

southwest michigan **first**
THE GREATEST FORCE FOR CHANGE IS A JOB

The Best Things to Happen in 2019



REVIEW THE YEAR'S GAME CHANGERS WITH SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST





We're on a roll in Southwest Michigan.

The latest data and accolades are in, and they all point to one thing: Southwest Michigan closed out the decade with a bang! The year 2019 delivered 2,166 new jobs to our region and a steady jobless rate in the lower three-point range. Western Michigan University (WMU) was named the #1 "Hidden Gem" place for study in the U.S., K-12 career and technical education got a thumbs up from voters, and Southwest Michigan was named by Condé Nast Traveler as one of the top 20 places to visit in 2020!

A decade ago, these achievements seemed unattainable. Our region faced an economy burdened by an unemployment rate four times higher than where it stands today. That reality no longer belongs to us. Working together, we have achieved amazing things—things that have the potential to positively impact our region for decades to come. We now face the next decade in a much better place than when we entered it.

We thank you; without the time, talent, and treasure of our partners and supporters, Southwest Michigan First would not have the resources it needs to execute upon its mission—the greatest force for change is a job. As we roar into the next decade (yes, the 20s are upon us!), let's celebrate together what we accomplished as an organization and community in 2019.

Always Forward.

*Ron Kitchens
chief executive officer and senior partner
Southwest Michigan First*



2019's 12 Best Game Changers and Place Makers

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

We identified the best of the best happenings that will undoubtedly change the trajectory of Southwest Michigan's economy. We wanted to stop at 10, but we added two more for good measure!



Graphic Packaging International selected Kalamazoo for its massive \$600 million investment in facilities and equipment. This investment will support the company's commitment to sustainable packaging, exceptional quality, and an unmatched cost position for producing coated recycled board.

The company's capability to produce 500,000 tons of coated recycled board is expected to be capacity neutral by eliminating

the higher costs of production at other facilities. The city of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Township, Kalamazoo County, Kalamazoo County Brownfield Authority, and Michigan Economic Development Corporation, as well as Consumers Energy and WMU's Department of Paper Engineering, were valued partners to company leadership and Southwest Michigan First, ensuring that this project happened in the region.

Did you know? WMU is the only university in the world with the ability to turn pulp into finished printed paper.

Its graduates—including Graphic Packaging's CEO, Michael Doss—are some of the most technically specialized in the paper industry.



FedEx announced that it will deliver more than packages to Portage come late 2020! The company will lease and operate a **new 321,000-square-foot state-of-the-art distribution facility** on Portage Road. This opportunity, which will create 924 jobs, was made possible by a \$50-million investment on the 37-acre site, project coordination by Southwest Michigan First, and support from both the City of Portage and Kalamazoo County.



Kalamazoo ranks in the top three places in the U.S. with the lowest cost of living. It was also named one of the top 10 places to hang your hat and enjoy retirement by Smartasset.com.



The Exchange Building opened for business! The tallest building to rise from the Kalamazoo landscape in years offers 133 luxury apartments and 60,000 square feet of commercial space.

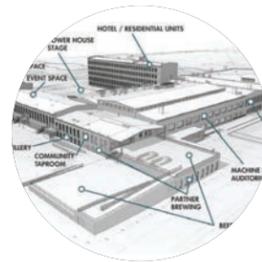


Condé Nast Traveler named Southwest Michigan one of the Best Places to Go in 2020, along with Dubai, Nashville, and Tangier. Our region's ocean-like coastlines, agritourism, and innovative beer, cider and wine makers caught their eye. Let's roll out the red carpet!



Career and technical education (CTE) got a big shout-out from Kalamazoo and St. Joseph County businesses and residents at the polls in November. In Kalamazoo specifically, **more than \$8.3 million in annual funding was approved to expand CTE access for K-12 students, create a centrally-located career center, and impact the future workforce for years to come.**

With 12,000 current job openings and more to come as baby boomers retire, the demand for well-qualified, educated talent is rising in Southwest Michigan. In addition to voter support, area businesses continue to work closely with Southwest Michigan First to promote CTE programs throughout the region. In another combined initiative with Kalamazoo RESA and Michigan Works! Southwest, 5,000 eighth graders interacted with over 70 businesses during MiCareerQuest Southwest, a two-day annual hands-on career readiness event.



More than \$80 million will be invested in the Mill at Vicksburg to give the village's abandoned paper mill a second lease on life. Southwest Michigan First helped Paper City Development, LLC win approval from the Michigan Strategic Fund on what is the state's second Transformational Brownfield Plan project. Once complete, **it will welcome 221 jobs, hotel and residential space, microbrewery incubator space, a beer garden, public greenspace, and more.**



Kalamazoo is number one in median household income growth, increasing 19 percent over the last 11 years! Kalamazoo was one of only three of Michigan's largest cities, along with Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor, with positive income growth in 2018, according to the most recent U.S. Census American Community Survey.



The state of Michigan transferred control of several downtown roads to the city of Kalamazoo. This will speed up the process for decisions on how to make streets safer and easier to navigate for drivers and pedestrians. What's more is that the move could pave the way for turning one-way streets into two-ways.



Make your reservations now! PlazaCorp unveiled plans to **redevelop the historic Rose Street Market building and bring a 113-room boutique hotel, 107-room extended stay facility, and approximately 15,000 square feet of office and commercial space to the city's downtown.** The Michigan Strategic Fund awarded the project a performance-based Michigan Community Revitalization Program loan of over \$7.4 million and announced approval for over \$3.4 million of local school and tax capture to alleviate brownfield conditions at the site. The \$44 million investment is expected to create about 75 full-time jobs.



Western Michigan University broke ground on its new student center and Arcadia Flats housing complex. Both innovative projects will have a positive impact on residential life and reflect the needs of students today and into the future. Can you hear all of those young Broncos galloping to their new digs now?



Thirty-one regional companies were named national winners by Best and Brightest Companies to Work For®. This recognition provides an unparalleled endorsement of our companies to potential residents and employees. Southwest Michigan is a great place to work!





The Jobs Report

JOBS ANNOUNCED IN 2019

Southwest Michigan First's belief that "the greatest force for change is a job" is at the heart and soul of our work.

We understand that a job can change the trajectory of life for an individual and their family—jobs change "tomorrows" and erase the "yesterdays."

In 2019, 42 economic development projects of all sizes were announced throughout our region creating 2,166 new jobs that will change 2,166 "tomorrows." Enjoy this snapshot of the new jobs and investment announcements in which our team had a direct hand; projects led by our economic development peers are not reflected in this report. For each, we appreciate the key partnerships with company, local and state government, education, and workforce development agency leaders that culminated in success for our communities.



CITY OF THREE RIVERS
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
30 JOBS



MOTTVILLE TOWNSHIP
\$750,000
80 JOBS



VILLAGE OF VICKSBURG
\$711,034
12 JOBS



VILLAGE OF VICKSBURG
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
30 JOBS



CITY OF THREE RIVERS
\$350,000
2 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
\$2,000,000
20 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
10 JOBS



VILLAGE OF VICKSBURG
\$3,000,000
37 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
6 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
\$100,000
5 JOBS



CITY OF PORTAGE
\$50,000,000
924 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO / KALAMAZOO CHARTER TOWNSHIP
\$600,000,000
29 JOBS



CITY OF STURGIS
\$1,700,000
84 JOBS



CITY OF PORTAGE
\$6,300,000
MEDICAL DIVISION



CITY OF THREE RIVERS
\$9,600,000
60 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
\$650,000
2 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
\$600,000
50 JOBS



CITY OF STURGIS
\$3,735,000
10 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
10 JOBS



VILLAGE OF SCHOOLCRAFT
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
12 JOBS



COMSTOCK CHARTER TOWNSHIP
\$2,100,000
28 JOBS



VILLAGE OF VICKSBURG
\$80,000,000
221 JOBS



VILLAGE OF VICKSBURG
INVESTMENT UNDISCLOSED
25 JOBS



CITY OF KALAMAZOO
\$7,000,000
NEW EQUIPMENT



CITY OF PORTAGE
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
6 JOBS



VILLAGE OF VICKSBURG
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
1 JOB



TEXAS CHARTER TOWNSHIP
\$6,749,164
17 JOBS



CITY OF STURGIS
SKILLED TRADES TRAINING
2 JOBS



CITY OF STURGIS
\$65,545
3 JOBS



What the Numbers Say About 2019

During 2019, the numbers 3, 19, and 3 came to represent some powerful data points describing the city that sits at our region's center—Kalamazoo. Those numbers reveal some very good news.

3 POPULATION

Did you know that Kalamazoo County ranks among Michigan's top three counties with positive population growth? While the metropolitan regions of Detroit and Grand Rapids lead the group of Michigan's fastest-growing places, Southwest Michigan—driven by growth in Kalamazoo County—is more than keeping pace!

MICHIGAN COUNTIES EXPERIENCING POPULATION GROWTH



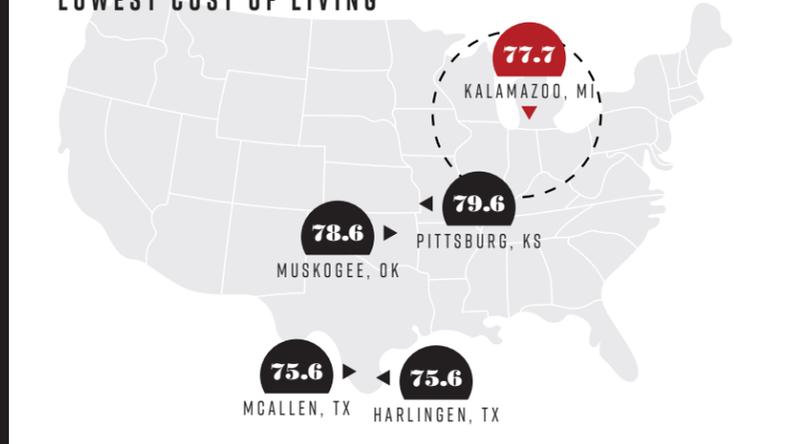
SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN COUNTIES POPULATION SNAPSHOT



3 COST OF LIVING

With the third-lowest cost of living in America, it's easy to see that Kalamazoo's future is bright! The city's affordability is making it a key attractor for people and businesses alike.

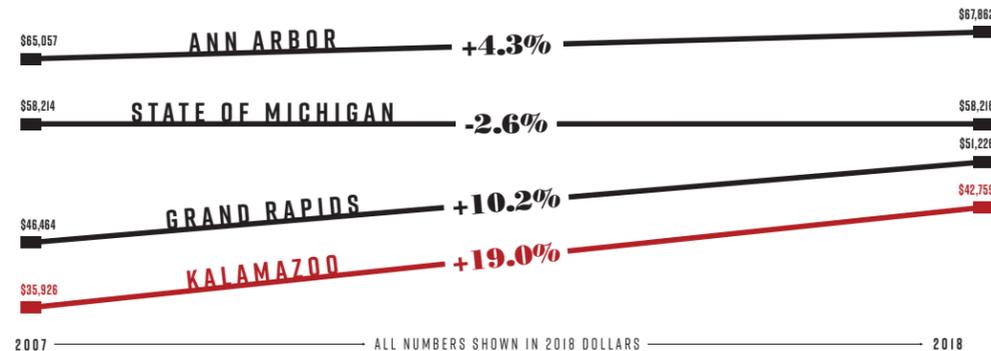
AMERICAN CITIES WITH THE LOWEST COST OF LIVING



19 INCOME

Median household income is on the rise in three of the cities where Michigan is seeing population growth—Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Ann Arbor. Not only is Kalamazoo among the only three cities in the state with income growth, but Kalamazoo also leads the pack, with income increasing 19 percent over the last 11 years!

MICHIGAN CITIES SHOWING POSITIVE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME GROWTH



The Greatest Force for Change is a Job

[RESULTS 1999-2019]

Regions that thrive require leaders who focus on growth, jobs, and talent.

Over the past two decades, Southwest Michigan First has been “the man on the wall”—ensuring the strength of our community. Our team wakes up every day, focused on economic vitality and the growth of jobs in our region, so that you can sleep soundly and confident in our community's ability to remain relevant and compete in the global economy.

To accomplish what needs to be done in our region, we have to do the little stuff well and consistently. Here's a look at the indicators that drive our efforts.



360° of Love for Our Community

WHAT WE'RE THANKFUL FOR

As one year ends and another begins, there is so much to be thankful for.

More than anything, the Southwest Michigan First team is grateful for your support and partnership as we work together to make Southwest Michigan a premier place to live and do business—this just doesn't happen everywhere. In addition to the many economic development successes of 2019, we would like to take a moment to recognize the other ways Southwest Michigan First is working to lift up the region.



TREASURE

When it comes to community impact, our Chamber division has also given us many reasons to be thankful. Beyond the 26 ribbon cuttings we celebrated at new and budding businesses over the past year, 12 Chamber Connect networking events brought 2,617 members from local teams together and raised awareness and dollars for these local community causes:

- YMCA of Greater Kalamazoo
- Talons Out Honor Flights
- Ronald McDonald House Charities
- American Red Cross
- Pretty Lake Camp
- Junior League of Kalamazoo
- Hospital Hospitality House
- Gryphon Place
- Kalamazoo Public Safety
- Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes
- Community Outreach and Prevention
- Hub ONE



TIME

Beyond financial impact, our team members are fully committed to sharing their time and valued expertise with many worthy organizations. Our team remains committed to impacting these philanthropic and corporate boards across the region:

- BC/Cal/Kal Foreign Trade Zone, Board of Directors
- Detroit Chamber, Mackinac Policy Conference Committee
- Family & Children Services, Development Committee
- Gibson Insurance, Board of Advisors
- Girls on the Run of Greater Kalamazoo, Finance Committee
- Homer Stryker M. D. School of Medicine, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
- Impact Label, Board of Directors
- International Economic Development Council, Board of Directors
- International Economic Development Council, Certification Committee
- Kalamazoo County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority, Board Member
- Kalamazoo County Economic Development Corporation, Board Member
- Kalamazoo Downtown Partnership, Citizen Coalition
- Kalamazoo Human Resources Management Association, Participant
- Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Board of Directors
- Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes, Finance Committee



TALENT

Southwest Michigan First was recognized for our achievements as a team—both in and out of the office—in 2019. We share our recognition with you not to show off the new hardware on our mantle but rather to demonstrate that we honored your investment with us. It is also our intent to challenge you to join us in our pursuit of cultural excellence as we work to make Southwest Michigan a region chock full of top workplaces.

- Top 101 National Best & Brightest Companies to Work For, Elite Award for Best Small Business
- West Michigan's Best & Brightest Companies to Work For, Elite Award for Best Small Business
- Best & Brightest in Wellness, Elite Award for Best Small Business
- Outside's Best Places to Work
- Inc. Best Workplaces
- Crain's Cool Places to Work

- Kalamazoo Promise, Compact Board
- Kalamazoo RESA Career and Technical Education, Business Advisory Board
- Kalamazoo Rotaract Club, Board Secretary
- Kalamazoo Rotaract Club, Members
- Kalamazoo Valley Groves Center, Advisory Board
- Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport, Air Service and Retention Committee
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), Board Member
- Michigan Economic Developers Association, Annual Meeting Committee
- Michigan Economic Developers Association, Education Committee
- Michigan Economic Development Council, Collaborative Development Council
- Michigan Humanities Council, Board, Member
- Michigan Region 8 Prosperity Council, Board
- Michigan Works! Southwest, Workforce Development Board
- Momentum Program Steering Committee, Member
- Portage Community Senior Center, Capital Campaign Committee
- Prevention Works, Capital Campaign Committee
- RAWK (Read and Write Kalamazoo), Board Member
- Recruiter Roundtable, Member
- Shared Prosperity Kalamazoo, Good Jobs Goal Team Member
- Three Rivers Industrial Development Authority, Board Member
- U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, Michigan Advisory Committee
- Western Michigan University, Audit Committee
- Western Michigan University, Board of Trustees
- Western Michigan University, Community Outreach and Engaged Scholarship Advisory Council
- Western Michigan University, Geological Survey Advisory Council
- Western Michigan University, Partners in Dance





LEADERS

Southwest Michigan First's leadership development and training programs shook things up for more than 5,000 leaders in 2019. Why does our organization place such importance on ensuring that our communities have leaders who are ready to step up? Because the ever-changing global marketplace requires that all organizations fully engage the talents of everyone on their team and pursue constant innovation in their products and services to remain competitive. Leadership is not about leaving a legacy but rather living a legacy.

From this year's Catalyst University—where 2,246 attendees laughed, learned, and were inspired—to the mentorship pairings of First 50 that help emerging leaders discover and develop their potential, Southwest Michigan First's 2019 leadership menu served leaders in their first through fiftieth year of leading.

- Catalyst University
- Leadership Academy
- Leadership Kalamazoo
- First Leaders
- First 50
- "Future Of" Series
- First Up
- Custom Coaching & Consulting
- Managing from the Middle
- Leadership Workshops
- Catalytic Cultures



WORKFORCE

With 35,000 workers in our region coming of retirement age in the near future, we know that we must put the focus on getting our younger generations excited about what they will be doing after they graduate high school and college. Helping employers discover how to build exciting internship programs is one way we are working toward filling the hiring gap.

Another way is partnering with agencies like Kalamazoo RESA, Michigan Works! Southwest, and Calhoun Intermediate School District, among others, to host MiCareerQuest Southwest, a two-day career exploration event where middle schoolers explore first-hand what's being made right here in our region. New in 2019 was High School Catalyst, attended by 300 local high school students who discovered their personal strengths, explored career pathways, and had a chance to network with business leaders.

Advertising part-time jobs fairs to employers, hosting apprenticeship workshops, and heading to the local classroom to judge innovation competitions as part of our MIX design initiatives were some of the other ways we rounded out our workforce engagement initiatives for K-12 students and beyond.

Our Why

WHO WE ARE

You've seen this year's results. But how did it all happen?

The team at Southwest Michigan First is often asked to describe what we do and why. As the region's economic catalyst, we take a holistic approach to our work. Depending on the need, we willingly take the lead on a project, develop community collaborations, or facilitate the efforts of others.

Why? We believe that Southwest Michigan's survival requires the commitment of the entire region—but starts with Southwest Michigan First. Our risk is not change but the complacency of the status quo. Complacency results in a shortage of people, leaders, buildings, and civic capacity and a shrinking workforce to the tune of 35,000 fewer workers in the next decade.

The time to sculpt our future is now. To change, invest, and culturally align. To build a strategy that focuses on recruiting and retaining college students, attracting young families, and growing great jobs.

Through our partnerships with business, industry, higher education, philanthropy, and local government, we ensure that we will meet the competitive demands of current and prospective residents alike.

Tomorrow is coming ... it is up to us to decide which version we will enjoy.



2020 Vision

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Before you go, know that our expectations are high for the next decade and beyond. Here are ten things we are already looking forward to in 2020:

1 Doors open for business at 180 E. Water St.—the new headquarters of Southwest Michigan First, The Kalamazoo Promise, and more

2 The ribbon cutting for Stryker Instrument's Global R&D Center, set for January 27th

3 Raising the beam at Graphic Packaging International's new Kalamazoo facility, scheduled for April 29th

4 Seeing you at our State of the Region event in the fall

5 The 20,000th direct job announced by our team

6 Catalyst University's 10th anniversary on May 21 at Wings Event Center in Kalamazoo

7 The day summer interns arrive for their first day of work at our region's companies

8 Training and impacting our 80,000th leader at one of our leadership events, programs, or classes

9 Watching FedEx trucks dispatched to make deliveries out of the distributor's new Portage location

10 Holding our 25,000th company consultation



Who needs binoculars? Not us.





We are at a pivotal moment in our community's history, and there are incredible opportunities in front of us. The growth of our region depends on leaders who are focused on jobs and talent and who are invested in Southwest Michigan.

To learn more about Southwest Michigan First, call us at 269.553.9588
or visit southwestmichiganfirst.com.