of Emergency
Medicine
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Brian Songer Agency - Farm Bureau
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Delta Dental of Michigan
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East-University Area
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Nuthouse Sports Grill
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Pratt & Whitney AutoAir, Inc.
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SM Saputo LLC
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Consulting, LLC
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Chamber Milestones

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45 years

Lansing Lugnuts
30 years

American Fifth Spirits
10 years

Arnouts Insurance Agency, Inc.
10 years

Greenlee Consulting
10 years

Capital Prime Steaks & Seafood
5 years

D&K Truck Co.
5 years

Johnson Sign Company
5 years

Storage Sense – South Creyts Road
5 years

We'd like to offer a special salute to these great organizations who reached milestone anniversaries as Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce members this month. Thank you for your continued support throughout the years!

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Mitchell's Seafood House
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www.mitchellsfishmarket.com
2975 Preyde Blvd.
Lansing, MI 48912

What's on the Ballot This November

On November 4, 2025, voters across Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham counties will decide on 13 ballot proposals totaling more than \$150 million in combined financial impact. These include school bonds, millage renewals, charter amendments, and new initiatives for public services. Notable measures include the \$66.15 million Mason Public Schools bond, the \$15.1 million Stockbridge bond, the \$2.66 million Portland Schools bond, and major renewals for Charlotte, Waverly, and Eaton Rapids schools. Local governments are also seeking new investments, such as the Village of Bellevue's fire protection assessment and East Lansing's proposed 2-mill Parks & Recreation levy.

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) is supportive of two critical proposals:

- **City of Lansing Charter Proposal** – modernizing governance with reforms such as a strategic plan requirement, independent auditor, and transparency dashboards. This will improve accountability and competitiveness.
- **Delta Township Public Transportation Millage** – providing seamless, reliable transit options for residents, workers, and visitors. Public transit is essential for workforce mobility and economic growth.



The Lansing Regional Chamber-Political Action Committee (LRC-PAC) is the political action committee of the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce

(LRCC), organized to maintain a pro-business, pro-growth outlook among elected officials in the Greater Lansing region. The LRC-PAC is a separate entity from the LRCC and has its own bylaws. The LRC-PAC is registered with the Michigan Secretary of State. No LRCC membership dues are used for political purposes.

In addition, the LRC-PAC has endorsed candidates for the upcoming City Council elections in Lansing and East Lansing who will prioritize economic growth and responsible governance:

- **Lansing:**
 - Mayor: Andy Schor
 - City Council At-Large: Jeremy Garza, Clara Martinez
 - 2nd Ward: Deyanira Nevarez Martinez
 - 4th Ward: Peter Spadafore
- **East Lansing:** Steve Whelan, Liam Richichi ♦

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Celebrating 60 Years of Dowding Industries: A Legacy of Innovation, People, and Community

By Cindy Kangas, Executive Director,
Capital Area Manufacturing Council



When I think of manufacturing excellence, I think of Chris and Jeff Metts at Dowding Industries. In my very first month on the job, Jeff personally took me on a tour of their Eaton Rapids facility. It was a Monday morning, and his energy was contagious — he greeted every employee by name, smiled, and even asked about their families. That moment stuck with me because it perfectly captures the heart of Dowding.

Founded in 1965 by Maurice “Skip” Dowding as a small tool and die shop, Dowding has grown into a world-class manufacturer of metal stampings, fabricated and precision-machined components, and assemblies. Today, Skip’s daughter, CEO Chris Dowding-Metts, and her husband, President Jeff Metts, carry forward his vision. With three plants totaling 160,000 square feet, they are proving that a generational business can continue to thrive and innovate for decades.

Jeff often says manufacturing is a “three-legged stool” — price, quality, and delivery — and Dowding lives that philosophy every day. In the past two years, they have installed more than 50 robots and cobots to streamline processes and improve quality in their high-mix, low-volume manufacturing model. Importantly, they have not lost a single job to automation; instead, they’ve used technology to help employees learn new processes, develop new skills, and grow.

Chris and Jeff believe in hiring for character, not just skills. Jeff likes to say, “It’s not what they know, it’s who they are.” Once someone joins the Dowding family, they are nurtured with personal and professional development opportunities designed to help them succeed.

What sets Dowding apart is their deep commitment to their people and their community. They are passionate about creating a workplace where employees are valued, challenged, and supported — a true gold standard in manufacturing.

Chris and Jeff’s leadership reminds me every day why I love what I do. Their story is a testament to the power of innovation, people-centered leadership, and a shared commitment to making mid-Michigan stronger. Congratulations to Dowding Industries on 60 years of manufacturing excellence — and here’s to many more! ♦



A strong community can do brilliant things.

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and we're ready to help.

bcbsm.com/employers/improved-care



Addressing Health Care Affordability for Michigan Small Businesses

By Sandy Fester, Vice President, Michigan Business, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan

WHAT HEALTH CARE AFFORDABILITY CHALLENGES ARE MICHIGAN SMALL BUSINESSES FACING TODAY?

Small businesses are the backbone of our state's economy, but many are struggling with the rising cost of providing health benefits. Premiums sit "downstream" of the broader health care system — reflecting the prices set by hospitals, drug companies and technology. With more employees managing chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease and more care delivered in high-cost settings like emergency rooms, employers are seeing premiums climb faster than their budgets can keep up. We know this puts real pressure on owners who want to support their employees and remain competitive.



Fester

WHAT IS BLUE CROSS DOING TO HELP SMALL BUSINESSES WITH AFFORDABILITY?

At Blue Cross, we believe affordability is a shared responsibility — and we're leading change upstream. Through our Value Partnerships and Blueprint for Affordability programs, we're working with Michigan providers to shift the focus of payment from volume of services to outcomes for patients. That means focusing on preventive care, coordinated treatment and reducing unnecessary hospital stays.

We're also addressing one of the biggest cost drivers: prescription drugs. By partnering with CivicaRx, we're helping bring more affordable generic medications to market and pushing for greater regulation in drug pricing. These steps don't just lower costs for members — they help stabilize the system for the small businesses who provide coverage.

IS THERE ANYTHING SMALL BUSINESSES CAN DO TO INFLUENCE THESE COSTS?

Yes. Employers have an important role in shaping health outcomes. Encouraging preventive care, supporting wellness programs and helping employees manage chronic conditions can reduce costly care. Healthier employees mean fewer high-cost claims, which helps ease pressure on premiums. These aren't quick fixes, but they can make a measurable difference over time.

You can also work with your insurance carrier and agent to shop for the right plan option at the right price point for you. At Blue Cross, we understand that a "one-size-fits-all" approach won't meet all employers' needs — that's why we offer a range of products that span the spectrum from lower premium + narrower network to higher premium + broader network. We have more than 120 plan offerings through our HMO and PPO products for small group customers.

WHAT'S THE BIGGER PICTURE? HOW DO WE SOLVE THE AFFORDABILITY CRISIS?

No one can solve this challenge alone. It will take businesses, insurers, providers, drug companies and policymakers working together to redesign the system so it works better for everyone. For small businesses, the stakes are especially high. That's why Blue Cross is committed to being your partner and your champion — standing alongside you to find solutions that keep coverage accessible and affordable for the people who make Michigan's economy thrive. ♦

Celebrating the 19th Annual 10 Over the Next Ten Awards

On September 16, 2025, the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) and Lansing 5:01, with support from Michigan Premier Events, gathered the community at the University Club of MSU to honor ten extraordinary young professionals. Now in its 19th year, the **10 Over the Next Ten Awards** continues to recognize rising leaders who are shaping Greater Lansing's future through their careers, community involvement, and innovative spirit.

This year's event was made possible thanks to our presenting sponsor, Independent Bank; the University Club of MSU, serving as the venue sponsor; and Martin Commercial Properties.



Meet the 2025 Honorees



Amy Adamy

As Public Relations & Marketing Manager at the Lansing Board of Water & Light (BWL), Amy has led the charge in crisis response, brand recovery, and digital strategy—growing BWL's digital presence and impact. Her leadership extends into the community through PRSA, ATHENA WIN, and Advancing

Women in Energy, making her a strong voice for professional women across the region.



Andrez Chune

Founder of SORA Gardens, Andrez transforms underutilized Lansing spaces into hubs of food sovereignty and community resilience. From spearheading the Photosynthesis Event to championing sustainable agriculture, his work bridges food, equity, and empowerment—

connecting people back to the land and to one another.



Cirea Strobe

As Program Manager at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Cirea oversees statewide juvenile justice initiatives and trauma-informed care for youth. Beyond her day job, she launched the Books & Building Initiative and serves on the Lansing School Board, embodying her

passion for equity, literacy, and youth opportunity.



Dan Olsen

At Michigan State University, Dan serves as Chief of Staff to the Dean of Communications Arts and Sciences, where his leadership has strengthened crisis management, fundraising, and strategic communications. His community contributions run deep as Vice President of CharlotteRising and

through his service with the Michigan Community Service Commission.



Gabriella Dixon

Gabriella brings both financial expertise and heart to her work at Neogen Corporation and as founder of NextGen Wealth, which promotes financial literacy. Wearing another crown as Miss Environment USA 2025, she uses her platform to champion sustainability, economic justice, and community empowerment.





Kirby Gibson

Kirby, Associate Director of Residence Education at Michigan State University, is a nationally recognized leader in student affairs and a doctoral candidate in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education. Her impact reaches beyond campus through service with the NAACP Lansing Branch, Alpha Kappa

Alpha Sorority, and local youth initiatives.



Sara Majeske

Sara shines as a Project Development Advisor with Custom Built Design & Remodeling, where she helps families bring dream homes to life. A proud Chamber Ambassador and graduate of the ATHENA Aspiring Leaders program, she is dedicated to supporting local businesses, uplifting women

leaders, and giving back to the region she calls home.



Megan Dowell

As owner of Do-Well Remodel, Megan has grown her woman-led construction business from the ground up while teaching more than 1,200 students about homeownership through her "Knowing Your Home" classes. Her passion for building extends to mentoring women in trades,

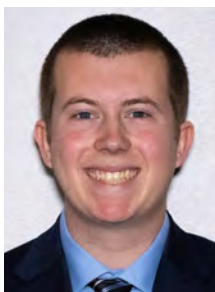
volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, and supporting the Women's Center of Greater Lansing.



Simon Verghese

As Project Manager Liaison at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Simon helps lead transformative projects, including the \$320 million New Vision Lansing redevelopment. Beyond their professional role, Simon invests in the community through leadership

with Ingham Community Health Centers and the Lansing Symphony Orchestra, advocating for equity, healthcare, and the arts.



Patrick Kayser

Patrick is both a business leader and entrepreneur. By day, he's a corporate real estate specialist with MSU Federal Credit Union; by night, he runs Capital City Sweets, his growing dessert business with a new storefront in Lansing. Through initiatives like Mission Mondays, Patrick pairs business

with community impact, ensuring his success is Lansing's success too.



In addition to recognizing the 2025 honorees, the evening featured a special moment with the unveiling of a brand-new honor: the **Chris Sell Award**. Named in tribute to Lansing 5:01 founder Chris Sell, the award celebrates individuals whose innovation, collaboration, and vision have helped transform the Lansing region. Fittingly, Chris himself was named the inaugural recipient. ♦



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Top Five Legal Considerations for Women Entrepreneurs

Empowering Women in Business Through Strategic Legal Choices

Women entrepreneurs and business owners are trekking down new paths in the modern economy, setting trends and shattering ceilings across every industry. Here are our top five legal essentials every woman entrepreneur should prioritize:

- 1 Leverage Business Certifications to Unlock Opportunities.** These partnerships are built on a shared mission to empower and support women entrepreneurs, helping you access valuable networks, contracts, and resources.
- 2 Locate Capital from Women-Focused Funding Sources.** These opportunities can provide the financial lift your business needs. After researching and connecting with particular funding sources that align with your business model and entrepreneurial goals, working with a legal team to prepare investment, governance, and other related documentation can turn a start-up venture into a well-structured, capital-ready enterprise ready to seize opportunities and foster sustainable growth for years to come.
- 3 Build a Network of Supportive Professionals.** No entrepreneur is an island, and for women in business, intentional networking and building a team of supporting professionals can be transformative. Find your network of supportive professionals as you continue to build your business and navigate the unique challenges of woman entrepreneurship.

- 4 Safeguard Your Assets & Intellectual Property.** Less often do women businessowners realize that the assets of their business are likely just as important as their personal belongings. It is crucial to prioritize defending your organization's intellectual property, such as its trademarks, patents, copyrights, trade secrets, and other critical assets.
- 5 Establish a Thoughtful Succession Plan.** Every business owner, regardless of the organization's size, should contemplate what happens *next*, even at the start of building your business.

See our full article at bit.ly/TopFiveGuide



**Amanda
Dernovshek**



**Lindsey
Mead**

October is National Women's Small Business Month. For more resources along with episodes of our monthly podcast **Businesswomen Talking**, scan the QR code below.





October 8, 2025, will mark 45 years for me in the Life Insurance Business.

Yes, that's correct — the Life Insurance Business. Today, that term is rarely used, and like the company I lead, Centennial Group, a member of the Principal Financial Network, our name is more often associated with Group Benefits, Pensions, Investment Management Advice, and Individual Financial Planning.

Over these 45 years, I've had the privilege of witnessing the miracle of life insurance firsthand. When someone purchases a life insurance policy, it is always an act of love for someone else. I was reminded of this truth just last month, September, which is recognized as "Life Insurance Awareness Month."

Let me share one experience from along this 45-year journey. I met a client I'll call "Danny" on a beautiful late-summer day. He had stopped by, curious about the renovation we had done on our then-headquarters, the old Greyhound Bus Station in Lansing. As I gave him a tour, he spoke with pride about his young family and the love of his life — his wife, a stay-at-home mom caring for their children.

It just so happened that this chance meeting took place in September, during one of our industry awareness campaigns, which encouraged me to ask him, "Danny, do you own any life insurance?" Like so many people, his answer was "no." After a short discussion, it became clear to Danny that his family would be financially vulnerable if something happened to him. I reminded him that, at 38 years old, the right coverage could cost less than dinner out at a local restaurant each month. After thoughtful consideration, Danny decided to act and put a policy in place.

Three years later, Danny was tragically killed doing the work he loved as an electrician.

I'll never forget the Sunday morning call from his wife. Her voice shook as she told me about the accident and asked if Danny's policy was paid to date — and if the claim would be honored. I was able to reassure her on both points and let her know we would sit down to discuss how Danny's decision would continue to provide income for their family and protect the hopes and dreams they still had.

Sadly, many families are not as fortunate. In recent years, we've all seen tragic stories — sometimes in headlines or on social media — followed by well-intentioned fundraising campaigns. While platforms like GoFundMe can provide immediate relief, the help is typically modest compared to a family's long-term financial needs. The grief of losing a loved one is overwhelming enough without the added weight of financial insecurity.

According to LIMRA (Life Insurance Marketing Research Association), 55% of working adults say they have life insurance only through work. But employer coverage is often a fraction of the 10 to 15 times annual income that professionals — and even popular search engines — recommend. The loss of a family's income provider is devastating, often in ways that aren't fully realized until it happens.

So, I urge anyone reading this: don't leave the question to chance. Ask yourself today, "Do I own 10 to 15 times my annual income in life insurance?" If the answer is no, reach out to a trusted advisor to change it — or **visit lifehappens.org** to find one. ♦



Building a Workforce Ready for Tomorrow

PREPARING NEW HIRES IN GREATER LANSING

By Liz Reno-Hayes



Finding the right talent is harder than ever. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce New Hire Readiness Report (2025), four in five hiring managers (84%) say most high school graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce straight out of school. Employers consistently rank critical thinking, communication, and adaptability as the most important skills for entry-level workers, yet too few young adults leave high school with those abilities fully developed.

The challenge is urgent. Across the country and here in the Lansing region, employers are balancing rapid economic shifts with the demands of a new generation of workers. Emerging industries, AI integration, and a global marketplace are transforming how businesses compete. To stay ahead, our region must strengthen talent pipelines and ensure that the next generation of workers can thrive.

What Employers Are Saying

The Chamber's report highlights a clear message from hiring managers: credentials and real-world experiences matter. Nearly nine in ten say they are more likely to hire a candidate with an industry-recognized credential, and internships rank as the top way students gain early-career skills.

Equally important are "soft skills," which many now call "critical skills." More than 90% of hiring managers say they are more likely to hire an

PREPAREDNESS GAP: Nearly all hiring managers view trade school/technical college graduates (90%) and four-year college graduates (89%) with industry-recognized credentials as prepared. But 84% say most high school students are not prepared to enter the workforce.

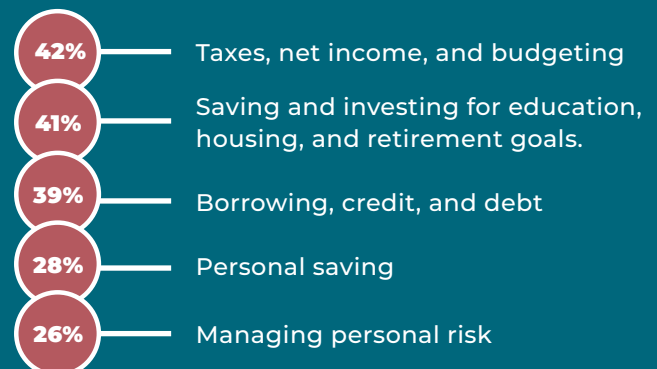
GENERATIONAL DECLINE: 80% believe today's high school grads are less prepared compared to previous generations.

SKILL PATHWAYS: Hiring managers cite internships (46%), trade schools (40%), and four-year colleges (37%) as the top ways for students to gain early-career skills.

SOFT SKILLS DRIVE HIRING: 94% are more likely to hire entry-level employees who show critical thinking/problem solving skills, and 90% say the same about effective communication.

HIRING CHALLENGES: Only about two in five say it's easy to find candidates with the skills (38%) or experience (37%) they need.

TOP FINANCIAL LITERACY SKILLS THAT EMPLOYERS VALUE MOST



**“We can intentionally develop
*critical thinking, communication, and
adaptability* in students before they
enter the workforce.”**

entry-level employee who demonstrates problem-solving and communication skills. Financial literacy is another priority: 96% of managers value new hires who understand budgeting, credit, and savings.

Ron Zeiter from Robert Half International states, “Local companies are eager to hire, but the skills gap is real. We consistently hear from employers that candidates with industry credentials, internships, and practical financial know-how stand out in the hiring process. When applicants come in with both technical knowledge and strong communication and problem-solving skills, they have a clear edge over the competition.”

To address this gap, educational institutions are taking proactive steps. Sean Williams, Superintendent of Eaton RESA, explains that schools are embedding essential skills directly into students’ learning experiences, noting that there’s a major push across Mid-Michigan districts toward competency-based education—an approach that asks, “Can you do it or can’t you?” rather than focusing solely on traditional grades. “This approach aligns perfectly with what employers want,” Williams said. “They care less about a student’s grade and more about what they can actually do. It’s a big shift for K–12 education, but by creating these competency-based spaces, we can intentionally develop critical thinking, communication, and adaptability in students before they enter the workforce.”

David G. Hornak, Ed.D., Superintendent of Holt Public Schools, echoed this emphasis on readiness, noting the district’s focus on balancing both college and career pathways. “We recognize the importance of preparing students for both postsecondary education and high-



Health Technology students connect, learn, and grow at the HOSA Conference.

demand career pathways,” Hornak said. “With that in mind, we have expanded opportunities for students to explore real-world careers through a variety of hands-on and industry-aligned programs.”

Feature: *Building a Workforce Ready for Tomorrow*

What This Means for Lansing

The Lansing Regional Chamber's 2025 State of the Region Report underscores both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, our region is making important strides:

- GDP growth of 10.3% from 2019 to 2023
- A surge in high-tech employment, growing 12.2%, outpacing most peer regions
- The third highest share of STEM degrees among peer regions, signaling a robust talent pipeline

Yet we continue to face hurdles. Our population declined by nearly 2% between 2019 and 2023. Educational attainment lags behind many competitors, with just 48% of adults holding an associate degree or higher. Median household income and private-sector employment remain among the lowest of peer regions.

"Establishing early relationships with high school students increases the likelihood of local talent retention."

To overcome these challenges, collaboration between the business community and educational institutions is crucial. Sean Williams

emphasizes the importance of these partnerships: "Establishing early relationships with high school students increases the likelihood of local talent retention. By engaging directly with students, businesses not only help build the skills needed for today's jobs but they also strengthen long-term talent pipelines for the Lansing region."

The Path Forward

The U.S. Chamber's report points to promising solutions, including the launch of the AP Business with Personal Finance course in 2026, which nearly all surveyed hiring



Animal Science and Zoo Management students get hands-on experience at Potter Park Zoo.

managers believe will improve workforce readiness. This course is designed to sharpen skills such as financial literacy, communication, and problem solving that are a priority for entry level employees.

Locally, LRCC is leveraging partnerships across education, business, and government to expand career readiness pathways, strengthen our private sector, and build on the region's growing momentum.



Future innovators at work—students design, build, and program robots in CTE robotics class.

“90% of respondents believe a high school-level AP Business with Personal Finance course would positively impact workforce readiness, with 44% saying it would have a significant impact.”

As the State of the Region Report makes clear, Greater Lansing has many of the right assets: a strong Gen Z population, a rising startup ecosystem, and nationally recognized universities and colleges. The challenge and opportunity are ensuring that tomorrow's workforce is prepared to seize those advantages.

"With evolving technology and growing regional talent needs, it's essential for K-12 schools, higher education, and local businesses to collaborate on career pathways that connect students' education to their future careers," Michele Strasz, Executive Director of the Capital Area College Access Network, emphasizes. "Building home-grown talent requires investing in these educational partnerships. Workforce readiness goes beyond the classroom, combining skills like financial literacy and critical thinking with hands-on experiences at local companies—giving students a firsthand look at the wide range of careers and industries in our community."



Through hands-on instruction, students in the medical CTE program develop essential clinical and teamwork skills for their future in healthcare.

Our call to action is simple: connect, collaborate, and invest in talent development. Together, we can close the readiness gap, strengthen our regional competitiveness, and ensure that Greater Lansing remains a place where businesses and people thrive. ♦

In Memory of Stephen Plumbley

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce mourns the loss of our longtime partner and friend, **Stephen Plumbley**, who passed away recently. For more than a decade, Stephen was an integral part of the FOCUS family, shaping the look and feel of our magazine through his design expertise and creativity. He also played a key role in our updated branding, leaving a lasting impact on what our readers experience today.

Stephen was more than a designer. He was a true collaborator and friend to many in our community. His work reflected his talent, care, and vision, and his influence will continue to inspire us.

A celebration of Stephen's life will be held on November 29, 2025. Additional details will be shared when available.

We are deeply grateful for Stephen's contributions and the time we shared with him. His presence and creativity will be missed. ♦



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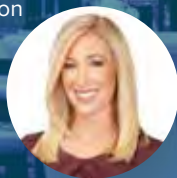
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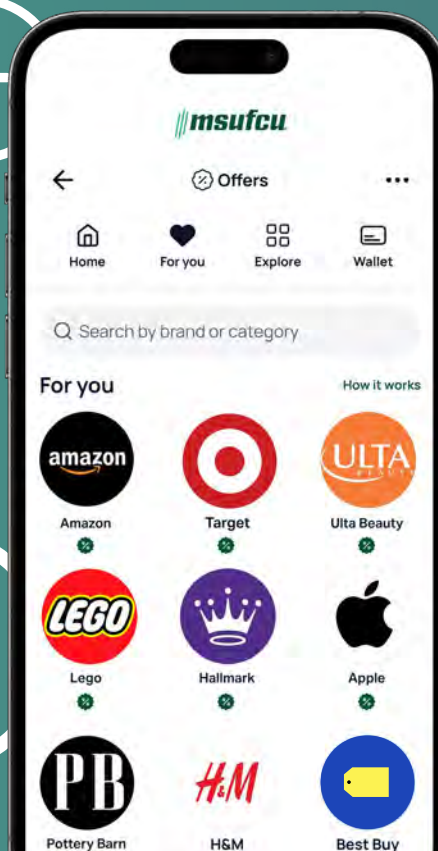
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The Power of Showing Up: Building Your Network Through ATHENA WIN

When it comes to building meaningful connections, sometimes the hardest part is simply showing up. In a world of packed calendars and competing priorities, it can be easy to put professional development and networking on the back burner. But as many members of ATHENA Women's Interest Network (WIN) will tell you, showing up is often where the magic begins.

ATHENA WIN is more than a series of events—it's a vibrant community of women leaders and allies who are committed to advancing one another. Whether you're stepping into your first networking event or are a longtime member, each gathering offers an opportunity to expand your circle, gain new perspectives, and be inspired by the energy of others on their own leadership journeys.

Recent gatherings, like the ATHENA WIN Summer Social, showcased the power of this network in action. New faces mingled with long-time members, sharing stories, encouragement, and career insights. Many attendees walked away with fresh ideas, new collaborators, and even new friends. These connections often grow into lasting mentorships, partnerships, and support systems that strengthen our entire region.



Looking ahead, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved—including the upcoming Professional Growth & Development Program on October 9, featuring a panel of dynamic women which will offer practical tools, insights, and inspiration to help you thrive in your career. Events like this are more than just calendar entries—they're investments in your personal and professional growth.

As you map out your goals for the coming year, consider where showing up could take you. Join us for an event, volunteer as a mentor, or simply connect with someone new at your next ATHENA WIN gathering. You never know which conversation will spark your next big idea—or your next big opportunity.

Because the truth is, your network can't grow if you don't show. And when you show up with ATHENA WIN, you're not just building a network—you're joining a movement. ♦



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TRIOTERRA

Open Doors With Peckham: Inclusive Opportunities in Lansing's Workforce

By Liz Reno-Hayes

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed its first membership intern, **Adrienne Harmon**, through a partnership with Peckham, a nonprofit that creates opportunities for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. A Holt/Mason native and proud mom of a 9-year-old son, Adrienne quickly became an asset to the Chamber team during her five-week internship.

Her favorite part of the internship? "The staff," she shared. "I really looked forward to coming in." Adrienne supported the membership department with phone calls and administrative projects, gaining behind-the-scenes insight into Chamber life. She hopes to continue her career in administration, building on the skills she developed through this experience.

>
Partnerships like these showcase what's possible when businesses open their doors to inclusive employment.

The internship was made possible through Peckham's On-the-Job Evaluation (OJE) program, which provides short-term work experiences designed to evaluate an individual's readiness and identify accommodations for long-term success. Participants gain hands-on experience,

while employers meet potential talent, address immediate staffing needs and build inclusive workplace cultures.

Peckham partners with Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) to provide tailored support, ranging from job coaching and accommodations to follow-up services after hire. For businesses, the process is simple: Peckham learns about workforce needs, identifies strong candidates, and coordinates the internship or hiring process to ensure success.

This partnership offers clear benefits to Lansing-area employers. Businesses gain access to motivated, reliable talent while supporting a more inclusive workforce. Many also see increased employee morale and customer engagement.

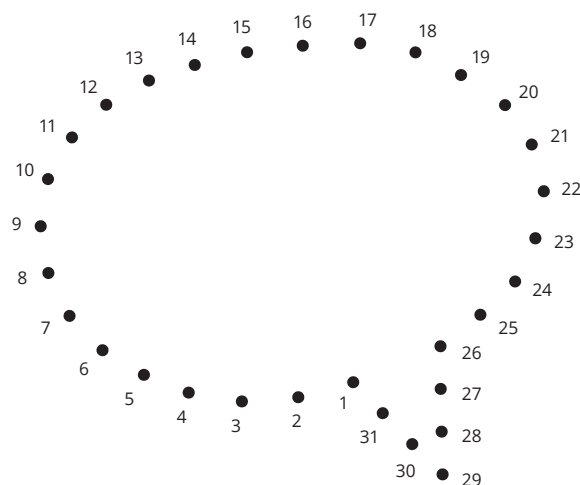
The program has already changed lives. Adrienne is just one example. Another participant, Jared, started with no work experience and little direction. After an OJE



at a local Meijer and job shadowing experiences with multiple other organizations, he discovered his goal of becoming a school bus driver. Today he has earned his driver's license, started his first job as a bus washer at Dean Transportation, and is saving toward his first car as he works toward his dream of becoming a bus driver.

Partnerships like these showcase what's possible when businesses open their doors to inclusive employment. Lansing-area employers interested in learning more can connect with Peckham's team at cagreen@peckham.org. ♦

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Build the Tunnel: Strengthening Michigan's Energy and Economic Future

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) continues to strongly support the Great Lakes Tunnel—one of Michigan's most critical infrastructure and energy reliability projects. Backed by the Great Lakes, Michigan Jobs coalition, this project will relocate a segment of Line 5 into a modern, concrete tunnel beneath the Straits of Mackinac. The tunnel will protect the Great Lakes, reduce environmental risk, and secure energy delivery to homes and businesses across the state.

With over 40,000 hours of environmental analysis already completed, the project is undergoing one of the most comprehensive permit reviews in Michigan's history. As the public comment period opened back in June, the LRCC urged our members to voice their support to help move this project forward.

The Great Lakes Tunnel will create thousands of good-paying jobs, generate significant private investment, and ensure Michigan's energy future is safe, sustainable, and affordable. It's time to modernize our infrastructure and protect the resources that power our economy. ♦



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Chamber in Action



We were honored to welcome **Accurate Inspections LLC** to the Lansing Regional Chamber family with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony.



The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, with its Ambassadors, welcomed **GiantMouse Knives** with a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate their membership.



Child and Family Charities just celebrated the Grand Opening of their brand-new Nonprofit Hub, a central space where local families can easily connect with the support they need.



The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce with its Ambassadors congratulates **American Freight Furniture & Mattress** on their grand opening, celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.



The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, alongside Mayor Andy Schor, proudly congratulates **Chengdu Teahouse** on their grand re-opening.



The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, along with Choose Lansing, Delta Township and local community members, celebrated the Grand Opening of **The Back Nine Golf – Lansing**.

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Members on the Move

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County National Bank has added three experienced professionals to its team.

Mark Dingee, Vice President – Commercial Loan Officer, specializes in

agricultural lending with a focus on dairy and brings 12 years of banking experience. Dingee is also active in the Hillsdale community through his church.

Sean Schumitsch joins as Assistant Vice President – Commercial Loan Officer with 20 years of experience in commercial lending. Schumitsch serves on the Board of Directors for Strikeout Baseball and enjoys bass fishing, golf, and family time. **Roy Dangel**, Treasury Management Officer, brings 36 years of banking expertise in credit, operations, lending, and treasury management. Dangel is Treasurer of the Portage Rotary Club, a Junior Achievement Titan Teacher, and a volunteer with the USGA and Red Cross, in addition to coaching football at Kalamazoo College.



Lloyd

Ashley Lloyd has been promoted to Controller at Gillespie Group, overseeing accounting for 60+ entities across commercial,

residential, and new development sectors. She will manage budgeting, audits, and provide strategic insights to senior management. Lloyd holds a Bachelor of Arts in Accounting from Michigan State University.



Konrad



Pallas

Triterra, a Michigan-based environmental consulting firm, is excited to welcome **Madison Konrad** and **Anya Pallas** to the team. Konrad joins the Brighton office as Senior Project Manager on the Industrial Hygiene team, bringing over 10 years of experience in environmental consulting and a Master's degree in Kinesiology from California University of Pennsylvania. Pallas joins the Grand Rapids office as Project Coordinator for the Industrial Hygiene Services team, holding a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from Aquinas College and brings a diverse background in healthcare, construction, and sports management. In her new role, she will manage project workflows and ensure projects stay on schedule with strong quality control.



Haun

Lisa Haun has joined **Fidelity National Title** as Branch Manager of the company's newly opened Lansing area office. With over 30 years of experience in the title industry, Haun brings a wealth of knowledge and a

strong commitment to serving the local real estate community. She is excited to support the region's growth and looks forward to building lasting relationships throughout Greater Lansing.



Finch



Sulcer

Martin Commercial Properties has welcomed **Kasa Finch** and **Leslie Sulcer** as Assistant Property Managers. Both bring expertise, dedication, and a commitment to excellence that enhance the company's property management services, which focus on delivering comprehensive, hands-on solutions to keep properties thriving and tenants supported.

APPOINTMENTS



Ellsworth Etchison

Kelli Ellsworth Etchison, Chief Marketing Officer and Chief Diversity Officer for **LAFCU**, has been elected to the African-

American Credit Union

Coalition (AACUC) national board of directors for a three-year term. Her election highlights Michigan's role in the national credit union movement and LAFCU's leadership in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ellsworth Etchison will help guide strategies shaping the future of credit unions and their ability to serve African Americans and other underrepresented communities.

AWARDS



Casby

Lansing-based **Maner Costerisan** earned a standout No. 2 ranking in the medium-sized employer category of *Crain's Detroit Business* 2025

Best Places to Work in Southeast Michigan. The firm's inclusion reflects strong scores in both company policy reviews and employee experience surveys. **Sarah Casby**, Maner Costerisan's Recruiting and HR Manager, accepted the award at an event held August 21.



has also been named one of

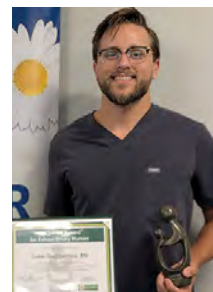
For the 10th consecutive year, **Maner Costerisan**

the Best Firms to Work For by *Accounting Today*. This national honor highlights the firm's people-first approach, including flexible policies, career advancement programs, and a culture of respect and connection that helps retain top talent.



TechSmith's Camtasia has been named a winner in the 2025 *Training Magazine* Network Choice

Awards, the only crowd-sourced honors in the Learning and Development industry. Chosen by over 2,000 training professionals, the awards recognize solution providers delivering innovative and effective tools. Camtasia, a leading video creation platform for educators, trainers, and businesses, was recognized for its ease of use and ability to create engaging, high-quality instructional content.



Guggemos

McLaren Greater Lansing nurse **Luke Guggemos** has been recognized with the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses, honoring his outstanding care, teamwork, and dedication.

Nominated by a colleague, Guggemos was praised for his patience, positive attitude, and willingness to go above and beyond to support both patients and staff.



The **Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP)** has received two 2025 Excellence in Economic Development Silver Awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) for its work in Recovery, Resiliency & Mitigation and Economic Equity



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- Autism Spectrum Disorder Programs
- Build Up & Early On
- Center Based Programs - Beekman Center & Heartwood School
- Emotional Impairment Programs - North Star School
- Transition Programs - Spartan Project SEARCH, Skills for Adult Independent Living (SAIL)
- Services provided include: Adaptive Physical Education, Assistive Technology, Audiology/Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Occupational Therapy, Orientation & Mobility, Physical Therapy, School Psychology, School Social Work, Speech & Language Pathology and Visually Impaired



& Inclusion. The awards recognize LEAP's Ingham County Sunrise Program, which provided \$9.75 million in grants and support to 630 small businesses and nonprofits, strengthening the local economy and promoting long-term resilience. LEAP's efforts impacted nearly half a million residents in the Lansing–East Lansing area and demonstrate innovative leadership in economic development.



Waldman



McKenna

Sinas Dramis Law Firm is proud to announce that **Bryan J. Waldman** and **Brian A. McKenna** have

been named *Best Lawyers®* 2026 “Lawyer of the Year” in their respective practice areas and regions. Waldman, partner and president of the firm, earned the distinction in Personal Injury Litigation-Plaintiffs for Lansing, marking his sixth time receiving this honor. McKenna, partner and leader of the St. Clair Shores office, was recognized in Insurance Law for the Detroit region. Both attorneys are celebrated for their decades of experience, exceptional advocacy, and leadership within Michigan’s legal community.



Tucker

award highlights female attorneys

Katie Tucker, Partner at **Sinas Dramis Law Firm**, has been recognized by *Michigan Lawyers Weekly* as a 2025 Influential Women of Law honoree. The

and judges demonstrating exceptional dedication to justice, client advocacy, and community service. Since joining Sinas Dramis in 2016, Tucker has excelled in personal injury and auto no-fault law, securing landmark legal victories and advocating for injured individuals and medical providers.



Güd Marketing has been named a 2025 Honoree in Tech

Innovators on the U.S. Chamber's CO—100 list, highlighting America's best and brightest small and mid-sized businesses. The recognition celebrates businesses that leverage technology and automation to scale operations, enhance customer experiences, and drive innovation. A full-service communications firm, Güd Marketing specializes in mission-driven, behavior change campaigns that create lasting public impact and strengthen communities.

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Seven attorneys from the Lansing office of **Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC** have been named to the 2025 Michigan *Super Lawyers* list: **James F. Anderton V, Tax**; **Charles E. Barbieri**, Environmental; **Charles A. Janssen**, Estate & Probate; **Scott L. Mandel**, Business Litigation; **Douglas A. Mielock**, Estate & Probate; **Michael G. Oliva**, Energy & Resources; and **Jeffrey S. Theuer**, Business Litigation. Super Lawyers honors only 5% of attorneys in Michigan for their outstanding professional achievement and peer recognition. In addition, **Taylor A. Gast**, Business/Corporate, and **Brandon M.H. Schumacher**, Business Litigation, were recognized as Rising Stars, a distinction awarded to no more than 2.5% of early-career attorneys statewide.

COMPANY NEWS

After more than 30 years with the Aveda name, **Douglas J** is moving forward and rebranding itself as Douglas J Institute, expanding its hands-on education programs across locations in Michigan, Tennessee, and Nebraska. The institutes will offer students a broader range of techniques and real-world training to prepare them for successful careers in the beauty and wellness industry.



LAFCU partnered with community organizations to provide more than 1,100 backpacks filled with school

supplies to Lansing-area students through two large-scale giveaway events in one weekend. The efforts help ease the financial burden on families and teachers, who face some of the highest out-of-pocket classroom costs in the nation. The events included LAFCU's Back-to-School Extravaganza at The Village Lansing and the Backpack Giveaway honoring Dr. Joan Jackson Johnson, which also celebrated children completing the "Magic of Literacy" summer reading program.



Groovy Donuts marks **10 years** of serving its community, celebrating a decade of donuts, friendship, and local connections. The bakery thanks its customers, team members, families, and the community for their support and looks forward to many more years of "keeping life just a little more groovy." ♦

Andrew & Monica

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