

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Southwest Michigan First Secures Future Site and \$100 Million Gift to Capital Campaign for Kalamazoo RESA's New Regional Career and Technical Education Center**

**Kalamazoo, Michigan** – Today, regional economic development catalyst Southwest Michigan First announced it has secured an anonymous gift of land along with a \$100 million commitment for the construction of a new, world-class Career and Technical Education Center on the gifted parcel.

“For years, local educators and employers have talked about the need for a centralized career and technical center in Kalamazoo County,” said Carla Sones, president and interim CEO of Southwest Michigan First. “That vision is now a big step closer to becoming a reality.”

Despite the pandemic, Kalamazoo RESA and Southwest Michigan First maintained their commitment to their vision and re-energized the partnership in May 2021. A world-class and centrally located Career and Technical Education Center was determined to be a vital part of the re-design of Kalamazoo County's career and technical education (CTE) system. This public-private partnership started ahead of Kalamazoo RESA's 2019 CTE millage campaign, which received strong support from Kalamazoo County voters on the November 2019 ballot.

The donors, who requested they not be named, have asked Southwest Michigan First to act as their representative in the transfer of both property and funds.

“Today's incredibly generous gift represents a transformational moment in the economy of Southwest Michigan,” said Sones. “Preparing young people to succeed in high-demand careers provides access to opportunity and helps them live their lives to the fullest and contribute to the innovation needed by our region's companies to remain globally competitive. With more students gaining access to world-class CTE curriculum, our region's workforce can continue the cycle of growth necessary for Southwest Michigan to be an attractive place for all to live, work and prosper.”

Over the summer, representatives from Southwest Michigan First and Kalamazoo RESA, along with local employers, other community organizations, school districts and partners formed a CTE Steering Committee to accelerate the redesign. The Steering Committee reviewed, analyzed, and approved a slate of course recommendations to the KRESA Board of Education based on robust labor market analysis by the Upjohn Institute and the University of Michigan Youth Policy Lab. Currently, facility design teams are providing input on the Career Center that will house equipment and courses to ready students for future opportunities in the regional labor market. CTE course offerings at the planned Career Center will provide industry-recognized credentials, as well as develop the critical 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of collaboration, communication, problem solving, critical thinking and self-management.

The new facility, expected to open in fall 2024, will be constructed on the parcel of donated land located along the I-94 and Sprinkle Road corridor next to Wings Stadium. The facility's central location adjacent to a major interstate and near the county's industrial base will increase accessibility through a countywide transportation system and ensure equitable access to course offerings for all students across Kalamazoo County school districts – a commitment at the forefront of project planning.

#### **ABOUT SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST**

Founded in 1999 on the principle that the greatest 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](http://www.southwestmichiganfirst.com), or call 269.553.9588.

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