

# CONNECT

Energize, Innovate, Engage with the West Coast Chamber

June 2016



Local Startups  
Share their Stories

# From the Publisher

Patrick Avery

Dear West Coast Chamber Members,  
Congratulations to everyone for making Holland the number one city in the country for startup businesses. Obviously, many of us already knew this as we have started businesses here and are enjoying the fruits of our labor. The Chamber is excited to feature three businesses that have taken that entrepreneurial step here in the Holland/Zeeland area. Enjoy reading their stories.

If you have interest in reaching the thousands of eyes that this publication reaches, please call me today at 616-414-2208. As an Elite Ambassador, I am very interested in learning about your business, even if you decide not to become a sponsor, so call me today and let me be a resource for you.

Sincerely,  
Patrick Avery

Division Manager / Publisher  
Best Version Media  
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616-414-2208



Patrick Avery



Chelsea Hall



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#### FEEDBACK/IDEAS/SUBMISSIONS

Have feedback, ideas, or submissions? We are always happy to hear from you! Deadlines for submissions are the 8th of each month. Go to [www.bestversionmedia.com](http://www.bestversionmedia.com) and click "Submit Content." You may also email your thoughts, ideas and photos to:

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#### TIMETABLE OF MAGAZINE DEADLINES

Content submissions and new business sponsors must be received by the 8th of each month for the next month's publication.

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# Letter from Jane Clark

President, Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce



## Building Something

This month the business community of Holland was honored with an impressive distinction. With a population of just 33,051, Holland was named the number one small city for launching a business in 2016 in WalletHub's list of the Best and Worst Cities to Start a Business. While it is certainly an honor to be named as the Best Small City to Start a Business, it is not a surprise. Our thriving business community has a long history of visionary entrepreneurs building successful companies from the ground up—a legacy that continues today. The spirit of the entrepreneur is celebrated and encouraged on Michigan's West Coast, and we see that in the number of startups and small businesses that thrive here. At the Chamber, we connect businesses to each other and the resources they need to grow and succeed. While we serve companies of all sizes, over 80% of our members are small business and we truly believe they are the backbone of our community.

Every year the Small Business Administration celebrates the very best in Michigan Businesses with the Small Business of the Year Award. In the last 31 years, 13 of the state award winners have been local Chamber member companies. It is a great testament that a community of our size has produced nearly half the state winners!

We are excited by the new designation of Best Small City to Start a Business, and look forward to working with and supporting all the new entrepreneurs it may inspire.

Best Regards,  
Jane Clark



### Vision Statement:

Strengthen our community as the best location to live, learn, work and play.

### Mission Statement:

Enhance our members' success, advance our economy, and improve our quality of life.

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## PREMIER PARTNERS



## Local Startups Share their Stories:

# CENTO ANNI, HR SOLUTIONS GROUP AND COLLECTIVE IDEA

By Chelsea Hall



Daniel Morrison, Amy Kraal, Ed DeNave

## CENTO ANNI

Ed DeNave and Randy Beute of Cento Anni are self-proclaimed “corporate refugees,” having previously worked a combined 40 years in the automotive industry. Both had a desire to work in an environment that offered more freedom, less regulations and lacked the, “layers between the maker of the product and user of the product,” Ed explained. With a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Ed has also completed masters work in finance at various universities. Randy holds a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering from the University of Michigan.

Cento Anni is a Holland-based custom woodworking shop that focuses on the use of rescued and reclaimed materials. The company was started by Ed in 2012, with Randy coming on as partner in 2015. Said Ed of their philosophy, “We strive to give customers exactly what they want at a fair price in the agreed timing.” This back to basics, hands on approach is exactly what

Ed and Randy love about their company. “We are still a small shop, so we don’t have room for a ‘that’s not my job’ guy,” Ed explained. “In the course of a few hours we can sign paychecks and push a broom.”

According to Ed, the best part about owning his business has been the ability to operate by his own rules. “We have two: ‘best idea wins’ (all of the employees are not only allowed to have an opinion, they are expected to) and ‘we only work with people that we like.’”

Flipping the status quo on its ear and not living by someone else’s vision of success is the inspiration behind Cento Anni. Ed thrives on the freedom to call the shots, while never losing sight of why he started the business in the first place. “The quest to create something completely from scratch and grow the business are what inspire me,” he said. “Also, creating products that a customer may pass down to their children.”

*“I had a high school football coach who used to say, ‘There are a hundred reasons why you didn’t catch that pass, but only one reason that you did—you really wanted to.’ I believe starting your own business is a lot like that. Sometimes you need to jump and hope that the net will find you. The city and the community have been very supportive. In particular, the West Coast Chamber, Lakeshore Advantage, Holland Visitors Bureau and the Downtown Development Authority. When people realize that you are all in, I believe they feel compelled to help you succeed.” —Ed DeNave*

Ed and Randy enjoy the connectivity to the community that owning their Holland business offers, and shared that many of their best customers are located just blocks away from their shop. “We try to support and grow their business and they do the same for us. For example, we are working closely with the Careerline Tech Center leadership team to provide opportunities for some of their building trades students. We are also beginning work with our neighbors, CBI, to offer appropriate opportunities for some of their students.”

When asked if Ed had any additional words to share he said this: “Come by and visit us. Our motto, ‘best idea wins,’ applies to you, too. We welcome your ideas and feedback.”

*Cento Anni is located at 136 E 6th St. in Holland. The showroom and retail hours are 8am-5pm Mon.-Fri. and 9am-12pm Sat. Visit their website at [www.centoanni.com](http://www.centoanni.com).*

## HR SOLUTIONS GROUP

Amy Kraal, founder and owner of HR Solutions Group (HRSG) in Zeeland, is a third generation graduate of Hope College in Holland. She brings to the company more than 20 years of professional human resources experience with companies like Varnum Consulting, kforce.com and Haworth. This experience, paired with Professional Human Resources (PHR) certifications from HR Certification Institute and the Society of Human Resource Management provided a strong platform to start HRSG.

Launched in 2007, “HRSG works with growth orientated, entrepreneurial companies to make sure they are competitive, legally compliant and have employees working toward common goals,” Amy explained. “HRSG serves as an outsourced HR department and develops strategic HR solutions for a large range of company sizes and industries.” Amy gets satisfaction from providing solutions that help business leaders achieve their goals. “I love solving business challenges that seem impossible,” Amy shared.

*“My parents raised me with two key character traits that have helped me immensely in my career. First, own your situation. You alone are responsible for your situation, only you can control your success and happiness. Second, nothing is insurmountable. Just take a step back, look at what’s really important in the big picture, make a plan, and take it one step at a time.” —Amy Kraal*

Amy views west Michigan as the very best place to own and run a business, and is committed to the local business climate as a West Coast Chamber board member. “People genuinely care and want to help each other,” she said. “When you do good work, you become known in the community.” The notion that investing in people and the surrounding community is vital to developing a network of resources is one that Amy believes in.



Amy Kraal





Recently, WalletHub's 2016 Best & Worst Small Cities to Start a Business list ranked Holland the number one city in the United States to start a company. What better way to celebrate this distinction than to profile three local companies that began right here in the Holland/Zeeland area? We are proud to bring you a closer look at Cento Anni, HR Solutions Group and Collective Idea.

## COLLECTIVE IDEA

Meet Daniel Morrison, founder of Collective Idea. This Holland software development company and consulting firm builds custom software for web, mobile and more for customers from Fortune 50 companies to small startups. After earning his degree in computer science from Hope College, Daniel went to work in software development.

Collective Idea was born out of Daniel's desire to take on bigger projects that required a team, and it was a natural progression of his freelance consulting work. 11 years later and Collective Idea continues to grow, currently employing almost 30 wildly creative minds with a variety of specialties.



Daniel Morrison

When asked what she made of WalletHub distinguishing Holland as the number one small city for launching a business in 2016, Amy had positive words. "West Michigan is known for hard work, strong values and community focus. I am honored to work with many great companies in the area. The West Coast Chamber, Lakeshore Advantage and Talent 2025 are just a few organizations that are making a significant impact in our community."

*"In late 2014, we developed a sales incentive plan for a new client. They were experiencing three consecutive years with flat sales. As with any big change, the owners were cautious. After some testing, projections and reassurance, we launched a complete sales team incentive pay plan overhaul. In one year, the four person sales team increased sales from \$6M to \$9M. The clients are very happy. We offered an excellent ROI on our services." —Amy Kraal*

Amy launched Know My HR, LLC in March of this year as a partner company to HRSG. "Know My HR offers a monthly subscription service for web based HR software with customized, best in class workflows and electronic HR record keeping designed for employers with less than 500 employees," explained Amy. "Additionally, Know My HR offers federal and state All in One Labor Law Workplace posters customized for Michigan employers of all sizes."

Never one to rest on her laurels, Amy pushes for greatness every day, and feels privileged to own two businesses in west Michigan. "Success comes from honesty, integrity and hard work," she said. "As well as constant pursuit of continuous improvement."

HRSG is located at 56 E Main Ave in Zeeland. Reach them by calling 616-719-5372 or visiting [www.thehrsolutionsgroup.com](http://www.thehrsolutionsgroup.com). Information on Know My HR LLC can be found at [www.knowmyhr.com](http://www.knowmyhr.com).

Daniel told *Connect* about a specific project that reminded him why his work inspires him. "In our first year, we built a software system for a customer that immediately saved their staff days' worth of time per week," he recalled. "That experience was a powerful reminder of what we can do when we focus on solving real problems and helping customers be efficient." Daniel shared that he enjoys the freedom that comes along with owning a business, but that, "Often that can mean making mistakes, but those are learning experiences." Owning Collective Idea has meant Daniel has learned a great deal in the past 11 years, but one of the more important lessons has been knowing when to say no. "Say no to bad clients," he said, "and don't be afraid to walk away from bad situations."

When asked how the business has impacted his life, Daniel had this to say: "I have been able to have a lot of fun while growing personally and professionally. I've been able to travel all over the world to work with customers, and I've been able to have flexibility to work when and where I need to." He added, "It has been hard work, and not always great, but very rewarding overall."

Even though the nature of the business allows Daniel and his team the flexibility to work from anywhere, being based in Holland was a conscious decision. A West Coast Chamber board member, Daniel recognizes the collective benefit a vibrant commercial environment offers the community as a whole, and is happy to be located in the heart of Holland. "We like being downtown, because it gives us a sense of community and a place we want to congregate," Daniel explained. "We're located right in the mix of everything, so we can go to lunch at several places without driving."

*"I love meeting with clients and helping get to the heart of solving their problems." —Daniel Morrison*

The experience of starting Collective Idea in Holland was a good one. "I think Holland is a great place to launch a business. We have low cost of living, but exceptional quality of life," he said. "We have a small town character, but are close to bigger cities. We have great talent in the area, and are attractive to people wanting to move." He went on to explain that he feels lucky to be in the company of so many other businesses he respects. "There's so much talent in this area, across a variety of industries," Daniel said.

Daniel sees growth in Collective Idea's future, and said, "We want to work on growing our customer base, and securing additional larger, longer-term customers. We plan to grow our team, but in a sustainable manner." And though the ebb and flow days of freelancing are behind him, Daniel hasn't forgotten where it all began. "It has been very rewarding growing from a small, scrappy company to one that can really take care of our employees and their families," he said.

Collective Idea is located at 44 E 8th St, Suite 400 in Holland. Reach them by calling 616-499-2122 or visit the website at [www.collectiveidea.com](http://www.collectiveidea.com).



# Are You Looking for the Financing You Need?

# 10%

Are you thinking about starting a business, or have you recently started a new venture?

You certainly aren't alone. In fact, 543,000 small businesses are started in the United States every month. Holland was recently named the best small city in the country for starting a new business by WalletHub, so you're already in great shape. The biggest challenge you're likely to face is not having access to the money you need to fully execute your business plan, but with a little digging, you'll find there is money out there for startup business loans. You just have to know where to look. Train your gaze on Lakeshore 504, and consider the following reasons to investigate a Small Business Administration (SBA) 504 Loan.

- An entrepreneur paying down a SBA 504 loan rather than throwing that same money away on rent means investing in his or her personal and business' financial future. Once the building or machinery is paid off, a business can enjoy the same revenue without paying a monthly property expense.
- With a 504 loan, an entrepreneur can purchase his or her business's real estate or machinery, and then get the tax benefits and appreciation on the real estate while locking in occupancy costs for 20 years.
- As an entrepreneur, you know the importance of liquidity. With financing available for up to 90 percent of project cost, the 504 loan offers a 10 percent down payment (compared to 25 or 30 percent through a traditional bank), enabling the entrepreneur to conserve working capital.
- The SBA created this program to increase the accessibility of business property loans to entrepreneurs, helping enhance the economic health of local communities.
- Compare SBA 504 loan fees to fees of other loan options on the market. What you will find is that 504 loan fees are the lowest on the market.
- SBA 504 loan financing allows an entrepreneur to fix his or her business occupancy costs rather than worry about market instability or fluctuating rates.
- Most businesses worth under \$15 million are eligible for a 504 loan for their property and machinery needs.

Lakeshore 504 works with private sector lenders to provide financing to small businesses. Finding a lender to commit to financing 50% of the total project is an important step in the overall approval process, and Lakeshore 504 has relationships with many lenders all over West Michigan including Chase, Huntington, Macatawa, Mercantile, Chemical and West Michigan Community Bank. These lending partners bring a wealth of experience to keep your project on track.

Contact Doug Kuiper (616-392-8099 or [dkuiper@lakeshore504.org](mailto:dkuiper@lakeshore504.org)), executive director of Lakeshore 504, to see if this financing option is right for your startup.

## What are the program benefits?

### Ninety Percent (90%) Financing – Preserves Working Capital

The 504 program, in partnership with local financial institutions, provides up to ninety percent (90%) financing of the total project cost for most commercial real estate and equipment purchases.

### Below Market Interest Rates

The 504 loan offers below market, fixed rates for 20 years. The low interest rates, along with the 20-year amortization, allows for smaller and stable monthly payments.

### Finance Closing and Other Soft Costs

You can finance your closing and other soft costs, such as professional fees (survey, appraisal, environmental report), into the 504 loan. This, in combination with the 10% down payment, allows you to preserve your working capital for other uses.

### 504 Loans are Assumable

If you sell your property in the future, the buyer may be able to assume the loan at today's below-market low interest rates.

And the best part is the 504 loan is administered by Lakeshore 504, which is housed right within the West Coast Chamber of Commerce. Along with your local banker, your Chamber will work with you every step of the way to secure and manage your 504 loan.



*Parkhurst Chiropractic utilized the 504 loan program to help grow its business.*

# Who Wants to Join us on a Fun Field Trip to NeoCon in Chicago?

NeoCon is North America's most important commercial design show that has been taking place at The Mart in Chicago since 1969. NeoCon has evolved into one of the most recognized and attended trade shows in the industry and remains the premier platform for connecting, learning and doing business in the industry. The three-day event attracts nearly 50,000 design professionals.

Experience NeoCon with a tour guide and make the most of your trip. If you've never been to this massive event before, we encourage you to try it out. You'll find exhibition booths from many of our west Michigan companies, and have the opportunity to network with businesses and individuals who work with the companies that supply the furniture industry. Registration for this Chamber field trip event is now open on our website, and we look forward to visiting the windy city with you.

Register now at [www.westcoastchamber.org](http://www.westcoastchamber.org).

Wednesday, June 15  
Chamber Field Trip to NeoCon in Chicago

@Chicago Merchandise Mart, Chicago

Time: 6:30am-7pm

Cost: \$75 per member which includes:

- Registration for NeoCon
- Transportation to and from NeoCon
- Snacks/refreshments on the bus
- Lunch provided at NeoCon
- Small groups will be arranged for interaction and tours with design companies at the exhibition space



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# Living in the SmartZone



Plans for the Holland SmartZone received state approval last month, and will allow for an estimated \$7.5 million to be invested back into Holland's local entrepreneurial ecosystem during the next 15 years. SmartZones provide distinct geographical locations where technology-based firms, entrepreneurs and researchers locate in close proximity to all of the community assets that assist in their endeavors. SmartZone technology clusters promote resource collaborations between universities, industry, research organizations, government and other community institutions, growing technology-based businesses and jobs. New and emerging businesses in SmartZone technology clusters are primarily focused on commercializing ideas, patents and other opportunities surrounding corporate, university or private research institute research and development efforts.

Michigan's 17 SmartZones include technology business accelerators that provide the services and facilitate the commercialization of technology emerging from research in Michigan universities and private companies. Accelerators help to mine technology from universities and private enterprise, assist companies and entrepreneurs in building business structures around the technology, conduct product development and help companies secure necessary start up financing. The SmartZones are also home to incubation facilities providing office and wet lab space to technology companies

### What the Holland SmartZone means for our community:

Over the past 20 months, area economic developers, legislators, community members and non-profit organizations have been working together to create a formal collaboration structure to support tech entrepreneurs in our region. This process has included establishing a Local Development Financing Act (LDFA) and presenting plans to the State of Michigan Treasury to capture tax revenue to support emerging businesses and entrepreneurs as the Holland SmartZone, a satellite of Grand Rapids SmartZone.



### Here are some key facts about the Holland SmartZone:

- The Holland SmartZone geographic region includes approximately 1,000 land parcels within 450 acres of the City of Holland and Holland Township. Some of which includes downtown Holland, Lake Macatawa waterfront and the Michigan State University Bioeconomy Institute, creating a true regional approach to economic development.
- SmartZone plan approval allows for tax increment financing (TIF) capture at 50 percent of any increase in property tax value for economic development within its geographic boundaries for programming and infrastructure improvements to support emerging businesses and entrepreneurs.
- SmartZones provide technology companies, entrepreneurs and researchers a place to cluster, collaborate and share resources. Being located in a SmartZone allows startup businesses to tap into certain pre-seed microloan and other business accelerator funds. These growth tools can help accelerate businesses, open new markets and provide local jobs.
- The approved SmartZone plan identifies anticipated creation of approximately 180 high-tech businesses and 360 associated high-tech jobs during 15 years, with a significant number of these businesses (72) and jobs (144) being created in the final years of the plan beginning in 2026 and ending in 2030.

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Kristin Ekkens (Spectrum Health), Ed Amaya (Kenowa Industries, Inc.), Rosemary Castro (Pro-Tax and Notary Services), Willie Watt (Escape Ministries), Jane Clark (West Coast Chamber)

The Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce celebrated the rich diversity in our business community and recognized minority business leaders and advocates at a luncheon at the Midtown Center on April 20. This year's recipients are Rosemary Castro, Pro-Tax and Notary Services and Willie Watt, Escape Ministries. Kristin Ekkens of Spectrum Health was the featured guest speaker and Ed Amaya of Kenowa Industries, Inc., himself a former recipient of the award, served as emcee for the event, which was attended by over 240 members of our community.

**The Minority Business of the Year:** Rosemary Castro, owner of Pro-Tax and Notary Services, started her business out of her home with one receptionist. As it grew, the company held the philosophy to provide very personalized service for their customers, with integrity and a strong desire to go the extra mile to ensure that client's individual needs are met.

This award is chosen using the following criteria:

- Must be a member of the West Coast Chamber
- Must be a minority owned business
- Must have been in business for at least 3 years
- Demonstrates strong financial stability

**The Minority Business Champion** award was presented to Willie Watt, founder of Escape Ministries. He founded Escape Ministries in 2007, and strongly believes in the impact that minority businesses can provide to the local economy. His purpose here on earth is to use love and understanding to grow unity in the business community in Holland, as he works to improve the opportunities, and subsequently lives of the youth and high-risk individuals in our area.

This award is chosen using the following criteria:

- Must work for a West Coast Chamber member firm
- Must promote or positively impact the minority business community
- Must value diversity and promote appreciation of differences

The West Coast Chamber would like to congratulate these recipients for their dedication and commitment to our business community!

## Congratulations to the 2016 Minority Business Award Winners



Willie Watt (Escape Ministries), Rosemary Castro (Pro-Tax and Notary Services)

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# June Calendar of Events

Thursday, June 2

## TED Lunch

@Herrick District Library, 300 S River Ave, Holland

The TED Lunch is a unique opportunity to view a TED video and discuss the 'ideas' worth spreading with other community thought leaders. There is not cost for this event, please bring your own lunch!

Time: 12-1pm

Cost: Free. Bring your own lunch or buy it from Captain Terry's Café.

Tuesday, June 14

## Early Bird Breakfast

@Haworth Inn & Conference Center, 225 College Ave, Holland

Come and hear from one of the 2015 best small/medium workplace in the US. Jeff Disher of Disher will share the Disher's story of their corporate culture and mission.

Time: 7:30-8:30am



Cost: \$15 per Chamber member (\$20 if registered after June 12) / \$25 per non-member

Wednesday, June 15

## Chamber Field Trip to Neocon

@Chicago Merchandise Mart, Chicago

Experience NeoCon with a tour guide and make the most of your trip. If you've never been to this massive event before, we encourage you to try it out. We'll provide the transportation, food and guides.

Time: 6:30am-7:00pm

Cost: \$75 per member

Monday, June 20

## Governmental Affairs Breakfast

@Alpenrose Restaurant, 4 E 8th Street, Holland

Join us for breakfast with our elected state and federal legislators. Ample time is provided for questions and answers. Arrive at 7:15am for a brief networking session before the breakfast begins.

Time: 7:30-8:30am

Cost: \$15 per Chamber member (\$20 if registered after June 17) / \$25 per non-member

Wednesday, June 22

## Network @ Lunch

@Boatwerks Waterfront Restaurant, 216 Van Raalte Ave, Holland

Get to know other business representatives by spending an hour with them over a relaxing business lunch. You will randomly be assigned with three other dining partners at the event, giving you the opportunity to make new contacts and share about yourself and your business. What could be easier?

Time: 12-1pm

Cost: \$10 per person (Payment due at the event)

Save the Date!

Wednesday, July 13

## 48th Annual Golf Outing

@Macatawa Legends Golf & Country Club

Not just another day on the course - network, relax and promote your company at the Chamber Golf Outing! Sponsorships are available at many levels. Register now for your morning or afternoon tee time.

For a full listing of events, visit [www.westcoastchamber.org/events](http://www.westcoastchamber.org/events).



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# Expert Contributor: What's Old is New Again

By Mike Hill, Edify North, LLC



Like many industries, the health insurance industry is cyclical, and while new products are regularly introduced, they are often a variation on an old theme. One of the “newest” trends within the health insurance industry is the introduction of plans utilizing a narrow network of providers to keep costs low.

Starting in the 1970s with the passage of the Health Maintenance Organization Act of 1973, the concept of managed care as a cost savings strategy began to gain momentum. With a focus on controlling costs by utilizing out-patient procedures and limited networks of providers, managed care plans (HMOs) did have a positive impact on the rate of healthcare cost inflation. This improvement wasn't achieved, however, without significant objection from the plan participants due to the benefit denials and limitations on providers associated with these plans. Therefore, throughout the 1990s over 800 state and federal laws were passed dictating how and what managed care plans would cover, significantly improving the member experience but eroding the impact on the cost curve.

Over this same period of time, managed care plans evolved from being plans that provided access to a limited number of providers to keep costs under control to those with broad networks providing access to the majority of healthcare providers. As access to meaningful information about

the cost of procedures and the quality of providers has grown over the last five years, health plans have recently started designing plans that incentivize members to seek low cost/high quality options.

Most recently the homegrown HMO in West Michigan, Priority Health, introduced West Michigan Partners, which are plans that provide two levels of benefits to members depending on which providers they elect to utilize. Tier one providers include those associated Spectrum Health, Metro Health, and Holland Hospital (and those who have admitting privileges there, along with a few select specialty practices), and if members seek services from these providers they are rewarded with lower out-of-pocket expenses. Tier two providers are all others in the Priority Health network, and utilization of these providers results in additional costs to members. The incentive for an employer to sponsor a plan like this, and for an employee to participate in one, is that plans of this nature come with a lower monthly premium compared to plans that provide the same level of benefit for all in-network providers.

The introduction of “narrow network” plans from carriers like Blue Cross Blue Shield, Priority Health and others marks a shift away from the days where all plans provided access to almost all providers. From our perspective, this isn't a bad thing in that it increases the likelihood that members will

more regularly utilize high quality/lower cost providers. Like all new strategies, however, the narrow network concept isn't without its flaws. An argument could be made that when whole health systems are being included at the Tier 1 level, one is assuming they are the best/lowest cost at every single service, which is not always the case. In addition, an employer who sponsors a plan like this needs to be prepared for some participants to be told that their preferred providers are now covered at a lower level. Despite these concerns, we do see a lot of value in the narrow network concept and therefore have a number of West Michigan based employers we have presented the concept to.

This is just the beginning of what we anticipate to be a significant evolution of health plans. We believe there is a significant possibility in the coming years for health plans to align with a specific health system as the only option for members. Regardless of where things end up, we will keep you in the loop with future articles.

*Mike Hill, RHU, REBC, LIC, is a founding partner of Edify North, LLC, an employee benefits consulting firm in Holland that is focused on improving the physical and organizational health of employers.*



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# Q&A with Escape YFGK Founder, Pastor Willie James Watt, Jr.

By Chelsea Hall

**E**scape (Youth for God’s Kingdom) YFGK empowers at-risk teens and young adults to be tomorrow’s positive leaders in the community. Founder and Executive Director Pastor Willie James Watt, Jr. recently received the West Coast Chamber’s Minority Business Champion award. *Connect* sat down with him to find out more about this mentoring program.

**Q:** How old is Escape YFGK and how did it begin?

**A:** We have been here for six years. In 2007, I was homeless. A local church reached me, aided me, and then trained me. I, in turn, began to reach out and help those less fortunate. I have a heart for young people that are being marginalized and want to afford them opportunities commonly available to anyone. My misery became my message.

**Q:** What services do you provide for the community?

**A:** We provide a safe place for youth. Building relationships and having relevant programs to aid young people in their development is central to what we do.

**Q:** Can you briefly describe these programs?

**A:** ASAP (Alternative Suspension Accountability Program) allows suspended/expelled students to come to our site and continue their education.

HYC (Holland Youth Connection), our job summer program, enables youth (ages 14-17) to become employed.

Westside Boxing reaches kids by providing incentive to become golden glove certified. Step 2 Connect is an after school program

provides a variety of creative and tailor made programming for youth development.

**Q:** What do you find most rewarding?

**A:** What has touched my heart is seeing these young people pursue their dreams. Students in our ASAP program have graduated from high school and gone on to college. Those in the boxing program have fought in tournaments and one of our boxers has signed with Mike Tyson. I weep when I realize how the youth are responding in the after school programs. They may still struggle some, but they keep coming and now we see them as our youth leaders! I am humbled when I see fewer children abused and neglected; and the less fortunate becoming fortunate. I had no idea God would use me in such a way to see real life transformation, to the point that other cities are wanting an Escape satellite in their location.



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**Q:** How can others become involved?

**A:** We are always looking for volunteers to serve by tutoring, driving vans, cooking, mentoring and teaching. A person could come to our location and complete an application and we will place them with serving opportunities.

**Q:** Are there any upcoming events the public should be aware of?

**A:** For 2016 we are planning a golfing event (June) and our appreciation dinner (October). Also unique to 2016 will be our Building Strong Families initiative. For some time, my heart was to reach the family through connecting with youth. In 2016 some of our programming will be devoted to retreats and gatherings that partners both parent and child together to

build better family dynamics. We also have an educational piece that has proven to be successful by having parents join tutoring/ learning times with their child and their testing scores have increased by 70%

**Q:** Is there anything else you care to share?

**A:** Because I wanted the youth to find a place to be safe and have all their needs met under one roof, we are also able to house a local church (LIFTC) in our ministry to connect and relate to the youth.

*Escape YFGK is located at 202 32nd Street in Holland. They can be reached by phone at 616-796-0538 or by visiting [www.escape-out.org](http://www.escape-out.org)*

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# Happenings at the Chamber



Anna's House Ribbon Cutting



Anna's House Ribbon Cutting



Great Escape



Early Bird Breakfast







Gill Staffing Ribbon Cutting



Minority Business Awards Lunch 2016



Minority Business Awards Lunch 2016



My House Ministry





# Happenings at the Chamber



Network at Lunch

Hispanic Chamber Awards



Poppin Huis Ribbon Cutting

MediLodge of Holland Ribbon Cutting



Compaan Door & Operator Co. Ribbon Cutting



## Project Management: Running Effective Meetings

By Joyce Fabian, MBA, PMP



**D**o you hate attending meetings? Are most meetings a waste of your time? During the course of a project, project managers hold and attend many meetings, both in person and virtually. These meetings may include a kick-off meeting, weekly status meetings, monthly steering committee meetings, risk review board meetings, change control board meetings, and a lessons learned meeting, to name just a few!

While running a meeting, we should all be very cognizant of the cost to the company for each person sitting in the room for the specified amount of time. Meetings are expensive, so we should strive to make them as effective as possible, every time we run one.

### Here are some tips to help you run your meetings more effectively:

- Determine if a meeting is really necessary
- Define purpose and intended outcome
- Determine required attendees
- Send meeting invitations with agenda
- Assign a facilitator or note-taker
- Prepare handouts and visual aids
- Make logistical arrangements for room/equipment/food/drink
- Start and end on time
- Introduce people and build relationships
- State ground rules for questions and electronic devices, etc.
- Re-state purpose of the meeting
- Review agenda

- Stay on topic and ensure important items are discussed
- Document action items with names and due dates
- Summarize decisions and action items
- Decide next steps, specifying what, who, when and where
- End meeting and thank everyone for attending
- Distribute meeting minutes with action items the next day!

Most of my students and clients find that when they begin using these effective meeting tips, their colleagues start adopting them too. Here's to better meetings!



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