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Contact:

Tim Terrentine
executive vice president
Southwest Michigan First
241 East Michigan Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49007
269.553.9588
tterrentine@southwestmichiganfirst.com

Southwest Michigan First to host Populus, a one-day event for community change-makers to get stuff done

KALAMAZOO, MI – Southwest Michigan First will host its second annual Populus conference on May 1, 2015 in downtown Kalamazoo. Populus 2015 is a one-day event designed to foster collaboration and spur real change in the community as thought leaders, policy makers and engaged citizens work together to solve some of Southwest Michigan’s most critical issues.

“Populus was created to bring together leaders who want to make a difference in Southwest Michigan by rolling up their sleeves and getting stuff done,” said Ron Kitchens, chief executive officer of Southwest Michigan First. “Leaders from every sector of the community – industry, business, not-for-profit, government, education and faith-based organizations – are invited to join us at Populus as we work together to build momentum and shape our community.”

New this year, attendees will select one of five breakout sessions and get to work on tackling a critical issue in the region. Leaders of different backgrounds and organizations will work together to create a plan of action for positive change based on their personal passions. Breakout session themes include Urban Core; Arts, Culture and Creativity; Transportation and Mobility; Education and Workforce Development; and Public Services. Each breakout session will be led by a local community leader currently serving in these fields.

Additionally, attendees will leave Populus inspired by the creative thought, civic engagement and innovative ideas shared by world-class speakers like Joel Kotkin. Kotkin is an internationally-recognized authority on global, economic, political and social trends. As the Roger Hobbs Distinguished Fellow in Urban Studies at Chapman University and Executive Director of the Houston-based Center for Opportunity Urbanism, he has completed studies focused on several major cities like London, Mumbai, Mexico City, New York, Los Angeles and Houston. At Populus 2015, Kotkin will specifically share insights he discovered in his latest book, *The New Class Conflict*, which describes the changing dynamics of class in America.

While Populus 2015 will kick off and conclude at Cityscape Events, the breakout sessions and “roaming lunch” will take place at various locations to showcase downtown Kalamazoo. There is a \$100 investment to attend. To register, visit www.populus.me/register.

About Southwest Michigan First

Founded in 1999 on the principle that the most powerful force for change is a job, Southwest Michigan First is an organization of privately funded economic development advisors who act as the catalyst for economic growth in Southwest Michigan. For more information about Southwest Michigan First, please visit us at www.southwestmichiganfirst.com, or call 269.553.9588.



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