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## Leave a trail

By Ron Kitchens

I am a true fan of singer-songwriters, and one of my favorites is Austin-based Tracie Lynn. In particular, I am a huge fan of Tracie's lyrics and the sense of humanity in her songs. The lyrics of the title song, *Leave a Trail*, from her most recent CD are a great example:

*"I never travel down that road of least resistance.*

*Long ago I made my stand, I had a vision.*

*I would do what I choose, only answer  
to myself.*

*I will go where there is no road,  
and leave a trail."*

Tracie's words not only speak to her own passion for life but to the responsibility that each of us has in life: to leave a trail for others to follow. For each of us that trail is different. I have been blessed through the years to be associated with some pretty tremendous leaders who indeed have not only left a trail but a very wide one.

At Southwest Michigan First, we facilitate the Monroe Brown Internship Program, which is a tremendous example of leaving a trail. For more than two decades, the Monroe Brown Family Foundation has shown a strong commitment for using its wealth to aid college students in paying for their education. What makes their story so special is the willingness to go one step further with the Monroe Brown Internships, which not only provide scholarships to students at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and Kalamazoo Valley Community College, but they also partner with local companies to provide summer internships for each recipient.

The trail that the leaders at Monroe Brown are blazing will benefit all of us for years to come. When asked what the number-one factor was for college students in selecting a community to live in once they graduated, finding a job rates at the top. And what you might ask is the biggest issue those same college students tell us in finding a job, you guessed it, who they know in the industry they want to work in.

Sounds like an internship to me.

When thinking of leaving a trail, I am reminded of Hal Taussig, founder of Philadelphia-based tour provider Untours, who uses all of the profits from his company to provide micro-loans to start up companies that operate in low-income areas. The Untours Foundation currently has 40 companies in its portfolio, ranging from a company that makes kitchen countertops out of 75 percent recycled glass to a software company that creates interactive language lessons for women in Third World countries that will allow them to negotiate better prices for their products.

A leader need not be a family foundation or a philanthropic businessman to blaze a trail. We have great examples every day in this Region of people who blaze a trail that allows the rest of us to live in a world that they made better. Do something today that blazes a trail.

And check out [www.tracielynn.com](http://www.tracielynn.com) — I'll bet you love her as much as I do.

*Ron Kitchens is the CEO of Southwest Michigan First, the general partner of the Southwest Michigan First Life Science Venture Fund, a director of the Southwest Michigan Innovation Center and a nationally respected speaker.*

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