

FOCUS Magazine talks with Gita Mahabir-Kohlsmith and Kathy Valentine to explore their experiences as women navigating the business world.

# FOCUS

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

MARCH 2024



## WOMEN *in Business*

Businesswomen Shape Successful Careers  
with Grit and Dedication

### *In This Issue*

Black Businesswomen Build Community With New Roundtable Group  
Capital-Area Leaders Work Together to Bring Career-Connected Courses to High Schoolers  
Meet the Seven New LRCC Board Members

# Leading Women in **Commercial Real Estate**

Julie, Nicole, and Amy are trailblazers in the Lansing commercial real estate industry, specializing in the Industrial, Office, and Retail sectors. Their achievements not only inspire those within the industry but also serve as a beacon of empowerment for aspiring women professionals everywhere.

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LANSING REGIONAL CHAMBER  
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WITH GRIT AND DEDICATION**

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## 2024 Board of Directors

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**Roger Graff / Farm Bureau Insurance Co.**

**Glenn Granger / Granger Construction Company**

**Robyn Howell / LAFCU**

**Katie John / Michigan State University**

**David Lewis / AT&T**

**Jeff Metts / Dowding Industries**

**Julie Mann / Neogen**

**Eric Musser / Auto-Owners Insurance Co.**

**Tom Ruis / PNC**

**Lisa Webb Sharpe / Peckham**

**Lisa Ellen Smith / InVerve Marketing**

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**David Zylbe / Jackson National Life**

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Leadership Circle investors are proven business and community leaders. We value their commitment to strengthen our region through their leadership and appreciate the important role they play in advancing the Lansing Regional Chamber's mission.

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[twitter.com/LansingChamber](https://twitter.com/LansingChamber)

[Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce](https://www.youtube.com/LansingRegionalChamber)

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[Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce](https://www.linkedin.com/LansingRegionalChamber)

# Lansing Regional Chamber Promotes Professional Growth For All

In this month's issue of *FOCUS Magazine*, we commemorate Women's History Month by celebrating the exceptional contributions of women business leaders in the Lansing region. The cover story, for instance, shares the wisdom of C-suite executives and local entrepreneurs who've made their marks in the business world.

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) has a long history of championing women's leadership roles, including with its support of ATHENA Lansing. ATHENA was created in 1982 by then-Chamber board member Martha Mertz.

ATHENA is now an international movement, growing locally to include ATHENA WIN, the ATHENA Leadership Award, and ATHENA *PowerLink*. We just recently unveiled the ATHENA Lansing Hall of Fame at the Lansing Center, honoring every ATHENA Leadership Award recipient since the program's inception. If you haven't already, I hope you'll visit the permanent installation soon.

ATHENA is a powerful piece of the LRCC's work to promote the professional growth and development of women in our community, but we're always looking to do more. The LRCC board continues to diversify your leadership to better represent our evolving and diverse business community.



Since 1901, 12 women have served as board chairs. Most of those appointments have happened in the last decade alone. I'm very proud of the fact that by the end of 2025, we will have had seven female board chairs since 2012.

It's about more than gender. The LRCC is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that empowers our regional business community to be equitable, inclusive, and prosperous.

The LRCC's DEI Executive Roundtable will begin work with its 2024-2025 cohort in April. The 12 monthly roundtable sessions offer business leaders, from CEOs to small business owners, a chance to learn best practices and approaches to strengthen DEI in their organizations. These meetings allow executives to learn how to grow professionally and as businesses through greater inclusivity.

We at the Chamber hope to offer you the resources and tools that let you create equitable environments for everyone in your organization. We celebrate Women's History Month and the outstanding women leaders, entrepreneurs and small business owners that contribute significantly to our region's growth. Together, we can embrace the diversity of our region to help our business community thrive. ●



**TIM DAMAN**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
LANSING REGIONAL  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Together, we can embrace the diversity of our region to help our business community thrive."

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](https://lansingchamber.org) and enter your username and password. If you have not yet signed into the site, please follow the simple password reset instructions.

**Call (517) 487-6340 with any questions.**

## Thank You Renewing Members

ACD.net  
Adna Technologies  
Bekum America Corporation  
Black Wall Street of Lansing  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan  
Boys & Girls Club of Lansing  
Brookshire Townhomes (Abrico, Ltd)  
Buddy's Pizza - Okemos  
Capital Region Community Foundation  
Capital Steel & Wire, Inc.  
Capitol Fundraising Associates  
Castle Pointe Apartments - Monarch Investment  
CBRE, Inc.  
Cohl, Stoker & Toskey, P.C.  
Comerica Bank  
Consumers Credit Union  
Courtyard by Marriott East Lansing/Okemos  
Crime Stoppers of Mid-Michigan  
Davenport University  
DeLau Fire & Safety, Inc.  
Duckett Brothers Distributing  
Extend Your Reach  
Fahey Schultz Burzych Rhodes PLC  
Fairfax Apartments  
Farm Bureau Insurance Company  
Granger Waste Services  
Great Lakes Christian College  
Great Lakes Realty Labs/Haptix Studio  
Guy Hurley Insurance & Surety Services  
Habitat for Humanity Capital Region  
Harrison Roadhouse  
Impact Solutions  
Impression 5 Science Center  
Jack Miceli - Edward Jones

Kolt Communications, Inc.  
L.D. Clark Companies  
La Fille Gallery  
Lakewood Apartments - Monarch Investment  
Lehman, Wesley & Associates, Inc.  
Len's Carpet Care  
Leon's Transmission Repair, Inc.  
Life Insurance Association of Michigan  
Liskey's Auto & Truck Service  
Maurer's Textile  
Michigan Health & Hospital Association  
Michigan High School Athletic Association  
Michigan Legislative Consultants  
Michigan State University Foundation  
MP Social  
MSU Federal Credit Union (MSUFCU)  
NCG Eastwood Cinema  
Northwestern Mutual of East Lansing  
PFCU  
Publicom  
Redhead Creative Consultancy  
Reid Machinery, Inc.  
Richardson & Richardson Consulting, LLC  
RSDC of Michigan  
Specialty Eye Institute  
Stifel Financial  
Student Book Store, Inc.  
Sunrise Cleaning And Construction Services  
Superior Services RSH Inc.  
T.A. Forsberg, Inc.  
T.H. Eifert, LLC Mechanical Contractors  
Transnation Title Agency of Michigan  
ZenBusiness

## Welcome New Members

### Apex Automotive Group

(517) 356-1430  
[goapexautomotive.com](http://goapexautomotive.com)  
207 Bell Street  
Lansing, MI 48906

### Campbell Home Sales

(517) 204-5557  
[campbellhomesales.com](http://campbellhomesales.com)  
3490 Belle Chase Way  
Lansing, MI 48911

### Capital Imaging

(517) 482-2292  
[capital-imaging.com](http://capital-imaging.com)  
2521 E. Michigan Ave.  
Lansing, MI 48912

### Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities

(989) 233-0500  
[chapmancommunities.org](http://chapmancommunities.org)  
8020 Forsyth Blvd.  
St. Louis, MO 63105-1707

### Collective Wellness Counseling and Consulting

(810) 328-3574  
[collectivewellnesscc.com](http://collectivewellnesscc.com)  
120 N. Washington Square  
Lansing, MI 48933

### Entrepreneurial Operating System

(517) 599-2360  
[eosworldwide.com/ryan-jankovic](http://eosworldwide.com/)

### Medilodge

(517) 332-0817  
[medilodge.com](http://medilodge.com)  
2815 Northwind Dr.  
East Lansing, MI 48823

### Medilodge of Campus Area

(517) 332-0817  
[medilodgeofcampusarea.com](http://medilodgeofcampusarea.com)  
2815 Northwind Dr.  
East Lansing, MI 48823

### Medilodge of Capital Area

(517) 272-4029  
[medilodgeofcapitalarea.com](http://medilodgeofcapitalarea.com)  
2100 Provincial House Dr.  
Lansing, MI 48910

### Medilodge of East Lansing

(517) 332-5061  
[medilodgeofeastlansing.com](http://medilodgeofeastlansing.com)  
1843 N. Hagadorn Rd.  
East Lansing, MI 48823

### Medilodge of Lansing

(517) 323-9133  
[medilodgeoflansing.com](http://medilodgeoflansing.com)  
731 Starkweather Dr.  
Lansing, MI 48917

### Medilodge of Okemos

(517) 319-1400  
[medilodgeofokemos.com](http://medilodgeofokemos.com)  
5211 Marsh Rd.  
Okemos, MI 48864

### Sensory Marketing Pros

(800) 808-5113  
[sensorymarketingpros.com](http://sensorymarketingpros.com)  
3842 Sandhill Rd.  
Lansing, MI 48911

## Chamber Milestones

*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!*

**The Christman Company**  
70 Years

**Gorsline-Runciman Funeral Homes**  
70 Years

**Michigan Association of Counties**  
30 Years

**EVE, Inc.**  
15 Years

**Cypress Home Care, Inc.**  
10 Years

**SpotlightMedia Studios**  
10 Years

**Waggoner Financial Group**  
10 Years

**Anderson Economic Group**  
5 Years

**EDL Energy**  
5 Years

**Keller Williams Realty Lansing**  
5 Years

**Newkirk Electric**  
5 Years

**Plumbers & Pipefitters Local Union 333**  
5 Years

**PTAC of South Central Michigan (APEX Accelerator of South Central MI)**  
5 Years

## March 2024

3/1

### FIRST FRIDAY LRCC PUBLIC AFFAIRS CALL UPDATE (VIRTUAL ONLY)

Friday, March 1, from 11 to 11:30 a.m.  
ZOOM

Join us every First Friday of the month for an insightful briefing on policy and political developments impacting the business community. Hosted by LRCC Public Affairs Senior Vice President, Steve Japinga, these monthly calls are designed to keep our members informed and engaged.

**Cost:** This event is offered at no cost.

3/5

### MARCH LANSING ECONOMIC CLUB: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PANEL

Tuesday, March 5, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center,  
219 S. Harrison Road, East Lansing

Proudly sponsored by Consumers Energy, this event will feature a panel of local leaders who will share their insights into leadership. Gain valuable perspectives on their personal journeys to leadership, the key elements of successful leadership, and the significance of mentoring others to cultivate future leaders. Panelists include Lisa Corless, president & CEO, AF Group; Margaret Dimond, Regional President, University of Michigan Health; Lisa Webb Sharpe, Ed.D., chief operating officer, Peckham, Inc. And Nicole Noll-Williams, president & CEO, Capital Region Airport Authority. Jessica Tramontana, community affairs manager, Consumers Energy, will moderate the program.

**Cost:** Tickets are offered at no charge for Lansing Economic Club members, \$55 for LRCC members and \$75 for future LRCC members. A table of eight is \$425.

3/7

### ATHENA WIN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT SERIES: AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP – EMBRACING YOUR UNIQUE STYLE

Thursday, March 7, from 8 to 9:30 a.m.

Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce,  
500 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite 200, Lansing

In this engaging session, career coach, Chelsea Jay, will explore the key characteristics of authentic leaders, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, transparency, and leveraging individual strengths. Through interactive activities, you'll have the opportunity for self-reflection, discovering your personal leadership values and learning to communicate authentically.

**Cost:** This event is offered at no cost for ATHENA WIN members and \$25 for future ATHENA WIN members.

3/12

### MARCH MEMBER MIXER

Tuesday, March 12, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.  
Playmakers, 2299 W. Grand River Avenue,  
Okemos

Mingle with fellow chamber members while enjoying delicious refreshments and exploring the latest offerings from Playmakers, one of the premier sports and fitness retailers in the region. This is a fantastic opportunity to connect with professionals from various industries, exchange ideas, and foster meaningful business relationships in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. Whether you're a seasoned networker or new to the scene, everyone is welcome to join!

**Cost:** This event is offered at no cost.

3/12

### CHAMBER 360

Thursday, March 21, from 8:30 to 10 a.m.  
Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce,  
500 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite 200,  
Lansing

As a current member or a business considering joining the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC), it is critically important that you understand and utilize the tools, resources and relationships available to you through your membership investment. The Chamber 360 program provides an intimate venue for you to connect with other members, provide brief remarks, meet the LRCC team and take a deeper dive into a LRCC membership.

**Cost:** This event is offered at no cost.

## LRCC BUSINESS ROUNDTABLES

### Delta Township – Eaton County

Wednesday, March 6, from 9 to 10 a.m.  
Ohana Sushi, 707 Brookside Drive, Lansing

### Lansing – Delhi Township

Wednesday, March 13, from 9 to 10 a.m.  
American Red Cross-Mid Michigan Chapter,  
1729 E. Saginaw Street, Lansing

### East Lansing – Meridian Township

Wednesday, March 20, from 9 to 10 a.m.  
Delta Dental of Michigan,  
4100 Okemos Road, Okemos

### Clinton County

Wednesday, March 27, from 9 to 10 a.m.  
AgroLiquid, 3055 W. M-21, St. Johns

## Unfolding Careers & Transforming Lives: Origami's Recipe for a Supportive Work Culture

By: Mari Moyer, Origami Rehabilitation



In the lively capital city, Origami Rehabilitation has established itself as a choice employer dedicated to transforming the lives of its clients and team. Origami, a leading provider of rehabilitation services, has served children and adults with neurological, developmental, mental health, and orthopedic conditions for over 26 years.

Origami was recently named a Top Workplace by the *Detroit Free Press*. The prestigious award highlights Origami's commitment to fostering an exceptional workplace environment where employees can learn, grow, and make a difference.

"Origami's mission is to create opportunities and transform lives, and this mission applies to our employees just as much as it applies to our clients. This recognition is a testament to the hardworking and passionate individuals that make up Team Origami," said Tammy Hannah, President & CEO of Origami.

Origami places a substantial emphasis on retaining and nurturing its workforce, fostering professional growth and personal well-being, and positively impacting the community.

"As an employer, Origami focuses on ensuring employees feel supported, encouraged, valued, and know how their role directly contributes to Origami's mission. A recent employee survey found that 100% of Origami employees agreed their work specifically contributed to Origami's mission. When individuals see their contributions as integral to the team's positive impact on the community, work becomes more than a job; you become a part of a mission.

"Fostering a shared purpose is crucial for creating a work environment people want to be a part of for any employer. I also recommend leveraging your



current network to seek out new candidates, offering hiring incentives for your employees such as referral bonuses, engaging your workforce through surveys and stay interviews to drive retention strategies, and continuously working to inspire your team by engaging them in your core values and mission," said Tori Richards, Director of Human Resources at Origami. ●



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**NovaCare Rehabilitation** held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at their new center located at 1665 Hamilton Road, Suite 100 in Okemos. The center has a team of friendly and trusted physical therapists who can answer patients' questions regarding their care and help with physical therapy, aquatic therapy, lower back rehabilitation, and much more. NovaCare Rehabilitation is a part of the largest therapy network in the U.S. They are committed to providing exceptional patient care every day to support the health and wellness of others.



Congratulations to **Beirut Kitchen** at the Lansing Shuffle on their ribbon-cutting ceremony! The latest restaurant addition to the food hall and social club offers a diverse range of Mediterranean dishes. These include chicken shawarma served over rice, hummus, and kebabs. They also have a great selection of vegetarian options from falafel to deep-fried cauliflower.

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# Meet the New Lansing Regional Chamber Board Members

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce is delighted to welcome seven new board members to its 2024 Board of Directors. Learn more about the seven newcomers below.

## **Kwafo Adarkwa, ITC Holdings**

As Director of Public Affairs for ITC Michigan, Kwafo Adarkwa builds relationships with policy stakeholders and leads efforts to foster a public policy environment conducive to ITC Michigan's business priorities. Adarkwa has degrees from Michigan State University, including BS in Electrical Engineering and MBA in Integrative Management.



Adarkwa

Adarkwa serves on the boards of Michigan State University Black Alumni Association, Clean Fuels Michigan, the Michigan Energy Innovation Business Council and Citizens Research Council of Michigan. Additionally, Adarkwa is a member of the American Association of Blacks in Energy and is a Commissioner on the Dr. Martin Luther King Commission of Mid-Michigan.

## **Paul Anderson, Granger Waste Services**

Paul Anderson has two decades of experience at Granger Waste Services, specializing in waste and recycling collection. As chief operating officer, Anderson is responsible for the development of the company's business strategies and for ensuring business goals are met. Anderson earned his bachelor's degree from Central Michigan University and graduated from Michigan State University's Executive MBA program in 2018.



Anderson

## **Margaret Dimond, University of Michigan Health**

Margaret Dimond, PhD, is an innovative and experienced healthcare leader. Dimond joined Sparrow in May of 2023 as President of Lansing-based Sparrow Hospital and was promoted to President of U-M Health Regional Network on September 1, 2023.



Dimond

Dr. Dimond has deep roots in Michigan and an extensive background in all facets of hospital operations, including acute care, ambulatory, and physician group experience. Dimond has a proven track record of success by leading caregivers toward common goals while maintaining a focus on caregiver and patient satisfaction, improved quality metrics, and financial performance.

## **Sarah Dolan, Michigan State University Federal Credit Union**

Sara Dolan, Chief Financial Officer of MSUFCU, joined the Credit Union in 2005. Dolan also serves as CFO of The Reseda Group, MSUFCU's wholly owned Credit Union Service Organization (CUSO) formed in 2021.



Dolan

Dolan has been instrumental in the Credit Union's growth and success, helping to triple the asset size in the 10 years since becoming CFO. Dolan donates her time and talents on the Board of Directors for several Lansing based business and philanthropic organizations.

## **Robyn Howell, LAFUCU**

Robyn Howell joined LAFUCU in 2017 as the credit union's human resources manager. Howell was promoted in 2018 to vice president of human resources and to chief human resources officer in 2021. Howell ascended to her current position as executive vice president and chief operating officer in 2023.



Howell

Howell's community service is exemplified by her involvement in various charitable initiatives and board service. She holds board positions with Boys and Girls Club of Lansing and the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce. Howell has extended her generosity to Sleep in Heavenly Peace, an organization dedicated to helping children in need sleep better, and Habitat for Humanity.

## **Katie John, Michigan State University**

Katie John serves as Michigan State University's Interim Vice President for Government Relations. In her role, John represents MSU with stakeholders from federal, state, and local government. John brings over 20 years of legislative experience, with a focus on higher education funding and policy.

Prior to joining the MSU team, John served as the Associate Vice President of Government Affairs at Western Michigan University, having held that position since 2006. Prior to her work at WMU John held positions at the Senate Democratic Policy Office, Senate Democratic Communications staff, and the Office of Senate Minority Leader Bob Emerson. John earned a B.A. from Michigan State University and an M.P.A. from Western Michigan University.



John

Prior to Neogen, Mann held leadership roles at Holland Corporation, Herman Miller, Webasto Thermo & Comfort North America, and more. Mann holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Northeastern Illinois University and a Masters of Science in Human Resources and Industrial Relations from Loyola University Chicago's Quinlan School of Business.

**Eric Musser, Auto-Owners Insurance Company**

As Assistant Vice President at Auto-Owners Insurance Company, Eric Musser assists with legal claims supervision, market conduct/regulatory compliance and lobbying/government relations.



Musser

**Julie Mann, Neogen**

Julie Mann, MSIR, SPHR, CCP, is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Neogen Corporation, a food and animal safety company located in Lansing, Michigan. For more than 30 years, Mann has specialized in the development of effective people and business strategies that drive positive organizational change. Mann utilizes her expertise as a thought leader to continuously look for innovative new ways to anticipate and resolve both current and future HR issues.



Mann

Musser graduated from Western Michigan University with a Bachelors of Business Administration in marketing and received his law degree from Thomas M. Cooley Law School. Currently Musser is the Chairman of the Life Insurance Association of Michigan and serves on the Executive Committee of the Insurance Alliance of Michigan. ●

## A healthier take on health care coverage



You want your employees to get the care they need – and so do we. At Blue Cross, we work hard to provide the best coverage in Michigan. With more plan options, more efficient, higher quality care, and access to no-cost programs such as Coordinated Care Core, a Blue Cross plan adds up to smarter care and better coverage for you and your employees, so you can attract the best talent, and keep it too.

Visit [bcbsm.com/employers](http://bcbsm.com/employers) to see what a Blue Cross plan can do for your business.

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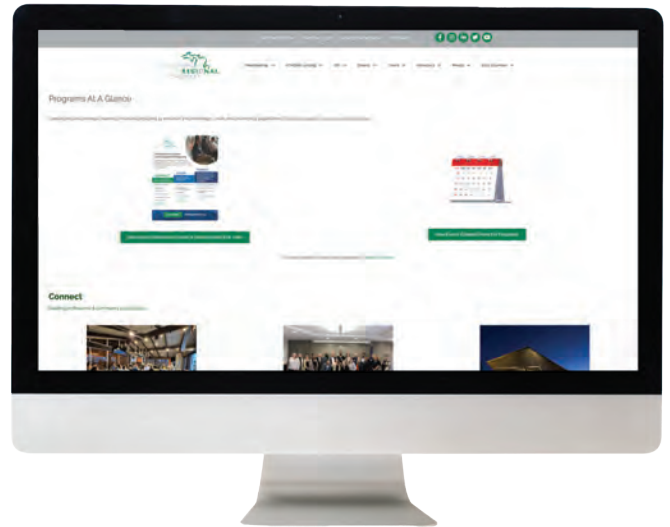
## Unlock Employee Growth & Business Success: Explore LRCC's Programs-at-a-Glance Web Page

The Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) is excited to announce a new addition to its website – the Programs at a Glance web page! Discover a wide variety of specialized and strategic learning initiatives designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, and leadership capabilities of business leaders, owners and employees.

Explore our events and programs and unlock the resources you and your employees need to connect, grow and thrive in today's business landscape.

Whether you're seeking strategic insights from executive roundtables or looking to enhance your team's skills through professional development workshops, our programs are tailored to provide essential resources and opportunities for networking, learning, and collaboration for business owners and employees.

Explore LRCC events and programs and unlock the resources you and your employees need to connect, grow and thrive in today's business landscape. Visit [www.lansingchamber.org/programs](http://www.lansingchamber.org/programs) to learn more. ●



**SADDLE  
BACK  
BBQ**

*dream*  
**BIG**  
and Grow  
Your Business

**Learn More**

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MSU FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

A promotional graphic for Saddle Back BBQ. On the left, a chef with a mustache, wearing a black polo shirt and a black apron, stands in front of a brick pizza oven. A pizza is cooking in the oven. The text 'SADDLE BACK BBQ' is overlaid in white on the bottom left. On the right, a dark green background features the text 'dream BIG and Grow Your Business' in white and green. Below this is a green button with 'Learn More' in white. At the bottom right is the MSU Federal Credit Union logo, consisting of three vertical bars and the text 'msufcu MSU FEDERAL CREDIT UNION'.

# TechSmith® Voices of Empowerment: Inspiring Quotes from Women in Tech

By: Emmie Musser, Future of Work Strategist and Director of Portfolio Growth Strategies at TechSmith

In the long evolution of women in business, many question if gender bias is still prevalent today. Amidst this dialogue, TechSmith, a global leader in visual communication and a 30+ year resident of mid-Michigan, stands out in the notoriously male-dominated tech industry.



Musser

## WHAT AM I DOING HERE?

Reflecting on my TechSmith journey, I'm reminded of the leap of faith I took over two years ago when I made the transition into the tech industry.

In conversations with my female colleagues at TechSmith, I discovered a common thread—a sense of serendipity in our journey into tech. Many of us didn't set out with the intention of working in this industry; rather, we stumbled upon it, drawn in by opportunity and curiosity. But stepping into this new realm stirred a whirlwind of emotions within us.

As women in tech, we shared feelings of imposter syndrome, casting doubts on our capabilities and qualifications. Yet, beneath the surface, a collective resolve—a willingness to speak up, to overcome obstacles, and to problem-solve. We share a passion for our work and a belief in our ability to effect positive change.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Here are insights from my colleagues. Through our collective experiences, we hope to ignite interest in creating a more inclusive and empowering future for women in tech and beyond.

### Overcoming Challenges

"In my career in tech, being in a non-tech role often led to misconceptions. My advice? Learn to say 'no thank you' and set boundaries early."

- **Jill Rinckey, Employee Experience Advocate**

### Unique Contributions

"Oftentimes women can represent or speak to a different perspective in tech... supporting each

other and speaking up has given us the confidence to succeed in our roles."

- **Stephanie Warnhoff, Senior Market Research Analyst**

"Being your authentic self will never make you second-guess your decisions. Authenticity means having a filter and taking into consideration the feelings and relationships of others. However, never regret doing what is right and good because it is right and good."

- **Michelle Massey, Vice President Community Engagement and Support Operations**

### Supporting Diversity

"It's important to create an environment where everyone's opinion is welcome, where they feel secure in sharing contrarian thinking, where everyone is treated with respect, and acknowledge that everyone brings value."

- **Chandra Owen, Instructional Designer, Lead**

### Challenges in Workforce

"Our biggest challenges are walking away from gender roles, as a whole... that flexibility can be huge for both the women, who have traditionally done family care, and for the men, to further embrace caring for families in a way that wasn't traditionally supported."

- **Dorie Blaisdell, Director, Engineering**

### Looking Forward

"My hope is that we won't be talking about women entering the tech industry. It will just be what it is."

- **Wendy Hamilton, CEO**

## JOIN US

These stories of doubt and discovery, of perseverance and growth, serve as guiding lights for those navigating similar paths.

Share your stories using #Lansingwomeninbusiness to inspire and celebrate women in business. Together, let's shape a more inclusive and empowering future. ●

# WOMEN *in Business*

## Businesswomen Build Successful Careers with Grit and Dedication

By Jennifer McEntee

**Women** have traditionally faced systemic inequality in the workplace. There is a greater ratio of men than women in paying jobs, and men are more often promoted to senior-level positions.

A woman in the U.S. who works full-time and year-round earns an average of 83.7 percent of what her male counterpart earns, according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Getting to the upper echelons of an industry as a female is often an uphill battle.

And yet strides are being made — here in Lansing and across the nation — to address gender gaps and embolden women to achieve professional gains.

In recognition of Women's History Month, *FOCUS Magazine* looked at the current terrain for women in business while checking in with local female executives serving at the top of their organizations and women entrepreneurs who've carved their own paths.

### THE CORPORATE LANDSCAPE

The largest study on the state of women in corporate America, "Women in the Workplace" conducted by McKinsey & Co. and LeanIn.Org, found that women are increasingly entering senior leadership roles. For instance, the number of women in C-suite positions has increased from 17 to 28 percent since 2015.

Put another way, women represent roughly 1-in-4 C-suite leaders, while women of color just 1-in-16, according to the 2023 study.

The "Women in the Workplace" study collected information from 276 U.S. organizations employing more than 10 million people. The research showed that

there is still a "broken rung" on the ladder to success for female employees. The so-called middle of the pipeline — at manager and director levels — has been slow to add women, making it difficult for women to advance to C-suite positions.

The shift to flexible work due to the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the playing field for many women interviewed for the national study. Women who work remotely or with a hybrid schedule have been better able to stay at their organization or avoid reducing their hours.

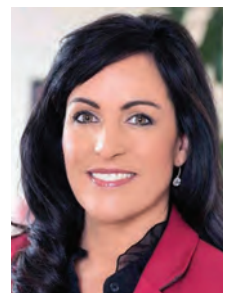
Women's personal lives — which often include responsibilities as family caregivers — can have as much priority as career ambitions when women are allowed flexible schedules and work locations. That elusive work-life balance becomes a possibility.

While all genders appreciate the potential for career advancement and flexible work schedules, the Women in the Workplace study suggests companies must do more to promote gender equity.

### SKY-HIGH VIEW

Nicole Noll-Williams, president and CEO of Capital Region Airport Authority, has drawn from her 25-plus years in the aviation industry to mentor others working to attain their professional goals.

"I firmly believe that by uplifting both women and men, we not only strengthen our communities but also create a ripple effect of positive change that extends far beyond our immediate surroundings," said Noll-Williams, noting that she, too, had mentors along her career path.



Noll-Williams



Morillo/Pexels

“My goal is to cultivate a culture where all employees and team members feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives,” she said.

Noll-Williams said she encourages diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace to foster innovation, creativity, and overall organizational success.

Each year, the Capital Region International Airport welcomes nearly half a million visitors and drives \$1 billion in economic impact for the mid-Michigan region.

Noll-Williams said she reached the top spot by starting in entry-level positions, then seizing every opportunity to learn more about airline operations, sales, marketing, and management.

“It’s important to embrace challenges as a natural part of the journey and use it as an opportunity to learn, adapt, and grow,” she said.

Despite the demanding nature of her job, Noll-Williams said her family helps her maintain an enriching work-life balance.

“Spending time with them rejuvenates me and gives me the necessary support to excel in my professional goals,” she said.

Noll-Williams said it’s essential that women define success on their own terms and pursue goals that align with their values and passions.

“My advice to both women and men aspiring to achieve success is to recognize that success is a deeply personal journey and may vary greatly from person to person,” she said.

### HEALTHY AMBITION

Gita Mahabir-Kohlsmith opened Mahabir Wellness in

Haslett in 2016 when the realities of her professional life and personal life met at a crossroads. As a newly single mom, she needed to shuttle her child between school and sports while continuing her work as both an esthetician and a counselor.

“I’ve always followed my own path in a way,” Mahabir-Kohlsmith said. “It’s been an intentional entrepreneurship that’s family-oriented.”

Her private practice offers in-house natural skincare and telehealth and in-person counseling sessions. Her tagline is “confidence, inside and out.”



Mahabir-Kohlsmith

Mahabir-Kohlsmith’s interest in skincare began in her teens, and she became a licensed esthetician by age 20. One-on-one work with clients sparked an interest in counseling, so she continued her education to become a licensed professional counselor. Mahabir-Kohlsmith said she grew her business slowly through networking and with the advice of mentors.

“You have a right to dream and achieve your goals,” she tells others considering entrepreneurship. “And network. You just never know. There are too many people out there who have gifts, and it’s reciprocal; you can lift each other up.”

She’s found kinship in the Lansing Chamber, the Meridian Area Business Association, and the National Association of Career Women. She’s grateful for the other professional women who’ve motivated her along the way.

“You have this support from them and it’s amazing,” she said. “It touches your life.”

### SUPPORT FUTURE LEADERS

Margaret Dimond, regional president of University of

Michigan Health, recommends every professional find a mentor, either formal or informal. With the goal of supporting young women with leadership aspirations, Dimond was among the founders of the Women's Leadership Institute at Michigan State University.

"When I started in healthcare, it was common that mentors were assigned to the up-and-coming males in the institution, but not females," Dimond recalled. "Inclusivity of all potential leaders, not just male and female, should be our mutual goal for advancement and cultivation. It can't come soon enough for the greater good of tapping emerging leaders to have gender as a non-issue."



Dimond

Dimond said her career has given her experience in mergers, acquisitions, management shakeups, and fiscal expectations. She's earned knowledge of how to anticipate and communicate about change.

"My advice for any emerging female leader is to have the attributes that all successful leaders embrace: humility, learning from others, listening more than you speak, absorbing the culture, and deciding when to pick your battles," Dimond said.

### A CLOSER LOOK AT DEI

Lisa Webb Sharpe said she's always had an aptitude for understanding how systems fit together in an organization. From there, she can create a strategic plan and help execute it.

While her career path may seem varied — local and state government roles, higher education, and now as chief operating officer of Peckham Inc., a nonprofit vocational rehabilitation organization — her focus has been on efficiency and leadership.

"I believe in working hard, working smart, and working on the things that matter to me," she said. "I'm just trying to be authentically who I am."

Peckham Inc. in Lansing is a nonprofit vocational rehabilitation organization focused on people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Webb Sharpe said Peckham has been evaluating its in-house diversity, equity, and inclusion progress, including reviewing how the organization recruits employees, trains staff, and creates a workplace culture.



Webb Sharpe

"I'm a proponent of diversity of thought," Webb Sharpe said. "Well, how do you get that diversity of thought? You get people with different perspectives and experiences that created those perspectives."

Peckham just completed a yearlong "inclusion academy" in which a consultant helped organization leaders examine their biases. Peckham also recently hired a "vice president of belonging" to foster workplace diversity and inclusivity.

Webb Sharpe is visually impaired and has, in recent years, been unable to do some of the in-person networking she might have otherwise done. "But I try not to let that limit what I am able to do," she said.

While she still puts in long hours at the office, she's deliberate about maintaining a work-life balance to spend time with family and friends, and for quiet reflection.

"I think reflection is a really important aspect of growth and leadership," said Webb Sharpe. "I think only when we reflect on what we think, how we move about the world, how we may have executed a particular interaction or a project, there's always learning. So, I'd like to have a continuous improvement mindset."

### SHOW UP, SPEAK UP

Lisa Corless is president and CEO of Lansing-based AF Group, a holding company for affiliated insurance brands. Before joining AF Group, Corless served as chief operating officer of Texas Mutual Insurance Co.

She credits her success to her dedication, resilience, and ongoing learning, but also to her mentors and AF Group colleagues. She said her first mentor was her dad, who introduced her to the business and taught her the importance of connecting with others.

"While the journey hasn't always been easy, when you're surrounded by those you respect and trust, it has tremendous meaning," Corless said. "My team has helped me realize there will always be obstacles and challenges, but we can grow and learn so much if we navigate them together."

AF Group staff has embraced the company's efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion, she said.

"Creating an inclusive environment allows us to truly connect with each other authentically, and it's one of the simplest but most significant ways we can show up," Corless said.



Corless



Corless said it's also essential that women speak up for themselves, offering their opinions whether or not they align with the opinions of others. Success isn't dependent on a woman's title in an organization but on how she uses opportunities to make an impact.

"You are unique, valued, and special, and should never underestimate what you bring to the table," she said.

## GROWING CONNECTIONS

Kathy Valentine, owner of The Plant Professionals, used her horticulture degree to build a company that hires diverse employees and works with a variety of clients.



Valentine

The business began in 1979, with Valentine hired as a plant care technician in 1980. By 1984, she was a partner, and in 1990 became the sole owner. She's grown the business from a one-person indoor plant shop to a multifaceted business on three acres with about 37 employees. The Plant Professionals offer a floral shop, plant rentals for events, holiday decorating, landscape design and construction, and green vertical walls for office lobbies.

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Valentine has occasionally had to explain to a customer that she has a wife, not a husband. And she mentors employees from various cultures she hopes will become the future of The Plant Professionals.

While she tries to be decisive in her small business, she's learned the value of listening to her staff for new ideas and perspectives.

"Of course, you have to be able to make decisions, but sometimes you need to hear several people at the table before you make decisions that are going to impact the course of your business," she said. "I've had to learn how to listen and trust other people with things. If I thought that everything had to have my personal touch on it, we would still be very small."

That trust is empowering to employees, she said.

Valentine said she interacts with business people from all over, but feels fortunate to have established her place in mid-Michigan.

"Lansing is like a big, small town," she said. "Just the community here. The people here want to help you grow. I feel well cared for here as a person and I'm grateful to be here." ●



## Economic Club - Women's Leadership Panel

Join the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce in commemorating Women's History Month as we highlight the exceptional contributions of four distinguished women leaders from the Greater Lansing community at the March Lansing Economic Club on Tuesday, March 5.

Proudly sponsored by Consumers Energy, this event will feature a panel of local leaders who will share their insights into leadership. Gain valuable perspectives on their personal journeys to leadership, the key elements of successful leadership, and the significance of mentoring others to cultivate future leaders.

### Panelists:

- **Lisa Corless**, president & CEO, AF Group
- **Margaret Dimond**, Regional President, University of Michigan Health
- **Lisa Webb Sharpe, Ed.D.**, chief operating officer, Peckham, Inc.
- **Nicole Noll-Williams**, president & CEO, Capital Region Airport Authority
- **Moderator:** Jessica Tramontana, community affairs manager, Consumers Energy

### When:

11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 5

### Where:

Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center  
219 S. Harrison Rd.  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1022

### Event Contact:

Ashlee Willis, 517-853-6463,  
[MichiganPremierEvents@lansingchamber.org](mailto:MichiganPremierEvents@lansingchamber.org)

Tickets are available at [lansingchamber.org](http://lansingchamber.org).

# First Friday Public Affairs Call Update Delivers Key Policy and Political Insights for Greater Lansing Businesses



The Lansing Regional Chamber’s public affairs department is hosting a monthly First Friday Public Affairs Call Update for an insightful briefing on policy and political developments impacting the business community here in the Greater Lansing region. From national down to regional updates, these monthly calls are designed to keep our members informed and engaged.

### Key event highlights include:

- **Monthly 30-Minute Calls:** These concise and informative sessions are designed to fit seamlessly into your schedule, ensuring you stay informed without taking up too much of your time.

- **ZOOM Video Conference:** Join us on the ZOOM platform for an interactive experience that brings the community together virtually.
- **Complimentary for LRCC Members:** As a benefit of LRCC membership, these calls come at no additional charge. It’s our way of ensuring you have the information you need to navigate today’s dynamic business environment.

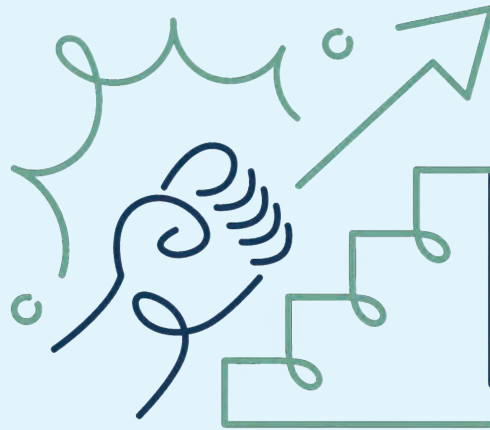
These updates are made possible by ITC Holdings Corp. To register for the First Friday Public Affair Call Update, please visit [lansingchamber.org](https://lansingchamber.org).

## Lansing Chamber Advocates for Sustainable Growth with Rebuild Lansing Plan

Lansing is on a precipice: across the city, efforts and investment that will strengthen our community for the long-term are well underway as we work toward a Lansing that can thrive for the sustainable future.

We can have a Lansing that offers more affordable housing, thriving community spaces, more resources for our students and neighbors, improved public safety, and a thriving downtown.

If we do this right, we can have ALL of that. But getting there is going to take action and that is why the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce put together an advocacy campaign to convey to Lansing city officials that they have a once-



in-lifetime opportunity to strategically invest in strengthening Lansing for the long-term. Every piece of the puzzle must fit together for Lansing to seize its potential. Enacting only one or two new initiatives will not transform our city.

This is an incredible opportunity for the capital city to position itself for future success.

We have had 60+ chamber members sending communications to Lansing

City Council encouraging them to act and support the Rebuild Lansing plan that has a city-wide impact, with a focus on strengthening downtown Lansing.

To learn more and make your voice be heard, please visit [www.rebuildinglansing.com](https://www.rebuildinglansing.com).

# Sparrow & ATHENA WIN: Empowering Women in Business

By Leslie Batchelor, Director of Health Equity and Community Partnerships, Sparrow & Board Chair, ATHENA Women's Interest Network

In March, we celebrate Women's History Month and, fittingly, this month's *FOCUS Magazine* cover story features women in business. Here in Lansing, we were history in the making when a local businessperson, Martha Mertz, founded ATHENA International more than 40 years ago.



Batchelor

Sparrow, soon to be known as UM Health-Sparrow, is proud to support women in leadership by providing a wide array of growth and development opportunities within our organization. These opportunities include mentoring programs, educational advancement, and a Women in STEM resource group. In fact, it was eight courageous and dedicated women who founded Sparrow hospital over 125 years ago and, currently, the majority of our leadership positions throughout our health system are held by women.

Sparrow is equally proud to support the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce and ATHENA Women's Interest Network (WIN) and have benefitted greatly from our membership. I encourage anyone interested in connecting with a group of inclusive and dynamic female leaders to join us at an upcoming ATHENA WIN event.

So, remember, as we recognize women throughout history and those making an impact here locally among our businesses, the ATHENA leadership principles that continue to remain true:

Live Authentically, Learn Constantly, Build Relationships, Foster Collaboration, Act Courageously, Advocate Fiercely, Give Back and Celebrate.

Here's to all our women leaders and those who support them – we salute you! ●

“  
Here's to all  
our women  
leaders  
and those  
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salute you!”



## 2024 ATHENA WIN Events & Programming Calendar – Save the Dates!

ATHENA Women's Interest Network (WIN) offers a wide range of events and programs that equip women in Mid-Michigan with the tools, information and connections they need to succeed in their careers. We invite you to connect with us during upcoming events. More information about ATHENA WIN and event registration is available at [lansingchamber.org/athenawin](https://lansingchamber.org/athenawin).

### PROFESSIONAL GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT SERIES

- March 7 | Authentic Leadership
- June
- August
- October

### GIRLS' NIGHT OUT EVENT SERIES

- May (first week) | Floral-making event
- September 11 | Dimondale Kayak
- November 7 | Holiday Event

### GIRLS' NIGHT OUT MEET-UP SERIES

- March 13 | Lansing Shuffle
- July 10 | Lansing Shuffle
- October 16 | (Location TBD)

### SIGNATURE EVENTS

- July 31 | Summer Social
- September 26 (Tentative Date) | Evening of Empowerment



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## Black Businesswomen Build Community with New Roundtable Group

**W**hat if successful female black business owners joined forces to elevate their work while encouraging other black women to pursue entrepreneurship?

At the Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce's senior member relations manager Daniel Rials' suggestion, an affiliate group with that mission is forming. Called the Black Women in Business Roundtable, the group of six and a facilitator have met in-person twice so far to determine how their alliance will move forward.

Together, they hope to work through business challenges, brainstorm ideas, and build a powerful support network.

Bernadette Johnson, owner of East Lansing leadership consulting firm Inspired Action Motivates LLC, said there is wisdom in the African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." For leaders of established businesses, "It's not necessarily about going faster. It's how can you create that sustainability," Johnson said.

As facilitator for the roundtable, Johnson will meet with the group quarterly for three-hour "mastermind huddles" for the business leaders to share perspectives and comradery. The group will have separate monthly meetings to share progress on their goals.

"They're all black women in business. It is hard enough," Johnson said. "From starting a business to maintaining it to building it, to getting funding, it's hard enough. And if you layer being a person of color on top of that, then it presents its own opportunities as well as challenges."

Dr. Carmen Thomas, founder and executive director of the Lansing nonprofit Transformation GEMS, said she and the other charter members of the Black Women in Business Roundtable have been friends, colleagues, and Chamber members for years. They hope by bringing together their collective expertise, they can

pass on some of the knowledge they've gained in their years of building respected businesses.

"We're serious in this space. We're not meeting just to have another meeting," Thomas said. "We are meeting because we want to make a difference in our businesses as well as in our community. We want to grow but also make a powerful impact within our city of Lansing and our community."



**Building Connection:** Carmen Thomas, Lisa Young, Ashlee Willis, Taunya Sims, Re'Shane Lonzo, Nikki Thompson Frazier and Bernadette Johnson.

The Black Women in Business Roundtable membership spans industries. Nikki Thompson-Frazier owns Sweet Encounter Bakery and hosted the latest gathering in her shop. Ashlee Willis is the founder and CEO of Michigan Premier Events; Re'Shane Lonzo owns both DRM International Learning Center and The Comfort Zone Cigar Lounge and Bistro; Lisa Young owns Express Employment Professionals, and Taunya Sims owns Jus Us Kidz Daycare.

"Being a black woman and starting a business, it's nice to have others who support you, who look like you, who can help you with information and resources and just some mentoring," said Thomas. "These are black businesswomen who are serious about business, but also serious about supporting more women in the community to be successful."

The Black Women in Business Roundtable hasn't determined how large it might become or what online presence it might have. In the meantime, contact Daniel Rials at [drials@lansingchamber.org](mailto:drials@lansingchamber.org) for more information. ●



## Leadership Lansing Participants Gain Certified Tourism Ambassador Certification

### FEBRUARY SESSION ALSO HIGHLIGHTED BY TOUR OF PECKHAM

The 2023-24 Leadership Lansing cohort spent some time in February learning more about what makes Greater Lansing such an outstanding region. The group spent the morning hours going through the Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) Program presented by Choose Lansing. The fun and engaging program was expertly led by certified CTA facilitators Melissa Nay of Choose Lansing and Jeff Magnuson from the James B. Henry Center for Executive Development at Michigan State University. The big takeaway — there is a lot to do in Greater Lansing!

Diversity, equity and Inclusion (DEI) was the focus of the remainder of the day. Lunch with a Leader speaker was Tina Alonzo, CM, CHRS, CDP, Vice President of Belonging at Peckham, Inc. Alonzo, who is a Certified Diversity Professional, told the group “every job begins and ends with a person.” She talked about cultural competency which she said is your ability to communicate with different people. She also provided insights behind Peckham’s DEI strategy. She said DEI is a collective effort that involves everyone in the organization.

“It’s a journey. There will be challenges along the way,” said Alonzo.

Leadership Lansing also enjoyed a presentation from Peckham’s Director of Vocational Services Emily McElmurry and Jessica Diener, Peckham’s Director of Employee Experience and Engagement – both Leadership Lansing alums! Peckham is a nonprofit vocation rehabilitation organization that provides job training opportunities for persons with significant disabilities and other barriers to employment.

McElmurry talked about how since 1976 Peckham has grown to be one of the largest vocational community rehabilitation programs in the state of Michigan. Peckham offers more than 30 different rehabilitation and human services programs from art to career planning, pre-employment screening to facility-based training, youth programs to organizational employment and residential services.

The Leadership Lansing group was also treated to a tour of Peckham’s impressive facility near Capital Region International Airport. Many thanks to our friends at Peckham for hosting our Leadership Lansing group for the entire day. It will be remembered as one of the highlights for this year’s cohort. ●

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# Capital-Area Leaders Work Together to Bring Career-Connected Courses to High Schoolers

Leaders from Capital-area education and industry have joined an initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to bring more career-connected learning opportunities to the region's high schoolers.



Those credits can be applied to associate's or bachelor's degrees, ultimately saving the students money on tuition costs while moving them closer to their chosen careers.

The initiative is called Accelerated ED: Seamless Pathways to Degrees and Careers. Community leaders invited to participate in the initiative are asked to design a "blueprint" to connect underserved high school students – particularly students of color and those experiencing poverty – to college credits and regional workforce sectors that have strong demand and better salaries.

Students can receive college credits while still in high school through dual-enrollment programs and early-college programs, according to Michele Strasz, executive director of the Capital Area College Access Network.

"We're really trying to increase the access and the equitable opportunity for students to take advantage of these types of programs," said Strasz. "We want to grow our talent here at home. We have so many students that haven't been exposed to the different high-demand, high-wage industries that are available here in the community. We all need to come together to do a better job of exposing students to these opportunities."

Strasz said the Accelerate ED initiative is well-aligned with her work at the Capital Area College Access Network, a community collaborative focused on increasing college and career readiness. This Gates Foundation-backed opportunity gives Strasz and her colleagues access to grant funding and strategy sessions with other communities doing similar work.



**We want to grow our talent here at home."**

—Michele Strasz, executive director, Capital Area College Access Network

To that end, the Lansing region's Accelerate ED team – 10 leaders representing local colleges, K-12 schools, healthcare, communications, and transportation industries – traveled to Austin, Texas in early-February to learn best practices and meet the other teams. Strasz expects eight teams will participate in this year's Accelerate ED program, while 12 teams were invited last year.

As part of the strategic planning process, the local Accelerate ED team will need to decide which industries to encourage students to consider, Strasz said.

"Then we're going to need to convene with industry representatives, education and community partners to design this pathway, the programming, and wrap-around services that students need to be successful," she said. ●

## Does your community feel scattered?

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## NEW HIRES



Alonzo

Lansing-based **Peckham Inc.** has named **Tina Alonzo** as its vice president of belonging. The nonprofit vocational rehabilitation organization created this

new leadership role to strengthen its diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging strategy. Alonzo's DEI experience includes leading organizational initiatives for more than 7,000 employees with Michigan State University's office of the executive vice president for administration.



Phillips



Taylor

**Martin Commercial Properties**

has added two new leaders to its expanding team: **Zack Phillips** as vice president of corporate services and **Jayme Taylor** as marketing director. Phillips brings a wealth of experience in sales management and business development, while Taylor has a long history in sales, marketing, and advertising.

**Fraser Trebilcock** has hired attorney **Danielle Lofton** to work primarily in the law firm's Lansing office. Lofton focuses her practice on insurance defense, representing clients with personal injury claims, including no-fault cases. She has routinely secured early dismissals through successful motions and negotiated favorable client settlements. Lofton was previously an employment recruiter, assisting ex-felons in their return to the workplace.

## PROMOTIONS



Maurer

Creative agency **Moonsail North** announced that **Amariah Maurer** has been promoted to senior marketing strategist. In this role, Maurer develops strategic

communications plans focusing on digital and social media channels. Maurer is a proud Spartan, having earned her bachelor's degree in advertising management and media from Michigan State University.



Balander

**Emily Balander**

has moved into the role of facilities manager at Martin Commercial Properties. As assistant property manager for the past two-and-a-half years, Balander has become an integral member of the property management team.

## APPOINTMENTS



Beekman

**McLaren Greater Lansing Foundation**

has welcomed **Bill Beekman**, vice president for strategic initiatives at Michigan State University, to its board of trustees

for a three-year term. The volunteer board represents the community and business leaders, medical staff, and hospital leadership, and oversees philanthropic initiatives that support McLaren Greater Lansing.

The shareholders of law firm **Foster Swift Collins & Smith, P.C.** have



Cassar



Rusek



Stafford

elected three of its attorneys as shareholders: **Michael A. Cassar**, **Alexander S. Rusek**, and **Hilary J. Stafford**.

Both Cassar and Stafford have been with Foster Swift since 2016 when they participated in the firm's summer associate program. Rusek joined Foster Swift in September 2022 as a member of the general litigation group.



Davis Boyd

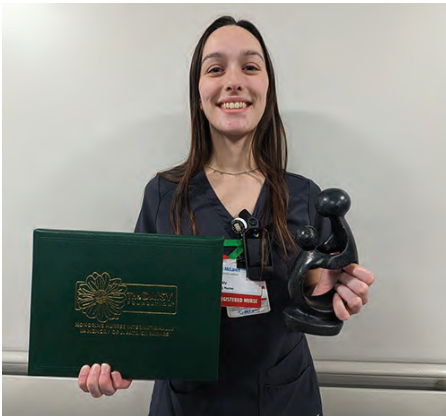
The **Lansing Economic Development Corporation** has appointed **Shelley Davis Boyd**, chief strategy officer at marketing and branding agency M3 Group, as the

new chair of its board of directors. As board chair, Davis Boyd will work closely with the board members, executive team, and community partners to implement strategic initiatives to enhance the regional economy. In addition to the Lansing EDC board, she will also serve as chair of the Lansing Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, and the Lansing Tax Increment Finance Authority boards.

## AWARDS

**McLaren Greater Lansing** nurse **Emily Daniels** was honored with the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses. The award is part of the





DAISY Foundation's program to recognize the exceptional care nurses provide every day. A patient submitted the nomination, writing: "Emily took care of me while I was on the eighth floor with a bad Crohn's flare-up. She did an amazing job: caring, attentive, kind, on time, fast, and courteous. You can tell she cares. She is clearly not just a great nurse but an amazing woman and human being. She is what every nurse should strive to be like."

**McLaren Health Care** has been included on the 2023 list of "100 hospitals and health systems with great oncology programs" compiled by Becker's Hospital Review. The health system has Michigan's largest network of oncology centers, the Karmanos Cancer Network, anchored by the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit.

**Turf Jockeys LLC** of Eaton Rapids was recently honored by the Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association in two award categories: Consumer Show Landscapes of over 400 square feet for the project "Black Tie Affair," and in Residential Landscape Design & Installation over \$100,000, for "Grand Views of Foxcroft." The MNLA's Industry Awards Program recognizes firms in the green industry that have demonstrated excellence, professionalism, and responsible environmental standards. Winners were honored during the 2024 Great Lakes Trade Expo in late January.

**COMPANY NEWS**



Richards & Addy Wealth Management and Cady Financial merged their practices to form **Richards & Cady Wealth Advisors**, combining over 70 years of financial planning experience. The merger brings together a larger team of experienced professionals, more robust and comprehensive resources, and established continuity for their clients.

**Graze Craze Charcuterie Boards & Boxes** in Shelby Township is



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under new ownership. New owners **Silas and Lindsey Coffelt** re-opened the store in January. The Coffelts also own the Graze Craze store in Okemos, Michigan. Graze Craze specializes in hand-crafted charcuterie boards and boxes featuring customizable food displays, including fresh fruit, vegetables, cheese, and gourmet sweets.

**Peckham Inc.** is one of 13 organizations to receive a \$150,000 grant from the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. The grant was made available for Michigan-based nonprofits to assist service members, veterans, and their families who are or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. The grant funding will support initiatives that offer immediate relief, sustainable housing solutions, and comprehensive support services for veterans in need. Peckham serves nearly 200 veterans across its five business lines.



**SHARE YOUR COMPANY NEWS**

LRCC members can send a press release and photo about new hires, promotions, company recognitions or awards to [info@lansingchamber.org](mailto:info@lansingchamber.org) and we will share it in our popular Members on the Move section.

**Jack Miceli, CRPC** financial advisor at **Edward Jones**, has moved to a new location at The Woodlands, 2390 Woodlake Drive, Suite 340, in Okemos.

East Lansing commercial real estate firm **Martin Commercial Properties** has issued its biannual Market Insights Report on the region's industrial, office, and retail sectors for the second

half of 2023. Among the findings: Despite a rise in vacancy rates in the industrial sector to 10.2 percent in Greater Lansing, up from 5.4 percent in H1 2023, the market remains strong, with limited quality options for users. Two major developments, including Amazon's 1.1 million-square-foot distribution center and Ultium Cells' 2.8 million-square-foot battery plant, are set for completion this year. In the office sector, vacancy rates have surged by 42 percent in the suburbs and 92 percent in the Central Business District compared to pre-pandemic levels. And in the retail sector, average market vacancies declined from 16.1 percent in H1 2023 to 14.4 percent by year-end. Major malls in the area have shed vacancies, with Best Furniture Outlet leasing the 103,000-square-foot former Macy's and Zap Zone now occupying the 125,000-square-foot Younker's space. Meanwhile, construction will soon be underway on the \$65 million Haslett Village mixed-use development project. ●



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