

# FOCUS



THE MONTHLY BUSINESS NEWS MAGAZINE OF THE LANSING REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE • FEBRUARY 2021

## Building a Culture of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

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**TIM DAMAN**  
*President and CEO*  
*Lansing Regional*  
*Chamber of Commerce*



# Living Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

**2020** was a watershed moment in our nation's history. It was a year of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, great turmoil, and divisiveness, and a year that ripped at our souls over the civil unrest that erupted on multiple occasions.

The pain of our nation's failures to come to grips with social justice was felt throughout our communities and within all of our organizations. If there is good news to come out of the past 12 months, it has been in a renewed commitment to elevating the cause of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I).

This month's Focus cover story features several organizations that have been among the leaders in DE&I for many years, in some cases, for decades. We wanted to highlight the great work that is already being done and showcase some of the best practices and challenges involved in building a DE&I culture.

Not surprisingly, organizations that have established DE&I initiatives have utilized the past year's civil unrest to strengthen their commitment further. Leaders at the highest levels of these organizations conducted town hall meetings and listening tours where they heard first-hand the concerns that their team members feel about social injustice and how it impacts their everyday lives. This is a good lesson for all of us, no matter where we are on the DE&I journey.

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) has taken its commitment to demonstrating leadership in the DE&I area very seriously. For several decades, this organization was male-dominated. That began to shift with the ascension of Nan Martin and later, Martha Mertz to the LRCC Board of Directors. Through the years, the LRCC has had several persons of color as chair of the board, including the late James Butler, Ernest Brown, Charles Blockett, and Paula Cunningham. Over the past decade, the number of board chairs has been evenly split between male and female. We are also very proud of our partnerships with the Black Business Alliance and Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, both organizations holding spots on the LRCC Board of Directors.

However, there is always more work to be done. Our LRCC team recognizes that we have to work even harder at recruiting and developing talent from a broad population as part of this great organization. This spring the Chamber will be announcing a new DE&I program series to increase engagement and outreach with businesses, employees and community groups.

As leaders, all of us need to be willing to be vulnerable and face our shortcomings in the DE&I makes our organizations stronger and our community richer and more welcoming.

We are making progress. However, it is not nearly enough. If 2020 was a year of unrest and injustices, let's commit to making 2021 a year in which we all take a significant step forward in living out the just cause of diversity, equity & inclusion. ■



**As leaders, all of us need to be willing to be vulnerable and face our shortcomings in the DE&I makes our organizations stronger and our community richer and more welcoming.**



**JOIN THE LEADERSHIP CIRCLE**

Leadership Circle members are proven business and community leaders. We value their commitment and applaud their efforts to strengthen our region with their leadership and appreciate the important role they play in advancing our organization.



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## FOCUS

### Editor

Ashley Sandborn

### Feature Writer

Ross Woodstock

### Design

Tandem Studios

### Cover Photography

Courtesy of AF Group

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

During mandated social distancing, the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) hosts numerous virtual events monthly, from Member Mixers to Lansing Economic Club programs. The events and programming provide valuable content and information and give members unique opportunities to learn, connect and network. The LRCC also continues to host virtual weekly roundtables for business, community, and government leaders to provide updates and share what is going on in their community.

The LRCC encourages members to check their email, follow LRCC social media channels, and visit the LRCC website for the most updated information on additional educational offerings and networking opportunities as we move forward.

*Registration is available on the LRCC website.*

## FEBRUARY MEMBER MIXER

**Date:** Tuesday, Feb. 9 from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

**Description:** Volaris Lansing will serve as the virtual sponsor for the February virtual Member Mixer, taking place on Feb. 9 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. The event will feature breakout sessions throughout the event to allow for connecting and relationship-building. Participants will also have the opportunity to win gift cards!

## LANSING ECONOMIC CLUB

**Date:** Thursday, Feb. 11 from 11 a.m. to noon. *Enjoy virtual networking prior to program 10:40 to 11 a.m. and after the program from noon to 12:15pm.*

**Description:** A distinguished panel, including the women and men's head golf coaches for Michigan State University; Sarah Burnham from the LPGA Tour; Ryan Brehm, tour professional, PGA, and John Lindert, secretary, PGA, will discuss how golf survived the pandemic and how its resurgence is bringing a new generation of players onto the course.

## LANSING ECONOMIC CLUB

**Date:** Thursday, Feb. 18 from 11 a.m. to noon *Enjoy virtual networking prior to program 10:40 to 11 a.m. and after the program from noon to 12:15pm.*

**Description:** Sponsored by Foster Swift Collins & Smith PC, the Feb. 18 Lansing Economic Club will feature former Marine Corps Commandant and former member of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, General Robert Neller. He will discuss leadership in turbulent times, what it takes to build a team, and how to address challenging situations.

## VIRTUAL BUSINESS ROUNDTABLES

- **Delta Township** - Eaton County: Wednesday, Feb. 3 from 9 to 10 a.m.
- **Lansing** - Delhi Township: Wednesday, Feb. 10 from 9 to 10 a.m.
- **East Lansing** - Meridian Township: Wednesday, Feb. 17 from 9 to 10 a.m.
- **Delta Township** - Eaton County: Wednesday, March 3 from 9 to 10 a.m.

## STAY CONNECTED. STAY SOCIAL.



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Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce

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## CHAMBER MILESTONES

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

**Greater Lansing Association of REALTORS**

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10 Years

**Eaton Community Bank**

5 Years

**Jessica Artibee Agency - Farm Bureau Insurance**

5 Years

**Lansing Brewing Company**

5 Years

**McDonald's, Grand River Okemos**

5 Years

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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 2722 E. Michigan Ave., Suite 217  
 Lansing, MI 48912  
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 6250 S Cedar St., #1B  
 Lansing, MI 48911  
[www.precisiondoormi.com/mid/](http://www.precisiondoormi.com/mid/)

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 Lansing, MI 48912

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LRCC members have unparalleled access to company and staff profiles on the LRCC website. To access and update this information at any point, visit [lansingchamber.org](http://lansingchamber.org) and enter your username and password. If you have not yet logged onto the site, please follow the simple password reset instructions. Call (517) 487-6340 with any questions.

# LRCC Announces Voice of Small Business Campaign

## MARKETING CAMPAIGN TO HIGHLIGHT THE STRUGGLES AND OBSTACLES BROUGHT FORTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) has launched an unprecedented marketing campaign to highlight how small business owners in the Lansing region have been impacted by COVID-19. The Voice of Small Business campaign will utilize multiple media platforms and include a series of themed videos that highlight the challenges small businesses have faced during the pandemic and how they have overcome setbacks and obstacles.

“Small businesses have been hit particularly hard by the COVID pandemic,” said Tim Daman, president & CEO, LRCC. “Despite the challenges of having their businesses curtailed or closed and having employees laid off, it has been amazing to witness the steadfast commitment to survive, and the resiliency needed to overcome extraordinary challenges. We want to build awareness in the community of the incredible stories of small businesses surviving and thriving during these difficult times.”

The Voice of Small Business campaign will leverage the LRCC website, e-communications, FOCUS Magazine, and a robust social media platform including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. A special landing page on the LRCC website will house a series of videos, which are categorized into six themes: resilience, teamwork, community, innovation, safety, and opportunity. The campaign will run from February through July 2021.

“The Voice of Small Business marketing campaign fills a need to shine a much-needed light on the everyday struggles these business owners are facing and how general awareness of these issues can garner more communitywide support and a sense of shared purpose,” said Ashley Sandborn, director of marketing and communications, LRCC. “The videos will also celebrate the Greater Lansing business community’s resilience and innovation.”

The website landing page will be updated monthly. The exciting stories of the Voice of Small Business campaign can be viewed at [www.lansingchamber.org/voiceofsmallbusiness](http://www.lansingchamber.org/voiceofsmallbusiness). ■



KARQUE ROCHA / PEXELS

# Mid-Michigan's MLK Commission Featured Dr. Bernice King in First Televised MLK Day of Celebration

**D**r. Bernice King headlined the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission of Mid-Michigan's 2021 annual signature event, which was televised for the first time in its 36-year history. The 2021 MLK Day of Celebration aired on WILX TV 10-NBC, Monday, Jan. 18 from 7-8 p.m. EST.



King

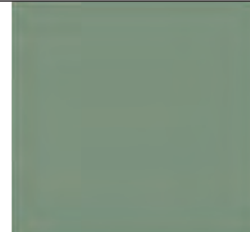
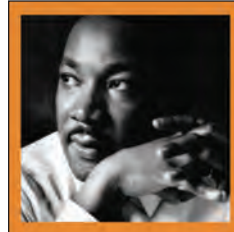
King is a global peace activist and the youngest daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King. Bernice King was only five years old when her father was assassinated. Bernice King is a peace advocate, thought leader, orator, minister, and member of the Georgia State Bar, having earned a Master of Divinity degree and doctorate in law. She began her oratorical journey at age 17 when she spoke in her mother's stead at the U.N. Most recently, she spoke at U.S. Rep. John Lewis's funeral.

A conversation between Bernice King and Elaine Hardy, commission chair, was featured in the one-hour TV program.

"Dr. Bernice King is an innovative, energetic, and committed leader, dedicated to taking her parents' legacy of nonviolence and the work of creating a more peaceful, just, humane world into a new era," Hardy said.

Bernice King addressed the nation's current state in light of the civil unrest that has been experienced following a series of tragic murders that took place in the past year.

"I think this is one of the most important if not the most important moments in our nation," said King. "As a people, a nation and a world, we really need to look at where we are in terms of creating a more just, humane, equitable, peaceful society."



**DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING**  
Commission of  
Mid-Michigan

Bernice King emphasized the role of her mother, Coretta Scott King, in elevating Martin Luther King's legacy and advancing the civil rights movement around the world.

"She is the architect of the King legacy," said Bernice King. "You can't celebrate the MLK holiday and not celebrate Coretta Scott King."

The theme for the 2021 MLK Day of Celebration was "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope." It is a quote by Dr. King from his "I Have a Dream" speech, and it is engraved on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Many organizations, including City of East Lansing and City of Lansing, actively support the commission's work. Corporate sponsors for 2021 who donate \$10,000 or more are AF Group/Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Cinnaire, Dean Transportation, Delta Dental, Jackson, LAFCU, and Michigan State University Federal Credit Union.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission of Mid-Michigan works to support equality, diversity, and social justice. It focuses on the area's pressing issues of literacy, youth violence, hunger, mentoring, education, and community enrichment. The nonprofit organization hosts speakers and concerts, supports community service agencies, and promotes youth initiatives, such as essay and art contests, college scholarships, and an annual Y-Achievers tour for high school students. ■

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**\*Ranked #1 in Member Satisfaction among Commercial Health Plans in Michigan.**



For J.D. Power 2020 award information, visit [jdpower.com/awards](https://jdpower.com/awards).  
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# Lansing Economic Club Sponsors Lend Support to Community Non-Profit Organizations

Several organizations that make the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) Economic Club series possible added a new twist to their sponsorships. The Lansing Economic Club sponsors invested a portion of their annual Economic Club support to several worthwhile non-profit organizations. The generous donations come at a critical time for organizations coping with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has stressed non-profit budgets and their ability to provide essential services in the community.

“The decision by Lansing Economic Club sponsors to provide additional support to organizations that offer services to those in need underscores what a giving community in which we all have the privilege to live and work,” said Tim Daman, president & CEO, LRCC. “Our non-profit community has been under a great deal of additional stress as a result of COVID, so this additional support couldn’t come at a better time.”

Lansing Economic Club sponsors and the non-profit organizations they are supporting through this important initiative include:

- **WIELAND:** \$1,000 to Pregnancy Services of Greater Lansing and \$1,000 to the Forgotten Man Ministries;
- **Michigan State University:** \$2,000 to the Davies Project;
- **Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes:** \$2,000 to the Greater Lansing Food Bank;
- **McLaren Greater Lansing:** \$2,000 to the Small Talk Children’s Advocacy Center; and
- **Siena Investments:** \$2,000 to the Grand Ledge Food Bank.

“WIELAND has a long history of supporting organizations that elevate humanity, especially those groups whose basic physical, mental, and spiritual needs are at risk,” said Craig Wieland, President, WIELAND. “Pregnancy Services of Greater Lansing provides life-saving resources to expectant mothers and their unborn children. On the other end of the spectrum, Forgotten Man Ministries gives attention to those in society who are seeking to reform themselves while being incarcerated. WIELAND is proud to provide financial support to both of these great local charities.”

“Supporting worthy non-profits is engrained in the Fahey Schultz Burzych



Rhodes culture,” said Mark Burzych, firm president, Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes. “We have provided financial and in-kind support for numerous organizations throughout the years. We are particularly proud to be able to lend this additional support to the Greater Lansing Food Bank at a time when the need in our community is so great.”

“The Michigan State University International Business Center is very pleased to have the opportunity to support a local organization that does so much good for the area’s most vulnerable residents during such a challenging time,” said Jade Sims, assistant director for international trade programs, International Business Center, MSU Broad College of Business. “Access to healthcare services is key to a healthy and prosperous Lansing region, and the Davies Project helps provide it.”

“As a long time Grand Ledge-based business, we are pleased to support the Grand Ledge Food Bank through our Lansing Economic Club partnership,” said Roger Millbrook, investment advisor, Siena Investments. “The Grand Ledge Food Bank and many other community non-profits have been lifelines to residents during these challenging times. We are confident this support will have a meaningful impact on our community.”

“McLaren Greater Lansing is a proud to sponsor Small Talk Children’s Advocacy Center and their crucial work to advocate for, and protect children in our area,” said Kirk Ray, president & CEO, McLaren Greater Lansing. “The health and safety of our most vulnerable populations is always at the forefront of what we do every day at McLaren, and it’s a job no organization can do alone. Supporting Small Talk Children’s Advocacy Center is another way McLaren is doing what’s best for our community, and we are pleased to support this incredible service.”

The Lansing Economic Club luncheons feature local, national, and world-renowned speakers who cover various business-related topics, such as leadership, innovation, and industry trends. The monthly events serve as an excellent opportunity to network with more than 450 regional community, business, and education leaders. In the aftermath of COVID-19, Economic Club forums continue to offer leading speakers in a virtual setting. A list of upcoming programs can be found *on the LRCC website.* ■

# The Unstoppable Ngage Management

BY MATTIE MILNE, KOLT COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

**2020** has been nothing short of eventful, and for Ngage Management of Okemos, Mich., this could not be truer. Among other things, one could say it was an award-winning year for the Ngage team.

As the team wraps up the year with several accomplishments, Tobi Lyon, founder and CEO of the Okemos-based company, Ngage Management is beyond proud. She notes gratitude as a guiding theme for Ngage—both personally and professionally—during these difficult times.



Lyon

“We have taken the mindset to focus on all the great that can come out of what was a challenging and difficult year for many in our industry,” Lyon said. “Ngage’s belief system and attitude surrounding us on this journey have made us unstoppable, and our energy is contagious to our clients’ growth as well.”

Over the past year, the team’s impressive awards include Michigan 50 Companies to Watch, The Best of MichBusiness Award—Small Business category, and recognition from Corp Magazine for its excellent pivot into a COVID-friendly working environment.



Lyon was also awarded Entrepreneur of the Year at the annual Greater Lansing Entrepreneurial Awards program.

These honors highlight companies and individuals boasting exceptional leadership, sales and employee growth, positive community involvement, resilience despite COVID-challenges, and overall success.

Additionally, the Ngage community grew—adding five new clients, expanding its client base by over 30%, and created eight full-time positions since April 1, 2020.

“We’ve maintained a rapid growth pace for the past seven years, and the past three years has been tremendous. We’ve seen these record-breaking numbers due to our ability to challenge the status quo and provide Michigan a new type of company,” Lyon said. “During these challenging economic times, we can stay in this growth mindset if we continue to focus on perseverance, hiring the best, and serving our clients to the fullest. We look forward to the year ahead as 2021 is marked to be an even bigger year for our team.”

To learn more about Ngage Management, visit the company’s reinvented website, including updated branding and a vibrant, reimagined logo at [teamngage.com](http://teamngage.com). ■



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# RELAUNCH Greater Lansing Providing Support for Small Businesses

BY NATHAN REENS, MLIVE

**F**or businesses in and around Lansing, the pandemic remains a serious threat to their livelihoods, the workers they employ and the customers they serve across industries and sectors, both small and large.

And that's why Lansing leaders assembled the *RELAUNCH Greater Lansing Task Force* and created a website designed as a one-stop experience for information to assist local businesses as they navigate the changing tides and circumstances of the pandemic.

*The site is a resource for businesses*, interpreting the impact of COVID-related news and restrictions, providing guidance on operating safely to build confidence among community members. The initiative offers details such as a symptom checklist, virus testing locations and directives on when to seek a diagnosis, vaccine information and more.

"Our local businesses are still going through tremendous hardships, and they're working hard to safely reopen and reengage," said Ashley Sandborn, director of marketing at the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce. "RELAUNCH is like a lifeboat to keep businesses afloat and get them to shore for 2021 and beyond."

Victoria Meadows, vice president of marketing and communications for the Lansing Economic Area Partnership, said COVID-19 has shifted the established business practices for many entrepreneurs and their patrons.

"Everybody was caught on their heels, but from the start, the goal was to keep doors open with the safety of employees and customers at the forefront of every decision," Meadows said. "RELAUNCH is a portal to the most up-to-date information available. It's an attempt to bring stability to an uncertain environment."

Carrie Rosingana, CEO of *Capital Area Michigan Works!*, served as a task force member for the RELAUNCH effort. Rosingana said success involves taking advantage of the capital region's unique strengths and ensuring dollars are spent at local businesses and kept in the local economy.

RELAUNCH recommendations for supporting local businesses while maintaining social distance include:

**Shop online:** Many local businesses have an online presence and can mail items to your door.

**Shop over the phone:** Unsure if what you need is still in stock? Give the business a call to see if they can check on your desired items. They may be able to mail your items, reserve them to collect at a later date or pick up with curbside service.

**Buy a gift card:** For yourself, a friend or family member to support local businesses now, without having to go in person.

**Order out:** If you're feeling well but wary of being in public, order take-out or delivery from your favorite restaurant.

**Leave a review:** Share an experience and support for your favorite local businesses by leaving a review — this can be on their Facebook page, Yelp or Google.

**Like and subscribe:** Be sure to boost local businesses' social media presence by liking and engaging with their content on their social media channels. Following along on social and even their email lists is one of the best ways you can stay up to date on their operations and safety plans, too.

"Every community member has the potential to support our local economy — even when we can't be there in person," Rosingana said. "And if you do need to leave your house for essential reasons — like essential jobs, grocery shopping or childcare — it's imperative to follow appropriate guidelines to reduce potential spread and exposure to COVID-19."

Steve Japinga, the chamber's vice president of public affairs, noted that businesses have been resilient in the face of difficult obstacles. The RELAUNCH effort and the free information provided are critical elements to overcoming vulnerabilities.

"In places like Old Town and REO Town, where foot traffic is incredibly important, we've seen the shift to doing business differently," he said. "You weren't online before? Well, you find a way now. Who is your customer and how do you make sure you're available to them? The businesses are being creative, and we're all trying to help them." ■

**RELAUNCH.  
REOPEN.  
RE-ENGAGE.**

The RELAUNCH Greater Lansing: Economic Rehabilitation Task Force has created a website and resource guide to provide the latest information to assist businesses as they continue to adjust to new realities brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**THE RESOURCES INCLUDE:**

- ✓ How to protect employees by screening
- ✓ How to create workplace distancing
- ✓ Proper cleaning & sanitation
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To learn more, visit [www.relaunchgreaterlansing.com](http://www.relaunchgreaterlansing.com)

LANSING REGIONAL CHAMBER

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# Building a Culture of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

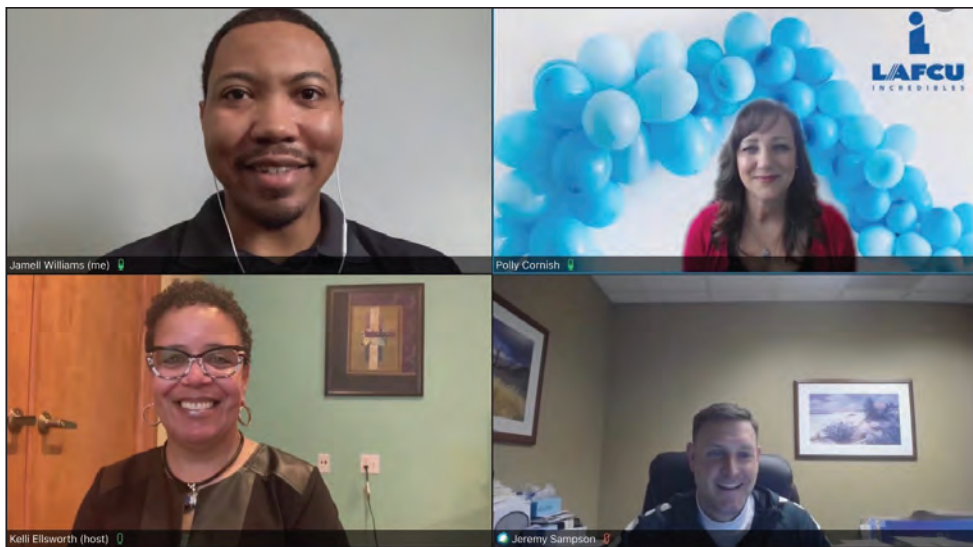
*AF Group, headquartered in downtown Lansing has been a leader in developing a culture committed to diversity, equity & inclusion.*

**D**iversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) have become much more than buzzwords, or something HR can check off their list of things to do. DE&I has become widely understood to be crucial to all organizations of all shapes and sizes in every industry sector of the economy.

One of the biggest concerns for business leaders worldwide is having the right people on their team. DE&I has moved to the front burner of issues that job candidates consider crucial to determining where they want to work. 86 percent of millennial females and 74% of millennial males consider company policies on diversity, equity, and inclusion during their job hunt.

DE&I also has a direct positive impact on the bottom line. In a recent CEO survey from Price Waterhouse, 85% of CEOs said their formal DE&I program improved their bottom line. Two reports from McKinsey noted a 10% increase in racial and ethnic diversity on the senior executive team resulted in a .8 percent rise in earnings in the U.S. The research also showed companies that are more gender diverse are 21% more likely to outperform others, and those that are ethnically diverse are 33% more likely to outperform others. DE&I has also been shown to promote innovation and lower employee turnover, which is very costly for organizations.





LAFCU's newly formed diversity, equity and inclusion committee meeting recently to discuss creation of a DE&I mission statement.



Ellsworth Etchison



Peffley



Hafley



Simon



Parsons



Hardy



Willis



Corless

Lisa Corless is the president and CEO of AF Group. She is also the granddaughter of four immigrants and the mother of two Latina girls, which has helped Corless appreciate how important it is for her daughters to feel included and the richness they have brought into the family through sharing their culture.

“When I take that and apply it to the workplace, I know how much richer an experience can be when you have diversity sitting around the table,” said Corless. “Our customers are diverse. Our partners are diverse. To be diverse and inclusive makes all the difference in the world in business outcomes and innovation.”

Corless says DE&I has been important to AF Group because of the value it brings to the culture and the business as a whole.

“It has allowed us to gain a tremendous perspective from teammates, and that has improved and increased the trust and transparency in the organization,” said Corless. “We’ve created partnerships with our customers that are more authentic, which has led to a better understanding of customer needs.”

Lansing Board of Water and Light (BWL) General Manager Dick Peffley says first and foremost, DE&I is the right thing to do and notes that inclusion is one BWL’s four core values.

“As a corporate citizen that’s publicly owned, contributions from our employees and customers are instrumental to our success,” said Peffley. “We believe it is important that our workforce reflects the rich diversity of our community. By keeping DE&I at the forefront of BWL’s strategic goals, we leverage the power of DE&I on corporate performance by being able to attract and retain top

## Defining Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

It is important to understand the distinction between diversity, equity and inclusion. Tedi Parsons, president & CEO of the Michigan Diversity Education Center offers these definitions:

**Diversity** is the many variations of different characteristics of who we are and how we represent our uniqueness and differences to the world. Diversity is not just about our race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, that’s only the tip of the iceberg.

*“Too many people get caught up in diversity as black and white and it is not,” said Parsons. “Diversity is our full-functioning self.”*

**Equity** is when we recognize and accept that disadvantages and barriers exist, and that we do not all start from the same place. It’s imperative that we correct and address the disadvantages and imbalances, ensuring everyone has full access to the same opportunities.

**Inclusion** is when there is a culture in which all individuals are valued, treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success. Simply put, where everyone is welcomed and included.

## Regional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Partners

There are a number of outstanding DE&I initiatives in the Lansing region. The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce’s DE&I partners include:

**Michigan Diversity Council**

**One&All – Inclusive Entrepreneurship – LEAP**

**Michigan Diversity Education Center**

**Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – Michigan State University**

**DEI – Davenport University**

**Office of Diversity and Inclusion – Lansing Community College**

**DEI Program – Grand Ledge Chamber of Commerce – Grand Ledge United**

**Executive Leadership Essential Programs – MI Premier Events**

**Sparrow Health System Diversity & Inclusion**

**The Professionals Forum**

A listing of DEI partners can be found at [lansingchamber.org/DEI](https://lansingchamber.org/DEI). If you would like your organization’s DEI information included, contact Steve Japinga, vice president of public affairs, Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce.

# Building a Culture of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

talent to bring diverse ideas and perspectives to how we do business.”

Law firm Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC has always had a passion for DE&I going back to the 1970s, when former Supreme Court Justice Lawrence Lindemer was a partner at the firm and started a diversity committee. Foster Swift was one of the first firms in Michigan to adopt a flexible time policy. A few years ago, current partner, Tony Smith pushed the firm to increase its commitment to DE&I.

“We are a firm that takes the oath of the legal profession very seriously and are committed to equal justice for all,” said Kim Hafley, director of marketing and recruitment, Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC. “We are known for our character and our integrity. DE&I is the right thing to do. It is right for the profession. It is part of our culture.”

The tragic 2020 murder of George Floyd elevated the national conversation around racial injustice. The impact of the Floyd incident and several other instances of racial injustice was felt throughout the country. At LAFUCU, Kelli Ellsworth-Etchison recognized the pain that was so prevalent presented an opportunity to elevate her organization’s commitment to DE&I. Ellsworth Etchison prepared a DE&I proposal and gave it to LAFUCU CEO, Patrick Spyke. He not only immediately embraced the initiative, he elevated Ellsworth Etchison to a senior level position as chief diversity officer (she retains her role as chief marketing officer). Many organizations came out with racial injustice statements after the George Floyd incident. LAFUCU considered a similar move but decided that wasn’t enough.

“We needed to go deeper,” said Ellsworth Etchison. “As a person of color, one that has dealt with some oppression and some racial injustices, I can talk from a first-hand experience.”

In the past year, the civil unrest in the country also caused the City of East Lansing to step up its efforts in DE&I, which had been under discussion for some time. Elaine Hardy, who had served nearly two decades as Hannah Community Center coordinator, was named East Lansing’s first diversity, equity, and inclusion administrator.

“There are things in organizational structures that we all have to address,” said Hardy. “We have to have individuals who have their eyes on all of those structures that preclude an organization from being its best self and driving it to be a more inclusive, equitable and more diverse organization.”

## The Commitment Must Come from the Top

Experts agree that in order for DE&I initiatives to be successful, the commitment must come from the organization’s highest levels.

At AF Group, this commitment includes sessions where leaders listen to what team members have to say without those leaders offering opinions. Executive team members also have the opportunity to be sponsors in Employee Resource Network (ERN) groups. Corless is one of the executive sponsors for AF Group’s African American Inclusion ERN, which is focused on attracting, developing, and retaining Black employees.

“We also have an inclusion steering committee and subcommittees that include people from all levels of the organization,” said Corless. “And we’re putting together an affinity-based leadership and mentorship program that includes front line team members and executives.”

“It has to be a full-throated commitment to the work, said Hardy. “You have to put resources including financial and people resources. You have to be committed to using training to build a culture where DE&I becomes embedded into the DNA of who you are.”

Last July, James Dover, president and CEO of Sparrow Health, held 10 town

## DE&I Mission Statements

These DE&I mission statements could serve as a model for any organization:

### AF Group

*To be a trailblazer by transforming our workplaces, communities and the markets in which we do business into diverse and inclusive environments that champion belonging, accountability and disrupting the status quo.*

### Sparrow Health System

*Through Cultural Competency and evidence-based practices, Sparrow Health System will maintain a caring, respectful, and inclusive work environment that promotes equity and recognizes, supports, and values the diversity of our Patients, Caregivers, and the Communities we serve. Diversity Is Our Strength!*

### Lansing Board of Water and Light

*The Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee’s purpose is to support the BWL’s mission and values by promoting shared, authentic values of inclusion, equity, respect and understanding of those we work with throughout our organization and community. Therefore, we will treat all people with dignity and fairness first. We will value diverse opinions and world views, and we will meet people where they are on their diversity and inclusion journey.*

### Foster Swift Collins & Smith, PC

*The mission of Foster Swift’s Diversity Committee is to “cultivate an environment where individuals of diverse race, color, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, nationality, age, height, weight, disability, and marital and parental status may succeed professionally and personally. The Foster Swift Diversity Committee recognizes that diversity and inclusion is a journey, and is enthused by the firm’s engagement in its initiatives.*

hall meetings to address racial injustices across the country. The events were a welcomed opportunity for Sparrow team members at all levels to express feelings about a topic that really matters to them.

“The Town Halls were an opportunity for leaders and caregivers to begin a conversation and allow our caregiver’s voices to be heard,” said Simon. “People were really able to talk about their experiences.”

## The Importance of Open and Respectful Conversations

Conversations around DE&I can be uncomfortable at times. Training programs will equip team members to communicate effectively and openly. Experts stress the importance of addressing issues as they arise and asking permission to dive into hot-button issues.

At LAFUCU, Ellsworth Etchison launched the DE&I initiative holding conversations throughout the organization. The first step in the journey last August was to ensure that employees understood diversity, equity and inclusion.

“We wanted everyone to understand the nuts and bolts and how we got to where we are in society today,” said Ellsworth Etchison. “We formed a DE&I committee of management and staff so everyone could feel a sense of ownership for this initiative.”

BWL's Peffley says diversity conversations are often uncomfortable because of a lack of exposure to them.

"We recognize it's important to introduce uncomfortable conversations in safe spaces and to recognize that people often aren't sure what to say or fear of saying the wrong thing," said Peffley. "Conversation about DE&I is not about knowing everything and having all the answers. Setting these expectations ahead of time sets the tone for safe spaces."

"Get comfortable with the uncomfortable," said Ashlee Willis, founder & CEO, Michigan Premier Events-Association & Corporate Event Management Company. "Leaders and business owners need to lead the way in changing the lens through which we all view success, especially around the DE&I effort."

Kim Hafley notes that having five generations in the workplace can create challenges around appropriate conversations. In some cases, discussions that were considered acceptable 20 or 30 years ago are no longer sufficient.

"What we are we trying to do is create a culture and provide people tools so they can avoid hurtful comments and to manage those difficult conversations," said Hafley.

#### **Challenges in Building a DEI Culture**

Building a DE&I culture is hard work and takes time. Tedi R. Parsons, president & CEO, Michigan Diversity Education Center (MiDEC) says one of the biggest roadblocks is when top leadership or a board of directors do not recognize the value of having a strong DE&I strategy or plan in place.

"Sometimes our biases or fear of change and stepping outside of our culture of advantage can be another roadblock to ensuring DE&I is in the forefront and a strong business imperative," said Parsons.

Lori Simon says some of the challenges Sparrow faces in DE&I are maintaining consistent policies, education, and messaging throughout a large organization.

"We have over 9,000 employees across five counties," said Simon. "Those are very different cultures you have to deal with and make sure everyone is on the same page."

#### **DEI in Small Businesses**

Small businesses seeking to build a DE&I culture can run into many roadblocks. Ashlee Willis says many business owners don't know where to start. She encourages people to network with other organizations that have established trainings and programs. Cost barriers can be overcome by finding books on DE&I in the workplace and researching online DE&I trainings and videos. Willis says DE&I allows organizations to identify areas of need within their company, sourcing and seeking talented, diverse candidates with qualified skill sets.

"Small businesses should incorporate diversity and inclusion in their culture because it creates extensive trust and more commitment from your employees," said Willis. "DE&I helps your employers feel valued and affirmed. It helps to create fundamental progress, fosters higher engagement and productivity."

Willis says small businesses can overcome challenges to DE&I by ensuring that everyone on the staff speaks a common language for DE&I. She also notes the importance of incorporating DE&I into company practices such as meetings and events, creating diverse partnerships, and making DE&I everyone's responsibility.

"Businesses first need to ask themselves why are they incorporating DE&I," said Willis. "It's crucial to take the time to explore what your company needs with the intentions of DE&I efforts. It is obvious when companies are quickly establishing DE&I efforts into their company just because everyone else is doing it and tends to be unsuccessful and sometimes offensive if not put together correctly. Michigan Premier Events strongly advocates for companies to incorporate DE&I not only internally, but also externally routinely within their programs, events, and meetings."

#### **DEI Must Involve Everyone**

Leaders in DE&I say a successful program will only happen beyond the work of a committee and a handful of people, but instead becomes a full organizational change.

"It cannot just be relegated to HR or mid-level managers," said Hardy. "It has to come from all levels of the organization. You can't change an organization's culture if only a few people are speaking the same language."

It is easy to think that hiring a diverse workforce is the end goal. Lori Simon insists organizations can have the most diverse workforce, but inclusion is a critical piece for talent retention.

"Diversity is having a seat at the table. Inclusion is having a voice," said Simon. "If you don't have inclusion, you won't retain your workforce."

"Feeling valued means your productivity is going to go up," said Ellsworth Etchison. "You know you can bring your ideas and have a seat at the table whether you are an executive or on the front line."

It is easy for organizations considering the DE&I journey to become frustrated by the overwhelming amount of information that needs to be considered, the resources required, and the complexity. Foster Swift's Hafley encourages people to commit to start the journey.

"Start with simple goals that encourage early successes," said Hafley. "There is no one way to do this. No two successful DE&I initiatives are going to be the same. They are going to be unique to the organization and the people in that organization."

Lisa Corless recommends that organizations start critical DE&I conversations by listening to teammates and customers with sensitivity and empathy, which will lead to trusting partnerships.

"These conversations will let you know where you need to focus," said Corless. "It's also important that you have an individual in the organization whose primary role is to advance inclusion and diversity. When you have somebody leading the charge for you, they will make sure that the necessary and sometimes uncomfortable conversations are taking place." ■



Leaders in DE&I say a successful program will only happen beyond the work of a committee and a handful of people, but instead becomes a full organizational change.

## High-Tech Software Company TechSmith Establishes New International Headquarters in East Lansing

Leading software development company TechSmith is planning to establish a new international headquarters facility, growing its presence in East Lansing with support from the Michigan Strategic Fund, the Whitmer Administration announced. The project is expected to generate a total private investment of nearly \$15 million and create 25 highly-paid jobs while retaining 275 jobs in the Lansing area.



Wendy Hamilton, CEO of TechSmith. “We look forward to providing a quality workspace and state of the art amenities to our amazing team, which not only better equips us to attract world-class talent, but also deepens our company’s sense of commitment to and passion for Michigan State University and the Lansing region.”

“This is great news for our state, our families, and our economy, and it proves once again that Michigan is a world leader in innovation,” said Governor Whitmer. “This crucial partnership with TechSmith will create up to 50 new good-paying, high-tech jobs for Michigan workers. I’m proud to partner with TechSmith and look forward to working with every business that wants to invest in our state.”

**TechSmith**, founded in 1987 as Horizon Technologies, is a high-tech software development company focusing on capturing screen content for better communication. Its software is used as aides for training, tutorials, scholastic lessons, and everyday communication. More than 65 million people use TechSmith’s products in more than 193 countries, and customers include Johnson & Johnson, eBay, and Accenture. The company has 275 employees and is currently spread across five buildings in Alaieton Township in Ingham County.

TechSmith plans to consolidate its current five facilities into one new headquarters building near the former Spartan Village in East Lansing. The project is expected to create 25 qualified new jobs, with the potential for up to 50 total jobs, and a capital investment of nearly \$15 million. The Michigan Strategic Fund approved a \$250,000 Jobs Ready Michigan grant in support of the project.

“As a growing tech company, we know our employees are driving our success,” said

The **Jobs Ready Michigan Program** is designed to provide grants for business expansion and location projects that create jobs and investments in Michigan that have a demonstrated training need, particularly in pursuing new opportunities for high-tech, high-demand, and high-wage jobs.

Since its founding, TechSmith has focused on embracing an employee-centric mindset and prides itself on offering compensation packages that exceed industry standards, along with providing professional pathways for every employee. To find and attract talent, TechSmith also has an extensive internship program that brings interns to the Lansing area each summer from many different universities and colleges, and provides year-round internships to local students from MSU and Lansing Community College.

The company expects the new building to be a recruiting tool that will include modern design, open work areas, and employee comforts mimicking accommodations found at software companies based in Silicon Valley.

The Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) assisted TechSmith in identifying and evaluating locations throughout the region. Additionally, LEAP has been vital to partnering and packaging TechSmith’s project with key governmental agencies and local business partners. ■

## Hundreds of New Jobs to Invigorate Economic Activity in Charlotte and Surrounding Lansing Region with Shyft Group Expansion

**The Shyft Group, Inc.**, formerly Spartan Motors, is ramping up hiring at its Charlotte campus with plans to add hundreds of new jobs to help the commercial fleet and specialty vehicle manufacturer meet fleet vehicle demand in 2021. Shyft’s expansion project will bring an influx of new individuals, families, and economic activity to Charlotte and the surrounding Lansing region, including new students in K-12 schools, revenue for municipal services, shoppers to downtown retailers, new neighbors and homeowners, and additional philanthropic giving to support community needs.

“The Shyft Group has a long-standing history in Charlotte as it has served as our home base for more than 40 years,” said Daryl Adams, president and CEO of The Shyft Group. “Today, we have plants all over the country in which we build last-mile delivery vehicles. We choose to reinvest in Charlotte as a declaration of our commitment to our existing campus, this region, and our highly skilled workforce.”

The Shyft Group boasts multiple well-known and high-quality brands in the commercial vehicle industry, namely Utilimaster, Royal Truck Body,



DuraMag, Strobes-R-U’s, Spartan RV Chassis, and Builtmore Contract Manufacturing. The Shyft Group continues to expand steadily, broadening its presence from coast to coast across nearly a dozen states in recent years.

“From family-owned and homegrown in small-town Charlotte to an innovative global heavyweight industry player, we have witnessed The Shyft Group’s impressive expansion across the US in recent years under CEO Daryl Adam’s leadership and team,” said Bob Trezise, president and CEO of the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP). “The competition from other communities and states is intense for a growing company like Shyft. Our collective economic package won the day to benefit the community and its people, our region, and Michigan.”

LEAP facilitated partnerships with multiple economic development partners to secure comprehensive recruitment and job training support for the company’s expansive hiring. ■

# Great Lakes Reality Labs Launches Haptix Studio Experience and Emersion Created Through Virtual Reality

BY CASSADEE JACKSON, KOLT COMMUNICATIONS

**G**reat Lakes Reality Labs (GLRL) is a Lansing-based software development company focused on Virtual Reality content for education and training. GLRL has partnered with T3 to launch Haptix Studio, the Midwest's largest motion capture studio and digital media production space. T3 is the education and talent development network made up of the Lansing region business and educational leadership. GLRL will use the motion capture capabilities to develop state-of-the-art animations for its education and training programs.



“We have put together the right partners to create a facility that will support our efforts as well as give students an educational experience that can't be found anywhere else,” said Jim Curran, founder of Great Lakes Reality Labs. “It is also a unique resource for businesses in the region and a facility that will draw business activity to Lansing.” “I want to tip my hat to the Lansing School District and the Intermediate School Districts in Ingham, Clinton, Eaton, and Shiawassee counties for being great partners.”



In partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, Great Lakes Reality Labs has developed the Virtual Reality Learning Initiative (VIRLI).

VIRLI is a library of Virtual Reality content suitable for educational settings. In addition to the 56 camera OptiTrack system installed at Haptix, full video and production services are available.

“It is remarkable for Lansing to have the biggest motion capture studio in the Midwest,” said Brian Town, CEO of Michigan Creative and a Haptix Studio partner. “Haptix Studio will be a great asset for the Lansing business community and beyond.”

GLRL has significant ties to Michigan State University. Both Curran and Tommy Truong, President of GLRL, are MSU alumni. The company is focused on keeping talented developers and artists in the Lansing region. A majority of the 13 member GLRL team holds a degree from MSU.

Great Lakes Reality Labs is located at 2722 E. Michigan Avenue, Lansing 48912.

Haptix Studio is located in the Hill Center at 5815 Wise Rd., Lansing 48911. To learn more about Great Lakes Reality Labs and Haptix Studio, call (517) 513-6744, email [info@glrealitylabs.com](mailto:info@glrealitylabs.com), or visit [glrealitylabs.com](http://glrealitylabs.com). ■

# Did You Know: PPP Forgivable Loans Can Be Used to Help Fund Your Digital Transformation

BY SARAH JENNINGS, MANER COSTERISAN

**W**hen news broke in December that Congress had agreed on a second stimulus package, I was relieved help was finally on the way for the numerous business owners, clients, and friends trying to make things work in a challenging (in some cases nearly impossible) environment.

I'm a certified public accountant – but most importantly, I'm a trusted advisor for my clients – presidents, business owners, leaders, and financial decision-makers across the great state of Michigan. Sure, simplifying the complexities of legislation changes, accounting standards, and compliance is an aspect of my job. But as the industry has evolved, my colleagues and I serve a far more valuable role – advising our clients on how to solve the problems, keeping them up at night, while planning for what's next. Clearly, the new stimulus package will have an impact on their ability to plan (and sleep!).

When the nearly 5,500-page legislation hit the internet, my team locked ourselves in our respective home offices, scouring the lengthy package, learning the ins and outs of what it all meant. This exercise is not new for us – we experienced the evolving guidance around the CARES Act. But given today's current state of events, it's essential for an advisory firm like ours to gather answers to the pressing questions and give swift, accurate advice to our clients.

## Using PPP Funds to Enhance Technology

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, (CAA) offers various new and critically important financial resources for eligible borrowers – many of which may not have been assessable in previous rounds. One such allowance is the flexibility for organizations struggling with technology (a hindrance for many businesses and nonprofits prior to COVID and only exacerbated by the pandemic) to pay for cloud-based software and systems with forgiven PPP funding.



Jennings

The legislation defines this as a “covered expenditure.” That is, “a payment for any business software or cloud computing service that facilitates business operations, product or service delivery, the processing, payment, or tracking of payroll expenses, human resources, sales and billing functions, or accounting or tracking of supplies, inventory, records, and expenses.”

While there are a variety of covered expenditures outlined in the lengthy package, and the threshold to use 60% of the funding for payroll remains, this new provision allows organizations to spend up to 40% of their approved, forgivable PPP loans on upgrades to software and cloud computing capabilities with the goal to help struggling businesses pivot in a virtual world.

I highlight this allowance – among the many offered by the PPP – because of the tremendous opportunity it provides to those new to the PPP, those who have not yet applied for their forgiveness, and those with second draw funding – to update inefficient or outdated technology. Monthly subscription costs, implementation fees, upgrades, and ongoing support are all considered “covered expenditures.”

Suppose your organization is battling inefficient or outdated technology or you're looking toward a future that includes some remote or virtual working. In that case, I strongly encourage you to research your options and consider how forgivable PPP funds can help your business meet its goals. Cloud-based technology can provide you with comprehensive, real-time data to make better decisions and help you gain efficiencies, especially important in today's world. ■

## About the Author

*Sarah Jennings is a partner and director of community engagement at Maner Costerisan, an award-winning public accounting and business advisory firm headquartered in Lansing. Jennings is one of the firm's Paycheck Protection Program experts and oversees the firm's nonprofit niche, serving more than 400 nonprofits, charitable organizations, and associates across the state. A Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE), and Certified Association Executive (CAE), Jennings can be reached at [sjennings@manercpa.com](mailto:sjennings@manercpa.com).*



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## Lansing 5:01 Acquires Grand River Connection to Offer Monthly Networking Opportunities for Young Professionals

TWO LANSING ORGANIZATIONS JOIN FORCES TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN EMERGING TALENT TO THE REGION

**M**ore than a decade ago, Lansing was remarkably different from the dynamic region we know today. Convincing young adults to live in the Lansing area, invest in local communities and find a career was significantly more challenging. Over the years, the capital city's metropolitan area has evolved into a collection of exciting destinations and thriving districts – populated with unique retail, locally-owned restaurants, and increased nightlife – that previously did not exist.



The region has seen a resurgence, renewed sense of energy, and better understanding of its strengths in the past decade. Lansing has played host to significant infrastructure investments, welcomed a newly crafted skyline, and developed a buzzing creative sector that draws local and global talent.

In the spring of 2005, there was no viable social network for those transitioning between life as a college student, young professionals, to settling down as a family. Grand River Connection (GRC) was established to offer monthly networking events for young professionals in their 20s and 30s to fill that gap. The diverse, non-partisan group provided fun, social, and professional connections that encouraged economic growth and community involvement in the Lansing region.

Recently celebrating its 15th anniversary, GRC boasts a networking event on the fourth Tuesday of every month, a quarterly professional speaker series, and co-leads the annual Ten over the Next 10 awards recognition event.

Lansing 5:01's acquisition of GRC will marry each organization's strengths to foster the region's talent retention and attraction efforts into the next decade and beyond.

"We are proud of the work that Grand River Connection has produced over the last 15 years, and we are excited about this new collaborative with Lansing 5:01 to ensure a continuum of services for the region's talent attraction and retention efforts," said Stephen Hershfield, president, GRC.

"Congruent with the growth of our region, Lansing 5:01's reach with emerging talent – and partnership with the region's top employers – has scaled exponentially since our inception five years ago," said Christopher Sell, founder and executive director, Lansing 5:01. The acquisition of Grand River Connection is a strategic opportunity to provide talent attraction and retention programming to the full spectrum of emerging professionals, including college interns, young professionals, and "boomerangs" looking to relocate to the area."

Lansing 5:01 is a non-profit organization and will retain the programs, name recognition, and logo for GRC. Rather than operating as two separate organizations with similar missions, GRC will become a regular networking and professional development series for local young professionals, as part of Lansing 5:01's suite of events. ■

## New Hires



Caldwell

Fraser Consulting, a full-service governmental and legislative affairs firm and a subsidiary of **Fraser Trebilcock** law firm, is pleased to announce the hiring of **Elvin L. Caldwell, Jr.** as a new legislative consultant. Before joining Fraser Consulting, Elvin worked in education and public relations, gaining valuable experience and recognition. In 2017, he was nominated for the Lansing Champions Award.



McHale

**James McHale** has joined **LAFCU** as chief financial officer. McHale has more than 20 years of executive experience with small-to-large credit unions. Positions he has held include CFO, COO, CEO, and chief risk officer. As CFO, McHale leads LAFCU's finance and accounting functions and serves as a financial and strategic business advisor to the CEO and broader leadership team.



Mays

**Delta Township** has selected its next community and economic development coordinator **Collin Mays**, who most recently served as economic development director in City Center, Michigan. Collin Mays comes to Delta Township with both economic and workforce development experience. Collin has worked in state and local government. He has also worked in the nonprofit sector.

**Sandee Donald** has joined **Ingham Intermediate School District (Ingham ISD)** as the deputy superintendent of instruction. The Ingham ISD Board of Education approved her hiring at their December meeting. Donald comes to Ingham ISD from the Columbus City Schools in Columbus, Ohio, where she served as the executive director of teaching and learning.



Allan

**LAFCU** has named **Rebecca Allan** commercial loan officer. Allan has worked in management for several Lansing-area financial institutions and has specialized in business banking and commercial lending since 2017. She was also customer service center supervisor for Jackson in Lansing, where she worked for nearly nine years.

## Awards

**PNC** continued to enjoy great success on many levels in the past year. Some of the prestigious recognitions accorded PNC in 2020 include: World's Most Admired Companies, Fortune; U.S. Best Bank, Euromoney Awards for Excellence; Best National Banks, Kiplinger; 100% Score on Disability Equality Index® (DEI®) Best Places to Work™; Top 50 Employers, CAREERS & the disABLED Magazine; Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality, Human Rights Campaign; Top LGBTQ+ Friendly, Black EOE Journal; Best Companies, Working Mother; Top 70 Companies for Executive Women, National Association for Female Executives; Gender-Equality Index (BFGEI), Bloomberg; Most Powerful Women in Banking and Finance, American Banker; 50 Out Front: Best Places

to Work for Women & Diverse Managers, Diversity MBA Magazine and Best of the Best Top Veteran-Friendly Companies, U.S. Veterans Magazine.



Susan Burhans receives her MVP award from Five Star Pizza's Eric Arnston

**Five Star Pizza Co. (FSPC)** presented **Susan Burhans** with its highest award naming her FSPC MVP. Susan joined the team on Feb. 3, 2020, and immediately had a positive impact on the organization. Susan helped create systems to operate better the business made the office run more smoothly and efficiently and helped FSPC navigate the difficult atmosphere that was 2020.

**CASE Credit Union** announced it was awarded the U.S. Small Business Administration Michigan District Office Community Diversity Lender of the Year Award for the 2019 fiscal year. This award recognizes CASE's help to give diverse small businesses in underserved markets the funds they need to start and grow.

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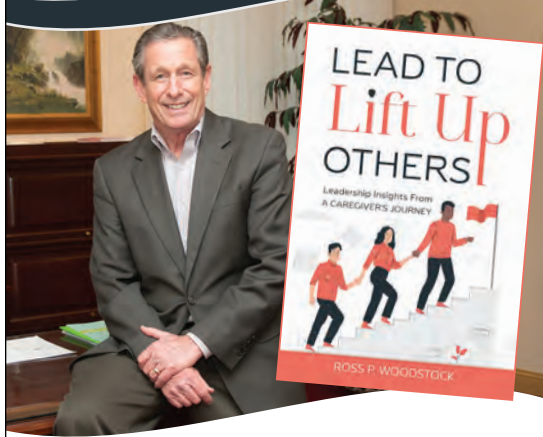
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**MSU Federal Credit Union** has received a Top Workplace Award in the large employer category from the Detroit Free Press for the eighth consecutive year. The news organization recognized 150 companies in Michigan as Top Workplaces for 2020. The awards were based on results from surveys completed by company employees.



Scholarship winners, bottom row from left, Abigail Payment, Adam Eichenberg, and Madeline Smith are honored at a virtual presentation for the LAFCU Write to Educate Essay Contest. Also pictured are LAFCU's Alyssa Troub, top right, and Kelli Ellsworth Etchison, bottom row center, The Arc of Mid-Michigan's Lynn Brenckle, and Madalyn Holyfield, and Child and Family Charities' Julie Thomasma.

Four recent high school graduates have won a \$2,500 college scholarship through LAFCU's Write to Educate Essay Contest: **Abigail Payment**, Ovid; **Adam Eichenberg**, St. Johns; **Madeline Smith**, Grand Ledge; and **Jack LaFevre**, South Lyon. Typically, two winners are selected for this annual contest. Still, with the state's stay-at-home orders closing schools and interrupting seniors' final classes, traditions, graduation ceremonies, and possibly college plans, LAFCU decided to support more graduates.

**Board of Directors**

**Eaton RESA** joined 538 local and 56 intermediate school districts across Michigan to celebrate January as School Board Recognition Month. The men and women serving on the Eaton RESA Board of Education are **Debbie Roberts**, president from Eaton Rapids; **Denise DuFort**, vice president from Grand Ledge; **Mark Rushford**, secretary from Maple Valley; **Jack Temsey**, treasurer from Potterville; and **Max Baxter**, trustee from Charlotte.

**Mason Public Schools** also recognized those individuals who approach their volunteer work like it is a full-time job and extraordinary dedication to public schools. They are citizens whose decisions affect our children and build our community. The men and women serving Mason Public Schools and their years of service are **Ralph Beebe** – 21 years, **Kurt Creamer** – 8 years, **Liz Evans** – 4 years, **Christopher Mumby** – 4 years, **Michael Kelly** – 2 years, **Patrick O'Connor** – 2 years, and **Steve Duane** – 1 year.

**Promotions**

**Rehmann**, a fully integrated financial services and advisory firm, announced it is celebrating the promotion of associates throughout Michigan.

At Rehmann's Lansing location, **Chris Hundt** has been promoted to principal. Hundt provides business management, consulting, tax planning, and tax preparation services to physicians and dentists and their practices. He is also a member of the firm's Healthcare Leadership Group, working with industry specialists from around the firm to share best practices and develop proactive ideas.



Kotlarczyk

**Lauren Kotlarczyk** has been named assistant vice president of community development at **MSU Federal Credit Union (MSUFCU)**. She oversees the Credit Union's Business Development, Community Development, and Financial Education departments in Greater Lansing and Oakland County. Kotlarczyk joined MSUFCU in 2009 as a Marketing intern, then moved to other roles at the Credit Union within the Internal and Corporate Communications, Community Relations, Marketing and Communications, and Community Development departments.

**Bethany Christian Services**, an international nonprofit that is changing the world through family, named **Krista Stevens** the new director of its East Lansing branch. She will oversee all of Bethany's programs and operations in the Lansing area. Stevens has nearly ten years of experience in social work and child welfare. She is taking over the branch director role from Rachel Willis, who now serves as the vice president of regional operations at Bethany's headquarters in Grand Rapids.



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**Foster Swift Collins & Smith, P.C.** attorneys **Allison M. Collins**, **Leslie A. Dickinson**, **Julie L. Hamlet**, **Mark T. Koerner**, **Warren H. Krueger**, and **Michael C. Zahrt** have been elected as shareholders of the firm. Collins practices from the firm's Lansing office, where she has extensive experience in environmental litigation

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in both state and federal courts. Dickinson is a member of Foster Swift's municipal and general litigation practice groups. Hamlet practices from the Grand Rapids office as a member of the firm's health care and employee benefits practice groups. Koerner practices from the Lansing office. He helps municipal entities, businesses, and information technology clients find practical solutions to complex problems. Krueger practices in the firm's Lansing office as a member of the trusts and estates practice group. Zahrt practices from the Grand Rapids office as a member of the firm's business and tax and trusts and estates practice groups.

### Company News

The **City of Lansing** and **Arts Council Greater Lansing** are proud to announce round-one FY 2021 City of Lansing Arts and Culture Arts Projects Grants totaling \$40,000 to two local arts and cultural organizations. These grants are funded through the City of Lansing and administered by the Arts Council of Greater Lansing. The 2021 art projects include Lansing Art Gallery & Education Center's ARTpath, which will provide a public art display in 20 sites featured along the historic Lansing River Trail for the Summer of 2021. Also, Lansing 5:01's Dam Jam, a riverside music festival, stretching over a mile of the Lansing River Trail, featuring a lineup of over 15 Michigan bands with a headlining performance in-the-round at the Brenke Fish Ladder.

East Lansing focuses its efforts on sharing information about the Downtown Merchant Community in a new and interactive way. The City has launched Explore **Downtown East Lansing**. This new web app that allows community members to find the location, business name, address, block number, and website for each business using an interactive map. The app also has a featured section to highlight business stories and information about COVID-19 recovery activities and safety measures.

Remember your first bike? The feeling of freedom, speed, and knowing you have something that was unmistakably yours is one that doesn't soon fade. Nearly 30 children in the Lansing area were able to experience that excitement over the holidays thanks to some **McLaren Greater Lansing** employees' generosity. The donations are part of the **McLaren Greater Lansing Foundation's** Simple Gift Holiday Tree program, a staple of holiday giving at McLaren for the past 10 years.

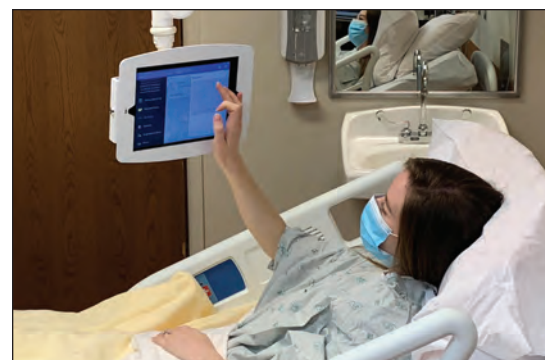
**Lansing Community College** students, faculty, and staff came together to create an expression of hope and resilience by joining together virtually in song with their rendition of "We Shall

Overcome." With opening remarks by LCC President **Dr. Steve Robinson**, who also sings with the choir, 24 participants rehearsed and recorded themselves. It was led by **Dr. Jonathan Ten Brink**, faculty chair of the music program, LCC. Ten Brink, the mastermind behind the endeavor chose the staple of the Civil Rights movement for the virtual choir because, "as individuals and a community, we are overcoming so many things, and this song of protest and hope brings individuals together as a community to inspire others."

Thank you to the Community Foundation and **Jackson National Life Insurance Company® (Jackson)** for their generous grants to support efforts and activities that will enable **The Davies Project** to grow and help more children be healthy, and families are hopeful. Pre-pandemic, an estimated 6,000 children in our community could be healthier if they had regular, reliable rides to medical appointments. Healthy children do better in school and achieve their future potential. Parents who are not stressed about losing their jobs due to a child's illness are more productive at their jobs and more financially secure.



**First National Bank of Michigan ("FNB")** has announced a \$1,000,000 investment to support affordable housing development in partnership with Cinnaire and the Michigan Bankers Association Service Corporation (MBASC). The investments are part of First National Bank of Michigan's commitment to expanding access to high-quality, affordable housing, a key driver of economic mobility and family stability.



As the holidays approach, **Sparrow** – through the generosity of a matching challenge grant from the **Dart Foundation** and support from donors like **PNC Bank** – is providing every inpatient room with an iPad so patients can communicate with their loved ones. The new equipment,

which is being installed in over 600 rooms, will allow patients to stay in touch with their family and friends while visitor restrictions are in place during the pandemic.

In response to the devastating business impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the **East Lansing Downtown Management Board (DMB)** has launched the Yiftee eGift Card Program for Downtown East Lansing businesses. Through a second-round of promotional programming, customers can go online and purchase Downtown East Lansing gift cards to be redeemed at 30 downtown businesses. If you spend \$25 or more, you receive a \$10 gift card for free; if you buy \$50 or more, you receive a \$20 gift card for free; and if you buy a \$100 or more, you receive a \$40 gift card for free.

The **Shyft Group** (formerly Spartan Motors) held a hiring event in December in Charlotte. Shyft will be hiring up to 70 employees. The event will take place with candidates staying in their vehicles while being interviewed.

More state-funded grants are on the way for small businesses that continue to be battered by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) has approved a Small

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Business Survival Grants program, administered by the **Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)** in partnership with regional economic development organizations around the state. The survival grant program will specifically assist small businesses and nonprofits impacted by the state Health Department December 2020 Gatherings and Mask Order. The **Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP)** will receive \$3 million to provide 194 \$15,000 working capital grants to eligible small businesses and nonprofits across Clinton, Eaton and Ingham counties.

**Lansing Housing Commission** and Communities in Schools of Michigan have teamed up to bring the love of reading to children. With this partnership, families who live within the 48906-zip code can register for a free new book for their children up to the age of 5. Each month, a high quality, age-appropriate book is addressed and sent to all registered children. By adding this new zip code, residents who live in Lansing Housing Commission properties and area neighborhoods can now register for the *Imagination Library* program.

The economic and business development agency formerly known as the Clinton County

Economic Alliance is officially announcing it has rebranded as **Clinton County Catalyst**. The Board of Directors recognizes the new name more accurately defines the role the organization plays as a resource to bring about positive change and reinvention throughout Clinton County.

**MSU Federal Credit Union (MSUFCU)** employees celebrated the 83rd anniversary of the Credit Union's founding by paying it forward with acts of kindness. Since 2012, MSUFCU employees have marked the Nov. 15, 1937, founding of the Credit Union with a weeklong celebration highlighting one of its key values: Giving back to the community. As part of the Pay It Forward initiative, the Credit Union donated \$8,300 to nonprofit organizations and local heroes chosen by employees. Recipients each received between \$200 and \$500.

**Sparrow Forensic Pathology Services** has released its Q3 report on drug-related deaths in the five counties in which Sparrow serves as Medical Examiner. The report shows a 70% rise in drug-related deaths from July 1 to Sept. 30 of this year, with large jumps in mortality due to opioid and fentanyl use. The report provides detail on each drug death and the type of drug involved. The report and other forensic

pathology findings, can be found at <https://www.sparrow.org/omereports>.



*Ingham ISD Superintendent Jason Mellema receives his COVID-19 vaccine.*

Early on in the pandemic, Governor Whitmer declared educators as essential workers. As group 1B began to take form, this group of essential workers rose to the top of the list at the **Ingham County Health Department (ICH D)**. I C H D ,

**Ingham ISD, CareATC, and SETSEG** came together to structure a plan for educators to begin to receive the vaccine. This plan prioritized vaccines for school employees who are currently providing face-to-face instruction and those who are making plans to return to face-to-face in the

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future, at a later date. Of the more than 5,000 education employees surveyed in the Ingham ISD service area, over 70% were ready to get the vaccine as soon as possible. CareATC, SETSEG and the ICHD set up and facilitated educators' the vaccination process through the MSU Pavilion. Ingham ISD worked with local districts to register based on their current instructional model. Some districts are still waiting to register for the vaccine as they are not currently teaching face-to-face.

**MSU Federal Credit Union** has opened its newest branch at 6051 Sashabaw Road in Clarkston. The new branch is conveniently located off Interstate 75, between Waldon and Maybee roads. It replaces the Credit Union's location two miles south at 8055 Ortonville Rd. in Clarkston. Nearly 5,000 Credit Union members and 30,000 community residents live within five miles of the new Sashabaw Branch.

**PFCU** is honoring teachers with donations through their Cash for Classrooms Program. Now through the end of May, teachers have the opportunity to be entered to win \$150 to use toward their classroom. This is PFCU's first year offering this program. The credit union's goal

is to recognize teachers' dedication and hard work throughout the communities they serve, particularly as they have faced the challenges of adapting to new classroom norms. Through PFCU's online submission form, teachers can be nominated by a community member or enter themselves for the opportunity to win \$150 through Cash for Classrooms Program.

Twenty-three entrepreneurs from across Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, and Shiawassee counties are taking important next steps toward building or growing their businesses as part of the second program of One and All, an *inclusive entrepreneurship initiative* created in 2020 by the **Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP)** and funded by the **Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)** and the **Consumers Energy Foundation**. The inaugural program began Aug. 26, 2020, and graduated 17 participants Oct. 22, 2020.

**LCC Emergency Management** has been working in partnership with the Ingham County Health Department to administer the COVID-19 vaccine at the MSU Pavilion. First responders and frontline workers started receiving the vaccine a few weeks ago. LCC

employees assisted in the registration process as people drove in to receive their vaccination. ■



**If your organization has news to share, whether it's a recent promotion, award, distinction or new hire, please send your news releases or a short paragraph highlighting the good news to Ashley Sandborn, director of marketing and communications, LRCC, at [asandborn@lansingchamber.org](mailto:asandborn@lansingchamber.org).**



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*It was a great start to the 2021 virtual Member Mixer series, which started strong with nearly 60 people in attendance for the Jan. 12 networking event. A special thanks to Casey Jacobsen, Max Muncey, and Carlito Mojica from LaFontaine Auto Group for their generous sponsorship of the January event. We were proud to support Mother & Earth Baby Boutique in Old Town and provide five \$20 gift cards to our lucky winners: Kathy Valentine, Peg Arnold, Justin Huan, Amanda Bauerschmidt, and Chelsea Roberts! The group was engaged and shared great content in the chat function, while also connecting more intimately in the smaller breakout rooms. Thank you to all who attended and made the program a success!*

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