

southwest
michigan



first

THE GREATEST FORCE
FOR CHANGE IS A JOB

ANNUAL REPORT

southwestmichiganfirst.com

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A Message from Our CEO

In early 2023, Southwest Michigan First launched a three-year strategic action plan called, *The Path to Regional Prosperity*. The action plan is ambitious and designed to unite our region in the pursuit of economic prosperity for all. Since its launch, we've been inspired by hundreds of regional businesses and community leaders who have risen to the challenge and formally committed to supporting our work. We've also been encouraged by thousands more who've participated in events and community discussions, adding their knowledge and expertise to move our region forward.

The common message we've heard from business leaders throughout the year has been clear: it's time for a collaborative, aligned, regional approach to economic development. Many of the challenges and opportunities facing our region are simply too great for any of our individual organizations to address on their own. Thanks to the leadership and hard work of many so far, the results from our collective efforts have been nothing short of amazing.

Regional leaders are uniting.

Our Board of Directors recently expanded to 75 executives, making it one of the largest business leadership groups of its kind in Michigan. Additionally, we saw unprecedented growth and engagement through our Council of 100 and the Southwest Michigan First Chamber. In fact, in the upcoming year, we'll be revamping our investor categories to better engage stakeholders and serve the increased number of participants we anticipate for events going forward.

Thousands are engaging.

In 2023, we supported more than 350 impactful events. Nearly 10,000 attendees engaged in a wide variety of programming and discussions on topics such as small business development, incentives, regionalism, diversity, groundbreakings, policy, workforce development, entrepreneurship, leadership development, community issues, site selector summits, transportation, and many more. Slowly but surely, we're building consensus around common issues and moving forward together.

Our action plan is working.

Our team, with support from many regional partners, set new records last year in job creation, capital investment, and events. As we look ahead, the pipeline of potential projects is among the largest we've ever seen. In each of our focus areas—economic development, community development, and workforce development—we delivered significant, positive impacts.

Game-changing projects are advancing.

Across the region, more than \$6 billion of investment in large industrial projects have either been recently completed or are underway. Mega projects, like Ford's BlueOval Battery Park Michigan and Holtec's Palisades Generating Station, announced their transformative plans this year. Other long-awaited projects, such as the Kalamazoo Event Center, are positioned to transform downtowns in our region and revitalize nearby communities.

Perceptions are changing.

Thanks to a new *You Can in Michigan* talent attraction campaign, launched by Michigan Economic Development Corporation, our region has a powerful new opportunity to tell our story. With that opportunity in mind, we've joined forces with many regional partners to build our own regional campaign called, *Thrive in Southwest Michigan*. Our Thrive campaign is designed to complement and build upon the State's platform, ultimately attracting more talented workers to our region.

As we approach 2024, we've refined our tactics, though our plan has not changed. We're still relentlessly focused on pursuing economic prosperity for all. We still believe working together as one united region is essential to capturing the many opportunities on the horizon and positioning Southwest Michigan as one of the most prosperous regions in Michigan. If you haven't already, I hope you'll consider joining us.

Moving forward together,

Jonas Peterson
CEO, Southwest Michigan First



2023

Celebrating Past Success

No doubt about it, 2023 was a year of milestone achievements in Southwest Michigan. It began with the launch of our three-year strategic action plan, *The Path to Regional Prosperity*. Much progress has been made during the last twelve months. Here are a few highlights:

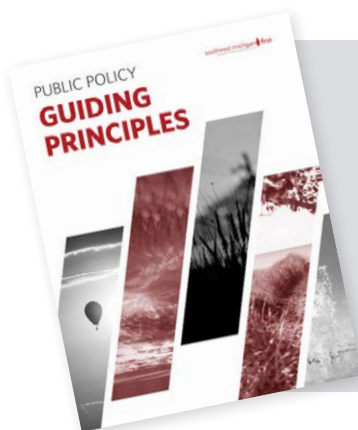
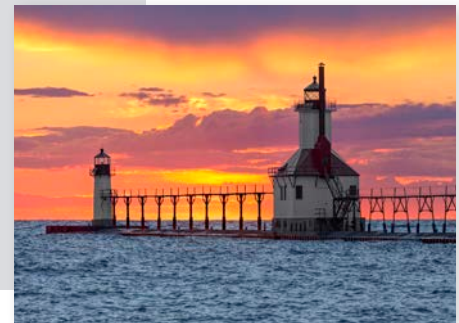


Long-Awaited Event Center Coming to Downtown Kalamazoo

Catalyst Development Co. announced that it will be constructing a 320,000+ square foot, state-of-the-art event center in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo. This privately funded event center will have the capacity to host more than 230 events per year while generating over \$54 million of annual economic impact regionally. Additionally, this multi-faceted venue is in a prime downtown location close to lodging, visitor amenities, attractions, and transportation/parking infrastructure. This project is unique because it is privately funded — a rarity in arena construction.

Advancing Regional Strategies

Although much work remains, key advancements were made this year to help align and strengthen our seven-county region. Regional leaders are uniting, supporting collaborative business services, and advancing new strategies. This foundational work is key to achieving our vision of making Southwest Michigan one of the most prosperous regions in the state.



Guiding Principles for Public Policy

Our multi-disciplinary team created a living document of guiding principles to advance pro-business policies at all levels of government. These shared principles include: Tools to Attract, Retain, and Grow Businesses, Skilled and Abundant Workforce, Competitive Tax and Regulatory Environments, Efficient and Reliable Infrastructure, and Attractive, Affordable, and Innovative Places. They serve as a model to guide and shape the public policy decisions that affect us all.

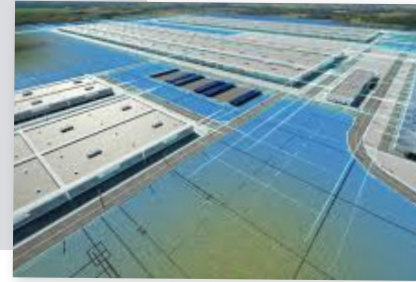
“As I look to the future of our region and as I also look back over the last 25 years, we’re so much stronger today, working together as a region. We’re just going to continue to build upon that going forward, to create new and exciting projects, and create opportunities for a really vibrant community.

- Aaron Zeigler, President, Zeigler Auto Group

LOOKING TO DEVELOP THE FUTURE

Ford Plant Will Bring 1,700 Jobs and \$2.5 Billion in Investment

Construction has begun on Ford's BlueOval Battery Park. The 1,500-acre megasite in Marshall, Michigan was selected over other locations in a highly competitive national site search. Ford's continued investment in the community will transform the economy in Southwest Michigan and the state.



W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) Grant to Advance Regionalism

The WKKF awarded Southwest Michigan First a \$600,000 grant to accelerate the implementation of regional efforts in Southwest Michigan, with a focus on Calhoun County. This grant aligns with our mission and helps WKKF's efforts to promote thriving communities for working families and children.

Grant Awarded for U.S. 131 Interchange Business Loop

The State of Michigan approved a grant for \$20 million to support the addition of two new ramps, from northbound U.S. 131 onto the business route and from the business route onto southbound U.S. 131. The project will enhance Southwest Michigan's infrastructure by increasing access from U.S. 131 to downtown Kalamazoo.



A Record-Breaking Year for Consultant Connect

Consultant Connect (C2), our for-profit consulting division, had the busiest and most profitable year ever in 2023! C2 hosted more than 36 events inside and outside the United States. The year ended with a bang at ECONOMIX, the annual conference that gathered more than 33 site consultants and 250 economic developers in Atlanta.



Southwest Michigan First has been instrumental in the economic development of our region. It has played an absolutely critical role, bringing together partnerships between the public sector, the private sector, other related businesses, and universities; all coming together to make sure that we provide as good a future for our citizens as we possibly can.

- Dr. Edward Montgomery, President, Western Michigan University

EMPOWERING OUR REGION'S WORKFORCE

Southwest Michigan First offers impactful education and training events with an eye toward the future. Our top-notch facilitators equip and inspire the next generation of talent in our community and beyond.



Catalyst University (CU) has equipped nearly 15,000 existing and emerging leaders over the past 13 years to carry our workforce and our community into the future. CU 2023 hosted nine dynamic speakers who inspired attendees for the year ahead.

Leadership Kalamazoo is an intensive program that uses interactive training sessions, community tours, and networking sessions to strengthen and influence the next generation of community leaders. The class of 2023 was the largest class to date with 48 participants representing five industry sectors. Together, the class explored a variety of relevant topics, including strengths-based leadership, wellbeing in the workplace, inclusivity, and more.



First Path is a 10-week program designed for individuals looking to start a new business or grow an existing one. First Path offers the direction and guidance entrepreneurs need to take their idea or business to the next level.

MIX Southwest Michigan believes in the power of creativity in our community. MIX brings together more than 2,000 creatives from more than 325 organizations throughout the region.



350+ IMPACTFUL EVENTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Business First Series
- First Path
- Groundbreakings
- Regional Partner Meetings
- Site Consultant Events
- Supplier Summits
- Sustainability Discussions

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Catalyst University
- Internship Mixers
- Leadership Kalamazoo
- Leadership Kalamazoo Alumni Events
- MIX Design

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

- Black & Brown Mixers
- Business Breakfast Roundtables
- Chamber Connects
- Coffee/Cocktails with Clarence & Kevin
- Community Townhalls
- Connect for a Cause
- Chamber Member Orientations
- Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies
- Women's Business Lunches with Moxie Mastermind

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Advocacy & Ales
- Coffee & Civics
- Legislative Updates
- Local Officials Academy

INVESTOR ENGAGEMENT

- Council of 100 Celebration
- First & Foremost
- Small Group Lunches
- Investment & Economic Briefing Breakfast
- Southwest Michigan First Board Meetings
- St. Joseph County EDGE Board Meetings

LET'S MAKE BUSINESS BETTER TOGETHER



Over the past 12 months, the Southwest Michigan First Chamber co-hosted 40 ribbon cutting celebrations, welcomed more than 120 new members, and partnered on over 100 events. The Chamber served more than 2,500 business leaders from every industry along with 20,000 community members from around the region. We're so proud of our Chamber members for strengthening the small business community in Kalamazoo County.



What is the Chamber?

The Southwest Michigan First Chamber is the most comprehensive business resource and number one business cheerleader for Kalamazoo County. Membership with the Chamber supports our efforts to strengthen the vitality and impact of the business community. When businesses thrive and our economy is strong, our entire community has the best opportunity to succeed.

We do this by:

- Working with business and industry professionals to develop an understanding of challenges, concerns and opportunities businesses in our region face.
- Creating a climate of community that focuses on the strength of all to increase our region's competitiveness, making us a more attractive place to live, work and play.
- Fostering community engagement for our business members through educational, networking and service opportunities.
- Actively engaging in legislative issues and initiatives along with local, regional and state elected officials to ensure a pro-business environment.
- Developing and supporting programs that strengthen the skills and increase the impact of business leaders and their teams.
- Bringing together powerful local and regional partnerships that leverage the talents and resources of the member businesses we serve — of every size and industry sector — for the benefit of all.



At Southwest Michigan First, we don't talk about generalizations, we talk about specific goals. We've created 24,000 jobs that have been brought to our community. As importantly, we have retained 36,000 jobs in this community.

- William D. Johnston, Chairman, Greenleaf Companies

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST GRANTS AWARDED

In 2023, Southwest Michigan First secured more than \$6 million in grant funding for projects that further regional growth and vitality through job creation, workforce attraction and retention, and business expansion. These major grants include:

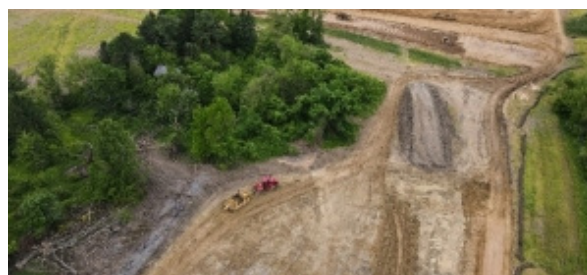


Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Revitalization and Placemaking 2 grant:

In 2023, Southwest Michigan First secured \$4.5 million in round 2 of the RAP grant decision process. These funds will be allocated to various locations throughout the area to revitalize buildings, parks, public facilities and increase available housing that increase workforce attraction and retention in Southwest Michigan. The projects are all expected to be completed in 2025/2026.

Michigan Strategic Site Readiness Regional EDO:

Southwest Michigan First was successful in securing a \$1.26 million grant to support the pre-development of strategic sites across Southwest Michigan. The purpose of creating a statewide inventory of investment-ready sites is to attract and promote investment in Michigan. These funds will be utilized for pre-development site analysis, engineering, and design.



MEDC: Southwest Michigan First was awarded an additional \$550,000 in Industry 4.0 funding from the MEDC to help 25 companies in the region offset costs associated with the purchase and implementation of Industry 4.0 technologies. This opportunity assists our region's companies in enhancing their technologies and improving efficiencies. This grant will provide 50% reimbursement for qualifying I4.0 technology costs up to \$25,000. Companies receiving grant funding include:

- Affinity Custom Molding
- Alpha Resources
- Envirolite
- Envision Automation LLC
- Final Gravity
- Frame Products
- Gaishin Manufacturing
- Hanson International
- Journeyman Distillery
- Kohler Industries
- Lakeshore Die Cast
- LTW Inc.
- Lyons Industries
- Melling Tool
- Omega Castings
- Peat's Original Cider
- Pratt Intermodal Chassis
- Progressive Dynamics
- Riveer (Petter)
- Shawnee Specialties
- Schupan Aluminum & Plastic Sales
- Sister Lakes Brewing
- Three Blondes Brewing
- Vickers Engineering
- W-L Molding



Southwest Michigan First believes The Greatest Force for Change is a Job and I firmly believe that. But to have the job, you need to have the companies. And to have the companies, there requires a collaboration of many parties. You cannot survive and be a great company if you are there alone. That's why we want to do our part and fully support Southwest Michigan First.

- Lynn Chen-Zhang, Partner & COO, Zhang Financial

JOB CREATION WINS IN 2023

2023 began with an exciting regional announcement by Ford BlueOval to locate a new battery plant in Marshall, Michigan. Many regional economic and workforce partners across the area came together to provide support for this big regional win. Additionally, Southwest Michigan First engaged in 380 one-on-one meetings with existing businesses in the region and were proud to announce over 25 projects with existing businesses and new companies.

NEW PROJECTS	NEW JOBS	RETAINED JOBS
13	2,243	352
INVESTMENT	SQUARE FOOTAGE	
\$2.7 Billion	2.8 Million	



COMPANY	INDUSTRY	PROJECT SUMMARY	INVESTMENT
	COUNTY		NEW JOBS
	Automotive Component Manufacturing Calhoun	Ford BlueOval Battery Park in Marshall will bring a new multi-million-sq ft electric vehicle battery manufacturing facility. Project leads: Marshall Area Economic Development Alliance and MEDC.	\$2,500,000,000 1,700
	Automotive Manufacturing Kalamazoo and Calhoun	Zoetis , which produces animal health pharmaceuticals, will be adding 53,000 square feet to their manufacturing facility on East Kilgore Road in the city of Kalamazoo.	\$115,000,000 59
	Medical Device Kalamazoo	C2DX which produces animal health pharmaceuticals, will be adding 53,000 square feet to their manufacturing facility on East Kilgore Road in the city of Kalamazoo.	\$998,500 35
	R&D, Manufacturing, and Distribution Kalamazoo	Depatie Fluid Power Company , in the fluid power automation industry, serves the aerospace, medical, automotive, mining, and agriculture sectors. The company, headquartered in Portage is adding a 35,000 square foot facility.	\$6,200,000 48
	Optics Manufacturing Kalamazoo	Micro-LAM is a world leader in the laser assisted machining, ultra-precision diamond tooling and custom optics industries. The company is building a new 30,000 square feet high tech facility.	\$5,900,000 10
	Life Science, Agriculture, and Food Kalamazoo	J. Rettenmaier, USA , a world leader in the fiber industry utilizing raw materials, is adding 160,000 square feet to their existing operations.	\$14,000,000 5
	Life Science Kalamazoo	Vestaron , a global leader in peptide-based crop protection products is expanding their research space with additional square footage at Kalamazoo Valley Community College Groves campus.	\$2,000,000 10
	Automotive Manufacturing St. Joseph	IAC (International Automotive Components North America, Inc.) , a subsidiary of International Automotive Components Group, is a global supplier of automotive interior components.	\$20,663,444 273
	Food Processing St. Joseph	Michigan Milk Producers Association's has partnered with a distillery to transform the lactose laden byproducts of the dairy industry into ethanol fuel for vehicles.	\$41,100,000 12
	Reusable Green Packaging St. Joseph	Carter Associates , a manufacturer of green packaging products is consolidating it's two Burr Oak facilities which will require renovating and retooling 35,000 square feet.	\$3,000,000 20
	Plastics Manufacturing St. Joseph	TekModo , which produces design-engineered composite materials for the transportation industry, will build a second manufacturing building at its existing campus in Three Rivers.	\$17,000,000 60

SHOWCASING REGIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Southwest Michigan had another exciting year in 2023. Across the region game-changing projects are advancing. Many of the exciting job creation projects are led by companies and organizations we're proud to call partners. Aligned with our mission of increasing economic prosperity for all, we celebrate the innovative projects advancing in Southwest Michigan. To highlight the regional transformation underway, we produced the *Growing Southwest Michigan Together Map*.



Regional economic development is important because it raises the overall quality of life for all of us in this region. By banding our efforts together and taking the time to decide what is important for our region, we ultimately create a higher standard of living for all of us.

- Greg Dobson, Chief Operating Officer, AVB Inc.



\$5.8 BILLION+ **IN CAPITAL INVESTMENT** **FOR RECENT AND UNDERWAY** **INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS**

“Regionalism matters. Leadership matters. We serve seven counties, but together we’re one region. And when we work together, we can achieve so much more. We’re here to partner. We’re here to unite. We’re here to significantly improve the economy of southwest Michigan.

- Jonas Peterson, CEO, Southwest Michigan First

The contributions of **Council of 100** organizations go directly toward aiding Southwest Michigan First in our mission to increase economic prosperity for all in Southwest Michigan. These companies are instantly connected to a network of leaders and resources around the region and across the country critical to creating success.

ACCOUNTING

BDO
Plante Moran
UHY LLP

ARCHITECTURE | ENGINEERING

Abonmarche Byce +
CRB
Eckert Wordell
Fishbeck
Jones Petrie Rafinski
SME
TowerPinkster +
Wightman +

AUTO

Zeigler Auto Group +++

BUSINESS SERVICES | PRODUCTS

Athletic Mentors
Buist Electric
C12
CLS
Custer
Hi-Tech Electric
Integrated Smart Technologies, LLC +
Knight Watch
McDonald Commercial Roofing
PRO Services
R&A Landscaping
R.W. LaPine
Safety Services, Inc. +
TRELLIS
VanDam & Krusinga

COMMUNITY LEADERS | ORGANIZATIONS

City of Kalamazoo +
City of Portage +
City of Sturgis +
City of Three Rivers +
Glen Oaks Community College
Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan
Greg O'Niel
Kalamazoo County ++
Ronda E. Stryker and William D. Johnston
South Michigan Food Bank
St. Joseph County ++
Sturgis Improvement Association
Tom Webb
Western Michigan University +
W.K. Kellogg Foundation +++
WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine
William and Barbara Parfet

CONSTRUCTION | MANAGEMENT

AVB +
CSM Group +
Consumers Concrete +
DJ Construction
ELITE COMPANIES
JMC Companies
Kendall Group
Miller-Davis Company +
Rockford Construction
Walbridge

ENERGY

CMS Energy | Consumers Energy ++
Indiana Michigan Power
ITC +
Midwest Energy

FINANCIAL

1st Source Bank
Advia Credit Union
AmeriFirst Home Mortgage +
Comerica Bank
Consumers Credit Union +
Fifth Third Bank
Greenleaf Trust
Honor Credit Union
Horizon Bank
Huntington Bank ++
JP Morgan Chase ++
Mercantile Bank +
Old National Bank +
PNC Bank ++
Rose Street Advisors
Southern Michigan Bank & Trust +
Sturgis Bank & Trust
The Connable Office
The Wiser Financial Group
Zhang Financial ++

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Greenleaf Hospitality
Imperial Beverage ++
Millennium Restaurant Group
St. Julian Winery & Distillery

FOUNDATIONS

Irving S. Gilmore Foundation +++
Fetzer Institute

HEALTHCARE | HOSPITALS

Ascension Michigan, Southwest
Bronson Healthcare Group ++
OptiMed Health Partners

IT | DATA MANAGEMENT

Aunalytics ++
AT&T

INSURANCE | RISK MANAGEMENT

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan +
Gibson
Lighthouse Insurance
Nulty Insurance +
Priority Health +

LAW

Honigman LLP +
Kreis Enderle
Miller Canfield +
Miller Johnson +
Varnum Law +
Warner Norcross + Judd

MANUFACTURING

Abbott
American Axle & Manufacturing
Armstrong International
Bell's Brewery, Inc. ++
Burke Porter
C2Dx
Charles River Laboratories +
DENSO
Duncan Aviation
Edwards Garment +
FEMA Corporation
FlavorSum
Flowserve
GHS Strings
Graphic Packaging +
Green Bay Packaging
Humphrey Products +
Kadant Johnson LLC
Kalsec
Landscape Forms
MANN+HUMMEL USA
Miniature Custom Manufacturing +
Newell Brands
Nobis Agri Science
Pfizer ++
Re:Build TEKNA
Schupan +
Stryker +++
Sturgis Molded Products
Whirlpool Corporation

REAL ESTATE | DEVELOPMENT

Allen Edwin Homes
Callander Commercial
Common Sail Investment Group
Franklin Partners
Greater Kalamazoo Board of Realtors
Jagua Realtors +
Midlink Business Park ++
NAI Wisinski of West Michigan
Peregrine Company
PlazaCorp Realty Advisors
The Hinman Company +
Treystar Holdings, LLC

RETAIL

Meijer

TALENT MANAGEMENT

HUMANeX Ventures
WSI +

TRANSPORTATION | LOGISTICS

Clark Logic ++
Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International
Airport +

+ *Council of Economic Advisors*

\$10,000 - \$19,999

++ *Legacy Council* \$20,000 - \$75,000

+++ *Major Contributors* \$75,000+

List is current through January 2024