

FOCUS

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

AUGUST 2026



THRIVE

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce
Talent & Leadership Series

In This Issue

Ask the Expert: So, You Think That Worker Is an Independent Contractor?

LAFCU for Life, for 90 Years

Building the Bench: Inside Dart Container's Partnership with MSU



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CONTENTS



feature

THRIVE: THE LANSING REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TALENT & LEADERSHIP SERIES

- 09** LAFCU for Life, for 90 Years
- 10** **Ask the Expert:** So, You Think That Worker Is an Independent Contractor?
- 11** CapCAN Welcomes Clinton County and 5 New Board Members
- 13** **ATHENA WIN:** Authenticity: The Courage to Lead as Yourself
- 14** The SmartZone Effect
- 15** Candidates Take the Stage: LRCC's Summer Series Spans State and Federal Races
- 19** Building the Bench: Inside Dart Container's Partnership with MSU's Eli Broad College of Business
- 20** Celebrating 20 Years of the 10 Over the Next Ten Award
- 21** Cabinet Secretaries Bring Energy and Housing Conversations to the Lansing Region
- 22** Two Interns, Two Journeys
- 23** Presidents & Chairs of the Lansing Chamber and its Predecessors



monthly features

- 05** Message from the Chamber
- 06** Chamber Milestones
Renewing Members
- 07** New Members
- 24** Members on the Move

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Print and Mailing Services

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The talent we attract, develop, and retain in this community is what determines whether our region will grow.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAMBER

Investing in People Is How We Build a Region

There is a truth every business leader knows, our greatest competitive advantage is our people. The talent we attract, develop, and retain in this community is what determines whether our region will grow. And in conversations with employers across every sector talent attraction and retention continues to be a top issue. It is not a new challenge, but it is an urgent one, and it is reshaping how the Chamber invests its time and resources.

In this issue, we are proud to spotlight THRIVE the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce's Talent and Leadership Series. THRIVE brings four leadership programs to the region designed to meet professionals at every stage of their career, from those stepping into their first leadership role to established executives shaping the future of their organizations.

A recent Lansing State Journal viewpoint from the Chamber's Talent Manager Sarah Bakken put the underlying problem plainly – it's time to stop promoting people without preparing them. Too often, our best individual performers are handed a title and a team with no investment in leadership skills such as communication, coaching, accountability, and culture building.

Four Programs, One Commitment to Developing Talent

ASPIRING LEADERS

Offered in partnership with the ATHENA guiding principles and led by Gina Lisenby, this program equips emerging women leaders with foundational leadership skills and confidence, paired with mentorship from experienced women leaders.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Facilitated by Dr. Tonya Bailey, this program develops leaders who strengthen workplace culture, elevate team performance, and lead with greater self-awareness, building trust, collaboration, accountability, and engagement across diverse perspectives.

LEADERSHIP FOUNDATIONS

A practical, cohort-based program facilitated by Bobby Hoffman, built for emerging and first-time leaders who need real-world skills to confidently manage people from day one.

LEADERSHIP LANSING

Facilitated by Susan Combs and Tanisha Black, this premier experience connects established and emerging leaders to the people, places, and systems shaping the Lansing region.

THRIVE reflects what becomes possible when the right partners come together around a shared commitment to this region's future. The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce does not build pipelines alone. We build them with organizations, and with employers across every sector who believe that developing their people is the most powerful investment they can make.

That is the work the Chamber is committed to. Deepening partnerships with higher ed, workforce development organizations, and employers. Building pipelines that connect emerging talent to the organizations that need them. Creating the conditions where people choose Lansing not just for a first job, but for a career.

Learn more about THRIVE, including how your organization can enroll your team members, at lansingchamber.org/thrive ♦

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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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LAFCU for Life, for 90 Years

LAFCU's first office on River Street, where the credit union began serving Lansing-area members in 1936.

Life looked very different in 1936, but the need for a trusted financial partner was just as real.

That year, 10 Lansing-area autoworkers pooled \$95 to establish the cooperative that would become LAFCU. Its first loan helped a member buy a cow, providing food and income for a family. It met a real-life need, just as LAFCU does 90 years later.

LAFCU's tagline, "Your Credit Union for Life," feels less like a slogan and more like a summary of nine decades of service.

"For life" means being there through first savings accounts, first cars, new homes and unexpected expenses. It also means supporting the life of a business, from its first spark through expansion and long-term growth.

LAFCU believes financial security should not depend on how much money someone already has. Guided by the credit union philosophy of "people helping people," it does not build its business on the backs of those who can least afford it.

That belief is reflected in reducing overdraft and nonsufficient funds fees from \$32 to just 99 cents, setting a \$50 certificate of deposit minimum and offering Express Cash loans as an alternative to predatory payday lending.

The same philosophy extends to entrepreneurs and business leaders. Through SBA and commercial lending and its Entrepreneurship Mixer Series, LAFCU equips entrepreneurs with education, networking opportunities and access to capital.

LAFCU also created StableCommunities Foundation to invest beyond traditional financial services. The foundation provides small-business microgrants, supports neighborhood organizations and helps remove barriers that can keep promising ideas from becoming viable enterprises.

Today, LAFCU serves nearly 73,000 members across Michigan and manages more than \$1 billion in assets, but growth is not the end goal. It is a way to help more people achieve financial security, support businesses and strengthen communities.

Ninety years later, that purpose still defines what it means to be "Your Credit Union for Life." ♦



LAFCU mascot Laff-e pays tribute to the cow purchased with the credit union's first loan in 1936.



One of the nation's last remaining automotive credit unions, LAFCU's Oldsmobile roots run deep, but today membership is open to anyone who lives, works, worships or goes to school in Michigan, as well as Michigan businesses.

Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes

EXPERT COUNSEL



REAL SOLUTIONS

So, You Think That Worker Is an Independent Contractor?

By: Hannah Morgan Smith, Associate Attorney with Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC

You pay the worker by 1099. There is a signed agreement that says “independent contractor” right at the top. The worker even asked for the arrangement. So the classification question is settled, right? Not quite. Under Michigan and federal law, worker classification does not turn on job titles, tax forms, or contract language. Agencies and courts look at how the relationship actually functions, and a business that gets it wrong can face liability it never saw coming.



Morgan Smith

THE LABEL DOES NOT CONTROL

There is no single legal test for independent contractor status. Different statutes apply different standards, and a worker may qualify as an independent contractor under one law and an employee under another. For Michigan wage and hour purposes, courts apply the “economic reality test,” which weighs who controls how the work is performed, how the worker is paid, whether the business can discipline or terminate the worker, and whether the work is an integral part of the business. For unemployment insurance and workers’ compensation, Michigan relies on the IRS 20-factor test, which examines behavioral control, financial control, and the overall nature of the relationship. Setting schedules, providing tools or equipment, paying hourly, and reimbursing expenses all point toward employee status, no matter what the contract says.

WHY IT MATTERS

Misclassification is expensive. A misclassified worker may recover unpaid minimum wage and overtime, an equal amount in liquidated damages, and attorney’s fees. Employers may also face back unemployment taxes, workers’ compensation exposure, civil penalties, and, in cases of willful violations, criminal liability. These claims often surface only after the relationship sours, through an unemployment filing, an injury, or a government audit, when the exposure has already accumulated for months or years.

GETTING IT RIGHT

A true independent contractor typically operates a separate business, supplies their own tools, controls how and when the work is performed, invoices for defined projects, and remains free to work for other clients. If the worker looks and functions like your employees, performing core business functions on your schedule and under your direction, the safer course is to classify them as an employee.

Worker classification is fact-specific, and small missteps carry large price tags. Before you engage that next contractor, or if you are second-guessing an existing arrangement, consult legal counsel. A short conversation now is far cheaper than a misclassification claim later. ♦

CapCAN Welcomes Clinton County and 5 New Board Members

By Liz Reno-Hayes

Clinton County students just gained a powerful ally on the path to college and career readiness. The Capital Area College Access Network (CapCAN) announced that Clinton County has officially joined the regional network, expanding its reach across Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties.



The partnership follows two years of community conversations between Clinton County Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) and CapCAN to identify what students, parents, staff and partners need to boost postsecondary attainment. "It

made sense for us to combine forces and resources with CapCAN to maximize our capacity," says Scott Koenigsnecht, superintendent of Clinton County RESA. "We are excited to link our young people to the regional talent pipeline."

CapCAN also welcomed five new leadership team members: Devon Pingel (Lansing Economic Area

Partnership), Dr. Anthony Berthiaume (St. Johns Public Schools), Deshon Leek (Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council), Samantha Morris (Central Michigan University), Patrick Malley (Haslett Public Schools) and Jayme King (Lansing Promise).

"The work CapCAN does connecting students to postsecondary pathways is vital to our regional talent pipeline," says Sarah Bakken, Talent Development Manager at the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC). "Every student who reaches a credential or degree strengthens the workforce our employers depend on."

CapCAN has grown over the past fifteen years, leading K-12, higher education, business, philanthropy, government and nonprofit stakeholders through a process to scale up across the Capital region. "The jobs of tomorrow will require that every adult achieve some form of a postsecondary degree or credential that will prepare them for our regional talent pipeline," says Michele Strasz, CapCAN director. "We are dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly low income, first generation and students with disabilities, all have that opportunity." ♦

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Authenticity: The Courage to Lead as Yourself

By Shelley Davis Boyd, MBA, CAE

Authenticity is often misunderstood as simply “being yourself.” I believe it asks more of us than that. Authentic leadership requires self-awareness, courage, and a willingness to align who we are internally with how we show up externally. It means leading in a way that reflects our values, even when it feels uncomfortable or unpopular.

For many women, leadership has historically come with unspoken expectations. Be confident, but not too confident. Be compassionate, but decisive. Be visible, but not disruptive. Over time, those messages can quietly pull us away from our own voice and influence how we believe leadership should look.

The ATHENA Leadership Principle of Authenticity reminds us that leadership is not about performance. It is about presence. It is about showing up with integrity, understanding our strengths and blind spots, and allowing others to experience consistency between what we say and what we do.

Some of the strongest leaders I have worked with throughout my career have not been the loudest people in the room. They are the leaders who know what matters to them, communicate with intention, honor boundaries, and remain grounded during moments of uncertainty. Authenticity builds trust because it creates a sense of congruence. They experience alignment.

Over the years, through executive leadership, coaching, motherhood, and community service, I have learned that authenticity does not require perfection. It requires honesty. It asks us to acknowledge where we are, remain open to growth, and lead with humility alongside confidence.

Authentic leaders create environments where others feel safe to contribute, challenge ideas, and grow. In a world that often rewards image over substance, authenticity becomes a courageous act of leadership.

As ATHENA leaders, perhaps the question is not, “How do I become more like other leaders?” Perhaps the better question is, “How do I become more fully myself?”



Because leadership rooted in authenticity not only transforms the individual. It transforms teams, workplaces, communities, and the people quietly watching us lead. ♦



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The SmartZone Effect

By Liz Reno-Hayes

The Lansing Regional SmartZone, based in downtown East Lansing, including The Coworkerie at MSUFCU is built on a simple idea: the best ideas coming out of the region's research and startup community should not stay stuck on the drawing board. They should turn into companies that grow jobs and investment right here in Greater Lansing.



That mission depends on collaboration. The SmartZone fosters entrepreneurial and innovation collaboration between MSU and the community, offering a number of programs and resources built specifically to bring those two worlds together. The results are showing up in the numbers. In the past year alone, SmartZone-supported ventures raised \$18 million in public and private funding, launched 16 new companies and connected with program resources more than 1,200 times.

517 E&I Week is one of the clearest examples of that collaboration. Spearheaded by the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) in partnership with the SmartZone, the MSU Research Foundation,

BRCE brce.shop

What started as a Michigan State class project went on to become a Shark Tank featured company. Founded by MSU students Madhav Aggarwal and Tanvi Gadamsetti, BRCE makes patented, untie resistant shoelaces engineered for the court, field, ice, track and street, already worn by athletes at the college and professional level. SmartZone support gave the founders a critical head start, helping them file and secure their patent in just 62 days, protecting their technology early and giving them the foundation to build the business.



Sit Sense sit-sense.com

Sit Sense is a medical device startup building a smarter way to prevent bedsores, one of the most costly and preventable problems in hospital care. Founded by MSU researchers Justin Scott and Tamara Reid Bush, the company's patented recliner automatically senses pressure on a patient's body and repositions them every 20 minutes, work nurses currently have to do by hand. SmartZone has supported the fledgling company from formation through three grants and a \$1.55 million SBIR award, helping bring their vision for smarter, safer patient care closer to reality.



Courtesy Photo

the Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation and the MSU Innovation Center, the week long celebration showcases the ideas and people driving the region's economic future, connecting the talent coming out of MSU with the wider community of local entrepreneurs and resources.

Behind the scenes, the SmartZone works directly with researchers and students on what is often called lab to market development, offering programming, mentorship and resources at every stage of that journey. That same support extends to local companies innovating on their own, not just those coming out of MSU. Sometimes that means help filing a patent. Other times it looks like support in getting a first prototype, an introduction to an investor or simply a sounding board for a founder still refining their pitch.

"Founders come to us at every stage, from a patent-ready technology to an idea on a napkin. Our job is connecting them to the resources and relationships that keep them moving forward," says Jillian Winn, director of the Lansing Regional SmartZone.

For entrepreneurs across the region, the SmartZone is proof that MSU's research strength and Greater Lansing's business community grow stronger together. Good ideas do not need to choose between the lab and the marketplace. At the SmartZone, they get both. Have an idea that belongs in the marketplace? Start the conversation at lansingregionalsmartzone.com. ♦

Candidates Take the Stage: LRCC's Summer Series Spans State and Federal Races

By Addison Rhoton

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce kept its 2026 Meet the Candidates Series in full swing throughout June and July, welcoming an impressive roster of candidates spanning state and federal office. The Chamber thanks McKinney & Associates for making these conversations possible, giving LRCC members a front-row seat to conversations with 74th State House District candidate Harold Pope; 7th Congressional District candidates Will Lawrence, Matt Maasdram, and Bridget Brink; U.S. Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed; Congressman Tom Barrett (MI-07); Michigan Secretary of State candidate Anthony Forlini; and gubernatorial candidate John James in June, followed by gubernatorial candidate Chris Swanson and U.S. Senate candidates Mike Rogers and Haley Stevens in July. The two-month lineup reflected the breadth of races on the ballot and the Chamber's commitment to ensuring the Lansing region's business community has direct, meaningful access to the candidates who will shape Michigan's future. ♦



ABDUL EL-SAYED
U.S. Senate Candidate



MIKE ROGERS
U.S. Senate Candidate



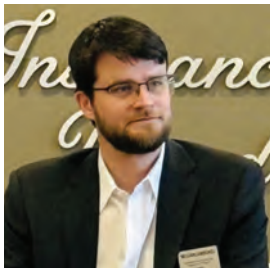
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BRIDGET BRINK
7th Congressional District Candidate



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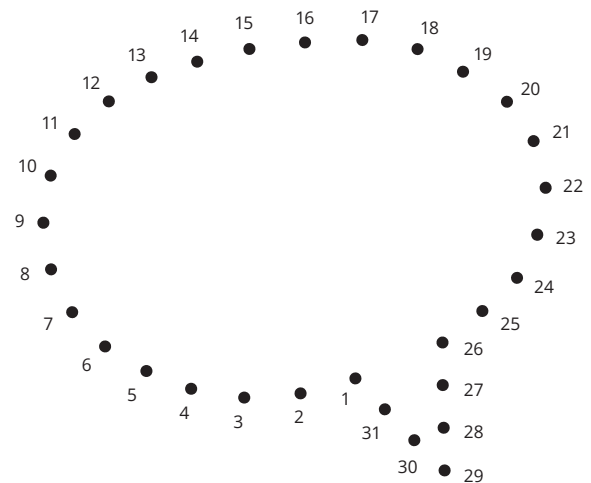


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THRIVE

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce Talent & Leadership Series

By Liz Reno-Hayes

Greater Lansing is growing. New developments are reshaping the skyline. Major employers are expanding. Michigan State University enrolls more than 50,000 students and draws researchers, visitors, and talent to the region every year. By almost every measure, the momentum is real.

But growth is only sustainable if the people leading it are prepared to lead. Workforce development conversations in this region have long centered on recruitment. Retention is where the real work happens, and retention is built on something less tangible but far more lasting: the belief that there is a future here worth building.

"Every organization has a story that goes something like this: a talented employee excels in their role, earns the trust of their team, and one day gets promoted into management. And then, without any real training on how to lead people, they're expected to figure it out on the fly."

Sarah Bakken, Talent Development Manager at the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce

That is exactly what the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce set out to create with THRIVE.

The THRIVE Talent and Leadership Series is four leadership programs designed to meet professionals at every stage of their career, from the employee stepping into management for the first time to the established executive ready to lead with greater impact and inclusion. Together the programs form a complete leadership development pipeline, built in Greater Lansing, for Greater Lansing.

Sarah Bakken, Talent Development Manager at the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, hears from members consistently about the gap between the desire to invest in people and knowing where to start.

But momentum is not the same as a pipeline. Attracting talent to a region and keeping it here are two entirely different challenges, and the second one is where most organizations quietly struggle. The gap is not always compensation or culture in the broadest sense. It is often something more specific: people get promoted and then left to lead without ever being taught how.

That pattern has real consequences for organizations and for the region. When leaders are underprepared, teams disengage. When teams disengage, people leave. And when skilled professionals leave Greater Lansing for opportunities elsewhere, the region loses more than a good employee. It loses someone who could have become a community builder, a civic leader, a mentor to the next generation of talent coming up behind them.

That is the problem THRIVE Talent and Leadership Series was built to interrupt.

"When we strengthen leaders, we strengthen organizations. When we strengthen organizations, we strengthen our community."

Sarah Bakken, Talent Development Manager at the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce

Four Programs. Every Stage of the Journey.

There is not a one-size-fits-all program, which is why the LRCC has four offerings, each built for a different audience, a different career stage, and a different set of challenges. What they share is a cohort model — meaning participants move through the program together, building peer relationships and accountability networks that frequently outlast the program itself.

Leadership Foundations

New for 2026

The newest addition to the THRIVE Talent and Leadership Series, Leadership Foundations launches this September for professionals stepping into management for the first time. Facilitated by Bobby Hoffman, co-founder of Thought Partner Services, the program is a practical, experience-driven leadership development program designed for emerging leaders, supervisors, and first-time managers who are stepping into people leadership responsibilities.

Many first-time leaders are expected to manage people without formal leadership training. This program provides action-oriented takeaways participants can apply immediately. Through six interactive sessions, participants will gain the tools, confidence, and communication skills needed to lead teams effectively, navigate challenges with clarity, and build strong workplace relationships and confident leadership alongside a peer network from across industries.

"Many people find themselves leading others before anyone ever teaches them how. That is exactly why I am excited to bring Leadership Foundations to the Lansing Regional Chamber's THRIVE Talent and Leadership Series. This program is designed to give emerging leaders practical tools, real confidence, and the communication skills needed to navigate the difficult moments that come with leading people. My hope is that organizations



Bobby Hoffman, Co-Founder, Thought Partner Services
Facilitator of THRIVE Leadership Foundations

across our region see this as an investment not just in one person, but in stronger teams, healthier workplace cultures, and the future of leadership in Greater Lansing."

Applications for Leadership Foundations are open until August 31st for the fall cohort. The program runs September 2026 through March 2027.

Aspiring Leaders

Offered in partnership with the ATHENA Women's Interest Network (WIN), Aspiring Leaders is designed to equip emerging women leaders with the foundational skills, confidence, and community to grow into the leaders they are already becoming. Facilitated by Gina Lisenby, founder of Revelation Road, a coaching and transformational learning company rooted in the belief that everyone is on a journey and every journey matters, the program combines skill development, mentorship, and a cohort experience grounded in connection and real-world application.

Aspiring Leaders pairs participants with experienced women leaders through a structured one-on-one mentorship model, with ATHENA WIN mentors connected to the cohort's content from the very beginning. That alignment means the mentorship relationship reinforces what participants are learning in real time. The program itself is built around hands-on, interactive learning focused on the competencies that matter most for emerging leaders: communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, professional presence, and self-awareness.

"Aspiring Leaders allows women to build deeper self-awareness about their impact as a leader and how they can create impact in their community. It is an interactive, immersive experience built around connection – and the real work happens when participants take what they



Gina Lisenby, Founder, Revelation Road,
Facilitator of THRIVE Aspiring Leaders

are learning back into their own environments and apply it. There is real strength in having relationships that create support, inspiration, and a sense of what is possible for us."

Applications for Aspiring Leaders are open until August 31st for the fall cohort. The program runs September 2026 through April 2027.

Inclusive Leadership

Today's strongest organizations are led by people who understand how to build cultures rooted in trust, accountability, communication, and belonging. That is easier said than done. It requires leaders who have done the internal work — who understand their own impact, who can navigate difficult conversations, and who know how to bring out the best in the people around them. That is the foundation of Inclusive Leadership, a transformative six-session cohort experience facilitated by Dr. Tonya Bailey, CEO of TCB Consulting.

Designed for mid-level and senior managers, business owners, HR professionals, and anyone responsible for employee engagement and organizational culture, the program meets leaders where they are. Participants work through real-world scenarios, guided discussion, and peer collaboration alongside a cohort of professionals from across industries — walking away not just with insight, but with strategies they can put to work immediately. Whether leading a small team or an entire organization, the tools apply.

"Inclusive Leadership is grounded in the belief that the most effective leaders are intentional about the culture they create and the impact they have on the people around them. This program is built around the L.E.A.D. Framework—Lead, Engage, Align, and Deliver, designed to strengthen that awareness while equipping leaders with the communication skills, emotional intelligence, and practical strategies needed to bring out the best in their teams and achieve meaningful organizational results. When leaders lead inclusively, people thrive, teams perform, and organizations succeed. That is the outcome we are building toward."



Dr. Tonya Bailey, CEO, TCB Consulting,
Facilitator of THRIVE Inclusive Leadership

Applications for Inclusive Leadership are open through September 11, 2026. The program runs October 2026 through March 2027.

Leadership Lansing

The Chamber's flagship leadership experience, Leadership Lansing takes a uniquely regional approach. Rather than focusing solely on individual skill-building, it immerses established professionals in the systems, institutions, and decisions shaping Greater Lansing, connecting them to leaders across government, education, business, and healthcare in a way that most professionals never experience.



Tanisha Black-Williams, Leadership and Professional Development Training Specialist,
Michigan Department of Corrections,
Facilitator, THRIVE Leadership Lansing

Facilitated by Susan Combs and Tanisha Black-Williams, Leadership Lansing builds broad civic leadership that holds a community together.

Alumni consistently describe the same thing: the relationships formed inside the cohort become some of the most meaningful professional connections of their careers. Participants go on to do business together, collaborate on community initiatives, and support one another long after graduation.

"Leadership Lansing is unlike any other experience in this region because it is not just about developing you as a leader – it is about connecting you to the place you are leading in. Participants walk away with a deeper understanding of how Greater Lansing works, who is shaping it, and where they fit into that story. Our alumni don't just stay connected to each other – they go on to shape this community together."



Dr. Tonya Bailey, CEO, TCB Consulting
Facilitator of THRIVE Inclusive Leadership

Applications for Leadership Lansing are open through September 11, 2026. The program runs October 2026 through May 2027.

An Investment in the Region

Leadership development is infrastructure. The Chamber's commitment to THRIVE Talent & Leadership Series reflects a conviction that the talent pipeline is just as important as the physical investments being made across this region. The programs are deliberately designed to be accessible to organizations of all sizes, because the need for strong leadership is not limited to large employers. It is just as urgent in a 10-person firm as it is in a 1,000-person institution.

Greater Lansing cannot afford to lose the talent it has worked so hard to attract. Talent stays where it grows. And when it stays, it builds, contributes, and strengthens every organization and community it touches.



That is what THRIVE is building, one cohort at a time. Spots are limited and cohorts fill quickly. [To learn more and apply, visit lansingchamber.org](https://www.lansingchamber.org) ♦

Building the Bench: Inside Dart Container's Partnership with MSU's Eli Broad College of Business

By Liz Reno-Hayes

Three years ago, Dart Container set out to solve a challenge familiar to nearly every large company: how to develop the next generation of leaders before you need them.

The answer was the Dart Emerging Leaders Academy, a partnership between Dart and Michigan State University's Eli Broad College of Business. Each year, the program brings together 15 to 25 high-potential employees from across the company, ranging from individual contributors to directors, for an intensive leadership experience built jointly by MSU faculty and Dart's own executive leadership team.

"We wanted to look at a way we could develop our high performing, high potential mid-career employees," says James D. Farrell, Executive Vice President of People, Culture and Communications, Dart Container Corporation. "We decided that utilizing Michigan State's strong Business school coupled with insights from our Executive Team would provide real benefit to this important group of managers."

Emerging Leaders Academy candidates are identified annually through performance evaluations and succession planning, with final selections made by the CEO, who personally notifies each participant.

The Academy runs in two one-week sessions, the first in July and the second in September. MSU professors lead coursework in supply chain, finance, marketing, commercial operations and leadership, while Dart's executive leadership team supplements every topic with company-specific context.

Participants also complete a leadership 360 assessment. Between sessions, teams work on Dart-specific initiatives sponsored by an executive mentor, presenting recommendations to the executive leadership team at the end.

"These are real projects Dart leaders want to be worked on," Farrell says. "Given the short time frame together, we try to scope the projects so we're not asking them to solve the whole issue, but to identify options and general directions to pursue further."

The Emerging Leaders Academy has graduated 43 people



*Jim Farrell, EVP People, Culture & Communications
Dart Container Corporation*

Keith Clark, CEO & Jim Farrell, EVP speaking to the 2026 Class of Dart Emerging Leaders Academy at MSU's Henry Center about their career journeys and the qualities and fundamental behaviors of a great leader.

so far, with survey scores on coursework and presentations consistently landing between 4.4 and 4.8 out of 5. Many graduates have gone on to promotions or expanded roles, and Farrell says the connections participants build across departments are often the most cited benefit.

"There's real value in these individuals getting to know one another," Farrell says. "They are bringing different perspectives from across the company together, and building a network they can call on down the road."

The Emerging Leaders program sits inside a larger philosophy at Dart, where talent is one of three pillars in the company's strategic plan alongside cost and growth.

"You start with the who, and then you figure out the what," Farrell says. "If you don't have the right people in the right roles, the best strategy in the world isn't going to get you anywhere."

Farrell is quick to note that a course alone will not build a leader. In his estimate, formal instruction accounts for roughly 15 percent of the learning, while the rest comes from a leader reinforcing what someone has learned and an employee taking ownership of their own development. This philosophy is captured in one of Dart's core behaviors: earn your success.

"No one cares more about your career than you do," Farrell says. "Don't wait for others to come pluck you out of the room."

As a family-owned company with 12,000 employees, Dart does not plan to cap the Emerging Leaders Academy's growth, and Farrell's advice to other companies is simple: use the resources already nearby.

"We are fortunate to have universities like MSU to take advantage of," Farrell says. "It is not overly costly to put a program like this together, and it shows employees that the company is committed to keeping good people. The Dart family has said it themselves: business is a human endeavor." ♦



Grace Braatz-Opper - MWA Financial Services

Since receiving the 2020 10 Over the Next Ten Award I have earned my RICP®, FSCP®, FFSC®, and Series 65. I have also been a part of giving back over \$1,000,000 to our local community! I have been voted as Best Financial Advisor for the last 4 years in Greater Lansing. I have been featured on the cover of the national magazine, Trailblazer, for the financial services industry. I was on the Board for OTCA (4 years) and am currently on the board for ASPIRE (6+ years). I am an executive mentor for DECA. I speak across the country to other financial firms (and also Universities) and share my story and how I started in the industry so young and how I've become successful over the years. I served on the ntnl

MWA Council the past 4 years. I have served as a board member and also President of the Michigan FIC. I have also been a part of Junior League of Lansing. I have earned MDRT®- Million Dollar Round Table- for the past 7 years (career milestone for the top 10% of financial services advisors worldwide). Most new clients in MI for the past 8 years.

What is a piece of advice you would give to young professionals in our region today?

Advice for YP's- Find Your People and Be a Blessing. Surround yourself with those who fill up your cup so you can pour back out to bless others.



Steve Japinga - Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce

Since receiving the 10 Over the Next Ten Award in 2014, Steve has focused on public affairs, regional collaboration, and community leadership throughout Lansing. He currently serves as Senior Vice President of Public Affairs for the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce, leading advocacy efforts on economic growth, infrastructure, workforce, and public policy issues. Steve previously served as Board Chair of St. Vincent Catholic Charities and helped guide the merger creating Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton & Clinton Counties. Above all, Steve considers marrying his wife, Katherine, and becoming a father to Georgia and Louie his greatest accomplishments.

What is a piece of advice you would give to young professionals in our region today?

Stay engaged and say yes to opportunities, even when they push you outside your comfort zone. Build genuine relationships, show up consistently, and focus on being someone others can count on. Lansing is a community where collaboration matters, and young professionals who invest in relationships, service, and leadership will find opportunities to make a real impact both professionally and personally.



Tom Ruis - PNC Bank

Since receiving the 10 Over the Next Ten Award, I have continued to advance within my banking career. Most recently earning Market All-Star at PNC for four consecutive years for consistent top performance. I was selected for PNC's Growing Forward Mentoring Program and have remained actively engaged in mentoring and supporting talent development. I am deeply involved in the Mid-Michigan community through organizations including the Lansing Regional Chamber, LEAP, CAMWI, and Impression 5. I'm especially proud of being recognized as a Mid-Michigan Women in Business Champion and

contributing to initiatives that foster inclusive growth and leadership.

What is a piece of advice you would give to young professionals in our region today?

Show up consistently, and invest in relationships—your network will shape your opportunities as much as your skills. Seek out mentors, be willing to take on challenges before you feel fully ready, and stay engaged in your community. Growth comes from stretching yourself while supporting others along the way

Cabinet Secretaries Bring Energy and Housing Conversations to the Lansing Region

By Addison Rhoton

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce recently helped convene two federal cabinet-level visits to Lansing region, giving local business leaders and officials a direct seat at the table on issues shaping the region's economic future: energy affordability and housing availability.

In June, U.S. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright and Congressman Tom Barrett visited Lansing for a roundtable on energy policy, joined by business leaders, state officials, and energy providers at the Lansing Board of Water and Light's REO Town headquarters. The group discussed delivering reliable, affordable energy for Michigan families and small businesses while strengthening manufacturing competitiveness and long-term growth.

"The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce is grateful for the opportunity to bring our members' voices directly to federal leadership," says Tim Daman, President & CEO, Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber also helped host U.S. Secretary of Housing



U.S. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright and Congressman Tom Barrett



U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Scott Turner

and Urban Development Scott Turner in Lansing, where he toured Walter French, a historic school redeveloped into 76 apartments and met with local leaders and Michigan House Speaker Matt Hall to discuss expanding housing opportunities across the Lansing region and state.

Together, the two visits highlight the Chamber's ongoing commitment to ensuring the Lansing region has a voice on the issues shaping its economy and quality of life, connecting members and community leaders directly with federal and state policymakers. ♦

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Two Interns, Two Journeys

By Liz Reno-Hayes

This summer, the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) welcomed two standout interns, one in Public Affairs and one in Membership.

Addison Rhoton: A Summer That Changed Her Path

Addison Rhoton spent 13 weeks with the Chamber as its Public Affairs intern, and by the end, she wasn't ready to go.

Addison is heading into her senior year at the University of Mississippi, or Ole Miss, where she studies political science. Her favorite part of the internship, she says, was meeting new people and watching different parties work together to get things done for the Lansing community.

Addison worked closely with the Chamber's VP of Public Affairs, Steve Japinga. Landing the internship took some persistence. Addison kept in touch while Steve was out on paternity leave, and once he returned, she was hired on the spot.

From there, the weeks moved fast. She helped put together the Chamber's Policy Forum featuring former gubernatorial candidate Mike Duggan, met HHS Secretary RFK Jr. and Congressman John James, and joined lunches with Congressman Tom Barrett's team. She even survived her first Economic Club luncheon, no small feat for someone with a severe raspberry allergy who ended up face to face with a raspberry dessert. She lived to tell the tale, and the Chamber learned its lesson and has since added "check for allergies" right above "don't almost take out the intern" on its event planning checklist.

Addison says the experience opened her eyes to what could come next, whether that's the campaign trail, the legislature, working for an elected official, or even a career at a chamber of commerce.

"It's been the best 13 weeks of my life," Addison says. "I'm thankful for all the connections I'll have with people forever. It even makes me want to come back to Michigan."

John Fabing Jr.: A Membership Internship Through Peckham

The Chamber's Membership intern John Fabing Jr. was connected with the LRCC through a partnership with Peckham, a nonprofit that creates employment opportunities for people with disabilities and other barriers to work.

A Texas native, John quickly became an asset to the team during his six weeks at the Chamber.

His favorite part of the internship was working alongside



staff on clerical projects, updating software programs, and keeping member lists current in the Chamber's CRM. He also loved the everyday perks, especially the team lunches, and describes the overall environment as a positive one.

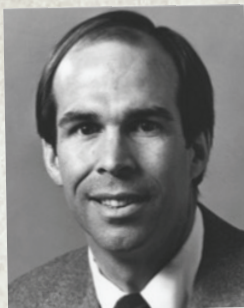
John got to know Bridget Drzal, Dawn Haddad, and Sara Lewis along the way, and a team outing to Ohana Sushi ranks among his favorite days. Looking ahead, John hopes to build a career in office clerical work.

"My time at the Chamber, through Peckham's On-the-Job Evaluation program, was a pleasant experience from start to finish," John says. ♦

An advertisement for TRIOTERRA. At the top, it says "CREATING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES" in large white letters over a background image of a city street with a large building. Below this, there is a circular portrait of Dave Van Haaren, a man with a beard and grey hair, wearing a light blue shirt and a grey blazer. His name and title, "Dave Van Haaren, Director | Economic Development", are written below the portrait. Underneath the portrait, it says "TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES - YOUR TRUSTED EXPERTS IN BROWNFIELD DEVELOPMENT". Below this, there is a list of services: "BROWNFIELD DEVELOPMENT", "ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING", and "NATURAL RESOURCES". To the right of this list is a QR code. Below the QR code, it says "tritterra.us" and "517.702.0470". At the bottom right, the TRIOTERRA logo is displayed.

Presidents & Chairs of the Lansing Chamber and its Predecessors

Presidents / Chair of Board of Lansing Chamber of Commerce - The title changed from President to Chairman of the Board in 1988.



James F. Anderton IV - 1977

Anderton graduated from the Cranbrook School, Hobart College (BA), Cornell University (MBA) and Michigan State University (PhD). He was CEO of Summit Holdings Corporation; president, Lansing Community College; and founded and serves as CEO of Maplegrove Property Management. He has served as chairman, St. Lawrence Hospital; board member and chairman

of the executive committee of First of America Bank; board member and executive committee member, Auto-Owners Insurance; president, Lansing Symphony Orchestra; board member, ATHENA Foundation; and national chair of Teacher Education Accreditation Council; chairman, Institute of Scrap Iron & Steel; and Board of Trustees, Hobart & William Smith College.



Nanette VanDervoort Martin - 1978

"Nan" Martin was a Lansing area native and graduate of MSU and served as president of the William G. Martin Co. In addition to her leadership in real estate, Martin was the first woman president of the chamber. She served on numerous other area boards, including American Bank and Trust and the First of America Bank Holding Corp., East Lansing Board of Education

(first woman president), Sparrow Hospital Service Auxiliary (charter member), Junior League of Lansing (president), YWCA Financial Advisory Board (chair), Salvation Army Advisory Board and MSU Alumni Assoc. (President), Greater Lansing Board of Realtors (president) and the United Way. Her son, Van Martin, is now head of CBRE/Martin. Martin died in June 2010.



J. Michael Warren - 1979

Warren was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1939. He was with the law firm Foster, Swift Collins and Coey for several years and then

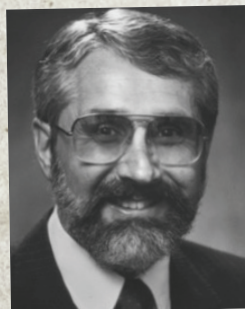
started his own law firm of Warren Price & Cross located in Okemos. He was listed in *Who's Who* in American Law starting in 1998. Warren died in January 2011



Edward E. Souders - 1980

Phillips was born in 1921 and attended East Lansing High School and Ohio Wesleyan. Souders was IBM's senior executive for national accounts in out-state Michigan. In 1983 he took early retirement from IBM and started Entre Computer Services. He and his wife, Lillian, sold the business in 2000 to Analysts International.

Souders held leadership positions on boards of directors including Capitol National Bank, Capital Quality Initiative and Junior Achievement and served as chair of the Capital Region Community Foundation. He is currently active with multiple advisory boards and was recipient of the chamber's Community Service Award.



Wayne H. Williams - 1981

Phillips was born in 1921 and attended East Lansing High School and Ohio Wesleyan. Williams is the principal and general manager of Williams Auto-World in Lansing. He was also a member of the board of directors of the National Automobile Dealers Association and chaired its Industry Relations and the Information Technology Committees. He has also been a

director of Sparrow Hospital and First of America Bank, served as a delegate to the White House Conference on Small Business and as director and treasurer of the Political Action Committee for Americans for Free International Trade. He earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from Western Michigan University. Williams now spends much of his time in Florida.

Members on the Move



Crosser



Harless



Blumstein

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce is excited to welcome new ambassadors to its team: **Ashley Crosser** serves as Director of Fund

Development, bringing a deep commitment to advancing nonprofit missions through strategic, mission driven philanthropy. She holds a bachelor's degree in Community Development from Central Michigan University and a master's degree in Nonprofit Management and Philanthropy. With extensive experience in fundraising and event planning, including prior work with the Alzheimer's Association, Crosser is known for building meaningful partnerships and community engagement. Outside of work, she enjoys family time, cheering on the Michigan State Spartans, and watching the latest films. **Kim Harless** joined Dart Bank in 2005 and brings 25 years of banking experience in business banking services and lending. A dedicated community leader, she has earned multiple honors for professional excellence and volunteer service, including the Holt Education Foundation's Outstanding Community Member Award and several Dart Bank leadership awards. Harless is active with the Holt Business Alliance, Holt Education Foundation, ATHENA WIN, Professional Women in Building, and the Lansing

Regional Chamber of Commerce, and serves as the Holt Delhi Old Newsboys Coordinator. She holds an associate degree in Business Administration from Muskegon Business College and is a graduate of the Robert M. Perry School of Banking. **Yarden Blumstein** serves as Executive Director of Conflict Resolutions, an organization dedicated to mediation, restorative justice, and community engagement. Through dialogue, Blumstein works to address conflict and build stronger, more connected communities. With a passion for teen mental health, he mentors adolescents to recognize peers' struggles and support one another, leading interactive workshops that equip teens and adults with practical intervention skills and tools for community wide support networks. A skilled facilitator, Blumstein combines his understanding of people with a commitment to proactive education and healing centered approaches.

NEW HIRES



McKinney



Sturdy

PNC Bank has added two leaders in Michigan. **Stacy McKinney** joined as Senior Relationship Manager, Corporate Banking, serving Greater Michigan and Northwest Ohio. She brings 25 years of corporate banking and finance experience, including nearly 13 years at Steelcase leading global capital management, and holds a BBA in Finance from Grand Valley State University. **Jennifer Sturdy** joined PNC Private Bank as Relationship Strategist, based

in Mid-Michigan. She brings more than 25 years of experience in financial services, marketing and community engagement, including 18 years with PNC, and holds a BBA from Northwood University.



Terpstra

Maner Costerisan has expanded its West Michigan business advisory presence with the addition of **Kristen Terpstra** as business development manager, based in Grand Rapids. Terpstra works alongside the firm's advisory, tax and accounting teams to build relationships across the West Michigan business community and connect organizations with solutions to support growth and strengthen financial health. Terpstra's more than 20 years of client relationship and business development experience make her a valuable resource for organizations looking to navigate change and plan for the future.

APPOINTMENTS



Bentley

Eaton Regional Education Service Agency (Eaton RESA) has named **Dr. Dawn Bentley** as its new Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services,

effective July 1, 2026. In this role, she will oversee the General Education, Early Childhood, School Wellness and Prevention, and Behavior/Mental Health Services teams. Dr. Bentley brings nearly 30 years of experience in educational leadership and a track record of building integrated instructional

support systems that drive real change in teaching and learning.



Bauer

Bellwether Public Relations has promoted **Bridgette Bauer** to director of public affairs. Bauer leads a roster of clients including the Michigan Association

of Health Plans, Anderson Economic Group, Michigan Community Action and the Michigan Organization for Nursing Leadership, and supports digital and communications strategy for clients such as the Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association, Michigan Health & Hospital Association and Protect MI Care. She has been with the firm for five years, starting as a student practitioner in 2021, and graduated from Michigan State University's James Madison College in 2022.



Jorgensen

LAFCU has promoted **Steve Jorgensen** to vice president of lending, where he will lead the credit union's consumer lending efforts to help members secure

financing for everyday needs and major life purchases. With 16 years of credit union experience, Jorgensen's strong member-first approach and strategic expertise will help enhance LAFCU's lending experience and expand access to practical financial solutions.

AWARDS

Ingham County Sheriff Scott Wriggelsworth has been named the 2026 Terrence L. Jungel Michigan Sheriff of the Year by the Michigan Sheriff's Association. Wriggelsworth, first elected sheriff in 2016 and a former command



Courtesy photo: Ingham County Sheriff's Office, Facebook

officer with the East Lansing Police Department, was nominated by current and former staff members who cited his robust inmate programming, his work establishing memorial dates for fallen deputies Grant Whitaker and Paul Cole, and his role integrating the county's Central Dispatch center into the sheriff's department.



Worst

nurses who make a daily impact on their patients and peers. The highlight of the event was the presentation of the prestigious Margaret McLaren Nursing Excellence Award. This year's well-deserved award was presented to **Stacie Worst, RN**. Stacie received multiple nominations from her colleagues, with one notably stating, "Nurse Stacie cares about her work and the patients; she enters rooms with confidence, respect, and professionalism."



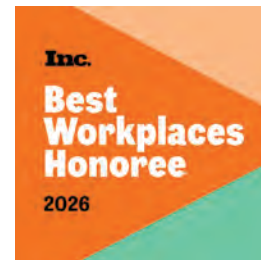
Jobson

of the Association for Career

During this year's Nurses Week celebrations, **McLaren Greater Lansing** hosted its annual award ceremony to honor the incredible

Eaton Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) is proud to announce that Career Pathway Specialist **Sara Jobson** has been named the recipient

and Technical Education (ACTE) Region 1 Counseling and Career Development Professional of the Year Award. She was also recognized with the Michigan Association for Career and Technical Education (MIACTE) Counseling and Career Development Professional of the Year award earlier this year. Jobson has spent more than 23 years in public education focusing on school counseling and career development, including more than six years in her current role.



Washington Avenue Advisors is proud to announce it has been named to Inc.'s 2026 Best

Workplaces list, which honors American companies with exceptional workplaces and cultures supporting in-person, remote, and hybrid teams. The recognition follows a comprehensive evaluation of hundreds of applicants, including an employee survey covering management effectiveness, perks, professional development, and company culture, plus a benefits audit. WAA is among 507 companies recognized this year.



LAFCU received the Michigan Credit Union League's 2026 Innovation Award, presented at the MCUL Annual Convention & Exposition held June 2 to 4 in Grand Rapids. The award recognizes LAFCU's launch of the StableCommunities Foundation, an independent nonprofit that addresses financial instability and builds stronger, more resilient

communities across Michigan through a community-first model offering flexible support to families, small businesses and grassroots organizations. This marks the sixth time LAFCU has earned the award over the past 10 entries.



Fowlerville Community Schools

has earned 2025-26 Capturing Kids' Hearts National Showcase Schools® awards for both Fowlerville Junior High and Fowlerville High School, recognizing each building's positive culture and student engagement outcomes through the Capturing Kids' Hearts process. It marks the fourth consecutive year for the junior high and the second award for the high school.

COMPANY NEWS



Davenport University celebrated the retirement of



Pappas

President **Richard J. Pappas, Ed.D.**, who stepped down June 30, 2026, after 17 remarkable years leading the university and nearly 50 years in higher education. The university honored his legacy by dedicating its athletic stadium in his name, the Richard J. Pappas Stadium, at a ceremony held at the W.A. Lettinga Grand Rapids Campus, and the Board of Trustees conferred him with President Emeritus status in recognition of his transformative leadership. Pappas served as president of four institutions of higher education over his career and was one of the longest serving university presidents in Michigan. Congratulations to Dr. Pappas on an incredible career and well earned retirement.



Cinnaire Lending Corporation (CLC) received its first Aeris®

Rating Report. Aeris is the leading independent rating and information service, providing investors with trusted tools to evaluate Community Development Financial Institutions' (CDFI) performance, impact, and accountability. CLC received an AA- rating for Financial Strength and Performance, indicating that it is financially strong, able to withstand market fluctuations and manage challenges effectively; three stars for Impact Management, affirming it deploys its financial resources in line with its community development mission; and a Policy Plus designation, for leading initiatives that impact government policy investments in affordable housing and community development. ♦

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~ Otis Wiley
General Manager of MSU Sports Properties

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OFFICE '26 Market Insights

Greater Lansing Area, Michigan | H1 2026

Market Remains Stable as Downtown Market Evolves

Market at a Glance
Across all markets through first seven months period

Category	Value
Vacancy Rate	10.1%
Completions	1.5M SF
Absorption	1.5M SF

INDUSTRIAL '26 Market Insights

Greater Lansing Area, Michigan | H1 2026

Industrial Fundamentals Remain Stable as Modern Space Scarcity Continues

Market at a Glance
Across all markets through first seven months period

Category	Value
Vacancy Rate	10.1%
Completions	1.5M SF
Absorption	1.5M SF

RETAIL '26 Market Insights

Greater Lansing Area, Michigan | H1 2026

New Tenants Keep Pace with Market Turnover

Market at a Glance
Across all markets through first seven months period

Category	Value
Vacancy Rate	10.1%
Completions	1.5M SF
Absorption	1.5M SF

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