



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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TO OUR INVESTORS AND PARTNERS:

2021 was an incredibly busy year for the Grand Traverse regional economy. The companies and organizations you lead created significant value for your stakeholders and growth for our region, all the more impressive given the stiff headwinds you faced with supply chain, staffing, and continued pandemic-related uncertainty. Your perseverance, determination, and resiliency have been remarkable, and it is Traverse Connect's distinct honor to support your hard work.

Supporting your businesses means continuing to execute on the key goals of our strategic plan: enhancing the competitiveness of the Northern Michigan economy, driving the growth of second-stage businesses, and attracting and developing a talented workforce.

With workforce issues such as attainable housing and affordable childcare for employees foremost among your concerns, Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance set an aggressive advocacy agenda for the year. Progress included initiation of the new state-wide Tri-Share Childcare Program with a pilot in the Grand Traverse area, the introduction of bipartisan childcare legislation that reduces regulations for providers, and efforts with Housing North and the Michigan Housing Coalition on a set of housing-related bills that would increase the options available for workforce housing.

Small businesses are the engine of northern Michigan, and 2021 saw the initiation of our strategic partnership with the Traverse City DDA in which we outlined key steps the district should take to help local small businesses recover from the pandemic, as well as prepare for the changing business environment post-COVID-19. We will continue this work for both the DDA and the City of Traverse City in 2022.

Traverse Connect helped form the Northwest Michigan Industry 4.0 Consortium to support manufacturers in adopting smart automation and machine-to-machine communication practices. Meanwhile, our comprehensive Grand Traverse Regional Skill Gap Study identified the critical staffing needs in various industries and the immediate steps policymakers and education providers can take to address the gaps, especially in the skilled trades.

Our Michigan's Creative Coast job board now has over 1,000 job views per month with considerable interest from talent hoping to relocate to our region from across the country. Work continues to improve the attractiveness of this area for all workers and foster a culture of inclusive opportunity with our DEIB program.

The competitiveness of our region was further improved with the initiation of an important partnership with Michigan Tech to bring their nationally recognized academic research to our region, setting the stage for commercialization of new technologies, targeted industry ventures, and further collaboration with Northwestern Michigan College.

We look forward to another challenging but productive year ahead, and we are excited to share highlights of local companies driving growth for the Northern Michigan economy. Their stories, detailed below, illustrate the impact our local firms have on the vitality of our region and why our support for these companies matters.

This work is only possible with the engagement of our members, investors, and partners. We deeply appreciate your continued support.



Russ Knopp
Chair
Board of Directors



Warren Call
President & CEO
Traverse Connect

ABOUT TRAVERSE CONNECT

MISSION

To advance the economic vitality of the Grand Traverse Region through the growth of family-sustaining careers.

VISION

By 2030, the Grand Traverse Region will be a diversified economic destination of choice powered by growth-oriented enterprises providing competitive total compensation to match our world-class quality of life.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Russ Knopp
Chair
Comfort Keepers

Steve Perdue
Past Chair
Grand Traverse Industries

Sara Harding
Vice-Chair
PeakTactic

Matt Wille
Treasurer
Munson Medical Center

Rachel Johnson
Secretary
Cherryland Electric Cooperative

David Mengebier
Government Relations Chair
*Grand Traverse Regional
Community Foundation*

Chris Morse
Finance Chair
Rehmann

Janis Adams
Danbrook Adams Raymond

Suzanne Allen
*Blue Cross Blue Shield
of Michigan*

Michael Brown
Burdco Inc.

Dan Buron
*Goodwill Industries of Northern
Michigan*

Trey Devey
Interlochen Center for the Arts

Doug DeYoung
Consumers Energy

Paul Heidbreder
Traverse City Record-Eagle

Don Howe
Century Inc.

Kevin Klein
Traverse City Airport

Jordan Lindberg
*Stardust Memorials &
eFulfillment Service*

Fernando Meza
Oneupweb

Bill Myers
Promithient, Inc.

Nick Nissley
Northwestern Michigan College

Amy Shamroe
City of Traverse City

Jessica Sullivan
Hagerty

Whitney Waara
Traverse City Tourism

Tonya Wildfong
Team Elmer's

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Traverse Connect's 2020 three-year strategic plan laid out priorities for the new organization to drive sustainable economic growth for the Grand Traverse Region.

LEAD REGIONAL STRATEGY

- ✓ Conducted a successful Northern Michigan Policy Conference in January and received a significant number of responses to our 2021 Legislative Priority Survey. These efforts, combined with discussions with Alliance partners and the Government Relations committee have resulted in an updated Traverse Connect policy framework
- ✓ In partnership with the Reopen Michigan Safety Coalition and other business organizations, we successfully created an environment in which the proposed permanent MIOSHA rules were withdrawn
- ✓ Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance were invited to join legislative leaders and the Governor to unveil a Package of Childcare Initiatives inside the Michigan State Capitol in June
- ✓ Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance helped to lead the Listen to Michigan Business Coalition, advocating against the imposition of a vaccine mandate for employers of 100+
- ✓ Hosted the Bully Pulpit event in September; a panel discussion with Lansing policy leaders and media leaders to provide insights on the national political environment, the upcoming race for governor, as well as an in-depth look at the complexities of redistricting and the potential impacts in this area
- ✓ Introduced new website and brand update for the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance



DRIVING BUSINESS EXPANSION

- ✓ Completed [2021 Skills Gap Study Report & Recommendations](#)
- ✓ Launched *Community Coaching* program
- ✓ Launched Women in Business Book Club and Leadership Webinar series to support and develop women in entrepreneurship and leadership
- ✓ Implemented Investor Recruitment Program
- ✓ New Women in Leadership Cohort Program
- ✓ Hosted the Economic Strategy Series for 2021 under the theme: Attracting Entrepreneurs & Innovation to the Grand Traverse Region, co-hosted with 20Fathoms & TCNewTech with the sessions covering:
 - What makes a city and region entrepreneur-friendly
 - Prosperity through entrepreneur-led economic development
 - Talent Wars: What people look for in jobs and locations
 - ✓ Partnered with Michigan Tech to house Michigan Tech Grand Traverse Area in the Traverse Connect building
- ✓ Taste the Local Difference and Short's Brewing Company selected as 2021 Scale Up North Awards winners





ATTRACTING AND DEVELOPING TALENT

- ✓ Grew digital engagement with the Michigan's Creative Coast campaign to include 2,250 Instagram followers, 1,250 newsletter subscribers, and 122,000 clicks on the website in 2021.
- ✓ Launched the new Fresh Coast Quarterly Club event series for remote workers and newcomers to the region to get plugged into a network and meet people already living in the Grand Traverse Region.
- ✓ Hosted North Coast Homecoming, a career fair and social event, in partnership with TCNewTech and 20Fathoms on Thanksgiving Eve.
- ✓ Saw an upward trend in month-on-month use of the Michigan's Creative Coast job board, bringing total employer accounts to 123 by the end of 2021, with an average monthly job view rate of 904.
- ✓ Reviewed and updated Michigan's Creative Coast web resources at michiganscreativecoast.com and expanded resources to include the Entrepreneurial Toolbox, For Employers/Find New Talent, and Work Remotely webpages.
- ✓ Completed several photoshoots in Summer 2021 to expand the original photography library for Michigan's Creative Coast, which demonstrates the region's unique work environment, local workspaces, and remote work opportunities.
- ✓ Completed the Michigan's Creative Coast video promo library to include two inspirational videos about life in the Grand Traverse Region, as well as four video interviews with people who have recently relocated to the area and added them to the newly created Videos webpage at michiganscreativecoast.com.
- ✓ Conducted an 'Internship Experiences in the Grand Traverse Region' focus group with summer interns to extract findings that will inform an Internship Resources web page's buildout in 2022.
- ✓ Welcomed nine new Northern Navigators to the roster, bringing the total number of Northern Navigators to 21. Reached a goal of over 100 Navigator <=> Newcomer meetings.
- ✓ Hosted 11 'Northern Explorers' (individuals from outside the Grand Traverse Region) at Traverse Connect's Reconnect Celebration in September 2021 for them to meet local employers, organizations, and entrepreneurs.

NEW 2021 PROGRAMS & EVENTS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| • ANNUAL ECONOMIC SUMMIT | • DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING SUMMIT |
| • COMMUNITY COACHING | • WOMEN IN BUSINESS BOOK CLUB & WEBINAR SERIES |
| • FRESH COAST QUARTERLY CLUB | |

2021 BY THE NUMBERS

+25%

INCREASE IN MEMBER
INVESTOR PAGE ACTIVITY

318

DIRECT MEMBER REFERRALS
IN 2021

31,118

SEARCHES OF OUR
INVESTOR DIRECTORY

17,627

REFERRALS TO INVESTOR
WEBSITES FROM DIRECTORY

100+

MENTIONS BY LOCAL AND
STATE MEDIA

+4.1%

INCREASE IN FACEBOOK
PAGE FOLLOWERS

+17.1%

INCREASE IN
EMAIL LINK CLICKS



54.1K
WEBSITE USERS

+70.2%

GROWTH IN MICHIGAN'S
CREATIVE COAST
INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS

11,101

MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE
COAST JOB BOARD VIEWS



113K
MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE
COAST WEBSITE USERS



3K
NORTHERN NAVIGATOR
PAGE VISITS



ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT: CHANGES FOR CHILD CARE

Access to quality child care has long been an obstacle to economic growth in northern Michigan. That's why two years ago, Traverse Connect initiated discussions on a range of policy changes to make child care more accessible and affordable for families across northern Michigan.

In 2021, Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance worked with Reps. O'Malley and Roth where they successfully navigated a bipartisan eight-bill package through the state House. We have since secured a commitment for a Senate hearing in February 2022.

The bill package includes measures to increase capacity at child care facilities, establish support networks for at-home providers, allow providers to operate in multi-use facilities, and give them a 90-day grace period to comply with new health and safety rules.

The legislation also eases reporting requirements and publicizes corrective improvements for at-home providers.

Traverse Connect played an integral role in this policy development by communicating with local child care providers to identify problems in the licensing system and then relaying these ideas to local legislators.

After facilitating discussions with providers, legislators, and state department officials, several policy changes became a reality and are now on the cusp of becoming law.

These policy changes are accompanied by Michigan's historic investment in child care. Within the \$1.5 billion to address child care needs are several Traverse Connect priorities, including:

- An estimated \$108.1 million to increase the Child Development and Care's entrance income eligibility from 150 percent to 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 fiscal years;
- An estimated \$158 million to increase provider reimbursement rates by 30 percent for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 fiscal years;
- \$700.7 million for MDE to distribute subgrants to eligible child care providers
- \$100 million for technical or financial support to new or expanding child care providers
- \$222 million for bonus pay to providers in addition to the ongoing 30 percent rate increases
- \$36.5 million for MDE to contract with child care providers for infant and toddler slots.

In addition to these investments, the successful Tri-Share Pilot Program, which helps employers and employees share the cost of child care with the state, will receive more than double the funding than last year and expand from five to 10 counties in northwest Michigan.

Businesses in the Grand Traverse region have long cited accessible child care as a barrier to workforce attraction and retention. Traverse Connect acted on those concerns and delivered tangible results for employers and employees in northern Michigan.



REP. JACK O'MALLEY



REP. JOHN ROTH

INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT:

IDEA STREAM MARSHA STRATTON, OWNER

No one could have guessed that business operations would have changed so much in the past year. As we saw these changes happening around us, we tried to offer solutions and better serve our clients' needs. Because let's face it - if you don't have staff and don't have products, marketing your business may not be on the top of your priority list.

We saw many trickle-down effects on local businesses from the pandemic. Whether it was supply chain issues or, in many cases, a lack of staff to perform the work needed, our focus shifted to how to help businesses with employee recruitment and retention and improving communication.

Recruiting: We helped clients create communication tools for hiring to reach their potential employees through radio, direct mail, email marketing, and more. Clients are encouraged to implement employee incentives to attract new staff, employee referral bonuses, and employee retention benefits. Trends in benefits include providing staff a monetary donation to a charity or organization in the area to foster and build excellent relationships with staff and their community.



Communication: Top-notch service is harder to offer due to supply chain issues and staffing. Now more than ever, the need for communication and appreciation of these relationships has come to the forefront. Social media can play an influential role in helping a business accomplish its goals, especially when scheduled months in advance. We determine the messaging and frequency, with predetermined topics that showcase the services and the staff that set a business apart from its competitors. Calendars should always have some fluidity for items that come up that are current and relevant.

Our team has received immense value in our partnership with Traverse Connect. Over the past year we have received three business referrals, expanded our SEO by using our Traverse Connect Business Directory. (We have seen over 1000 impressions and views in the last year!) My team and I appreciate the work that Traverse Connect delivers to our region. It is our pleasure to encourage businesses to join and get involved with this fantastic organization where you have access to resources to grow your business, and foster relationships.

Fresh Coast Concierge

"Relax. With Fresh Coast Concierge, it's taken care of. Whether you will be enjoying a long weekend or an extended stay, Fresh Coast Concierge has you covered!"



Idea Stream spun off a new division called [Fresh Coast Concierge](#). The service helps the owners and landlords of vacation properties by providing luxury services for their guests when they arrive. Services include – Grocery and beverage procurement, floral arrangements, dining recommendations and reservations, wine tour set-up, and anything the guest will want to have set up before arrival. Our goal is to ensure that when the guests arrive, it's time to start their vacation and make memories.

Volunteering

We are also volunteering with a new campaign in our area - [Build Your Life](#). Build Your Life brings awareness and talent to the building and trades industries. We're helping recruit candidates to explore the trades and show them the various educational paths and apprenticeships to provide a promising and rewarding career.

INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT:



PACE NORTH MARY JOHN-WILLIAMS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mary John-Williams joined PACE North as Executive Director in July 2021. At the time, the program was approaching its 2-year anniversary in October, navigating a global pandemic, and just a month away from celebrating the enrollment of its 100th participant

PACE North is one of 15 Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) programs in Michigan. PACE North offers a valuable alternative to Michigan's older adults for long-term care. PACE North enables adults 55 and older who require a nursing-home level of care to receive comprehensive health care services while living independently at home. PACE North provides older adults and their families with physical, psychological, and social-emotional support that ensures they can remain safe and well-cared for at home, regardless of income level.



PACE North serves adults in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, and Wexford counties. The program partners with caregivers, local providers, social workers, discharge planners, and senior service agencies to provide access to health care for those hoping to avoid facility placement. PACE North's interdisciplinary team comprises primary care providers, clinical staff, social workers, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a recreational therapist, a dietitian, nurses, nursing assistants, and transportation. This team develops a care plan for each participant that addresses their individual needs. Participants are served in the Day Center as well as in their homes. The Day Center has a fully staffed medical clinic, therapy room, daily meals, life enrichment with peers, and pharmacy on site.



As the newly appointed Executive Director and being new to the area, Mary states, "I have received much support from the Traverse Connect team. They have provided me with connections in the community which included organizations that assist with employee benefits and insurance services. I experienced warm introductions to educational leaders and grant writers. Traverse Connect continues to be a valuable resource for me and the PACE North team by encouraging participation in their professional development and leadership programs."

As Executive Director, Mary John-Williams is eager to expand the reach of PACE North to serve more seniors in the region. The need for a transformative model of care is evident based on the AARP's Public Policy Institute report that 80 percent of adults have expressed a desire to remain in their homes and communities as they age and prefer a home setting over a nursing home or other institutional setting.



"Directing a highly skilled and caring team that brings compassionate care to those who count on us even in these life-changing times is a responsibility I take seriously," mentioned John-Williams. "Collaboration and community are two of PACE North's core values, and working with others who share our vision in our seven-county region is what makes the PACE model of care unique, so we invite you to join us to enhance the lives of our Northern Michigan seniors."

For more information about PACE North, visit their [website](#) or find them on [Facebook](#).

TALENT SPOTLIGHT:



TENTCRAFT ANDREW DODSON, PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER

In the fourth quarter of 2021, TentCraft leadership made hiring and employee retention a top company priority to not only fill manufacturing, marketing, and sales positions, but also ensure current employees were pleased with the company and their jobs. As a leading manufacturer and seller of custom-branded tents and structures for some of the world's most recognizable brands, it's critical for the company to have the right people to deliver on its promise of high-quality, American-made solutions delivered with incredible speed.



As part of that company priority, TentCraft participated in a Michigan's Creative Coast job fair, partnered as a featured employer on the organization's website, created direct links from our [Careers Page](#)

to the [Michigan's Creative Coast website](#), enlisted employees into the Northern Navigator Program, and post all open positions on the Creative Coast website.

In addition to using Michigan Creative Coast to recruit new employees, TentCraft also executed several tasks to overcome hiring challenges, including...



- Surveying employees to develop a hybrid remote-work plan — and later executing on that plan.
- Restructuring benefits to include an extra week of paid leave for employees who are unable to work remotely; that makes for a minimum of 4 weeks of paid time off for all current and new employees.
- [Partnering with the state's new Tri-Share Program](#) to reduce the cost of child care for qualified employees.
- Optimizing the company's career page with SEO-friendly content that ranks high on Google.



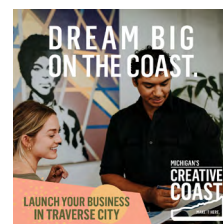
The company successfully executed on its hiring priority, filling 11 positions to round out the year, in addition to developing a strong talent pipeline for new positions that have since been created.

"We're constantly looking at the latest salary and benefit trends, in addition to company culture initiatives, to keep our employees engaged, motivated, and genuinely happy at their job," said Rob Hanel, director of human resources at TentCraft.

Hanel added: "A big selling point for potential employees is the attraction of working, living, and playing in Traverse City, Michigan, so we greatly appreciate the work of the Michigan's Creative Coast campaign as it highlights the quality of life we all enjoy here in Northern Michigan."

MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE COAST

One of Traverse Connect's top priorities is to develop and attract a talented workforce to the Grand Traverse Region. In 2021, we ramped up our talent attraction efforts by expanding the Michigan's Creative Coast programming and resources. We highlight the Grand Traverse Region as an exceptional place to live, explore, and fulfill a career while advancing the economic vitality of the region by elevating its innovative and entrepreneurial ecosystem, attracting new people, new ideas, and new businesses to place our region on the map as an attractive career destination. Sector and industry agnostic, we love all types of businesses and job types. The 'creative' in Michigan's Creative Coast is intended to inspire the innovative and entrepreneurial mindset, the families seeking a higher quality of life, and the digital nomads who can live anywhere.



Put simply, Michigan's Creative Coast is a full-service relocation program, offering a one-stop resource for everything a newcomer needs to live, work, and get connected in the Grand Traverse Region.

2022 MILESTONES

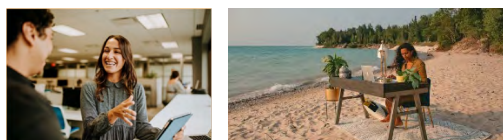
Updated our logo to give geographical significance to the brand by adding the keyword "Michigan's".



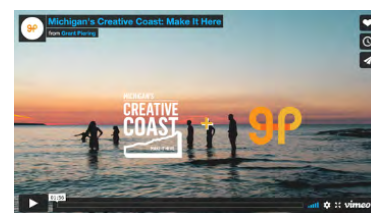
Added content and revamped the homepage and menu at michiganscreativecoast.com to provide clearer messaging on what resources are available.

Published an [Entrepreneurial Toolbox](#) webpage providing an overview of the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem and business growth opportunities, while providing resources on, and links to, the various organizations within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, access to capital, moving or scaling a business, stories from other entrepreneurs, co-working spaces, and spotlights on local tech companies.

Creatively directed several photoshoots to build out our library of photography to showcase the region's unique work environment, local workspaces, and remote work opportunities, as well as built out resources on the [Work Remotely](#) webpage.



Completed [Michigan's Creative Coast video library](#), including the two-minute inspirational video about life in the Grand Traverse Region titled, "[Make It Here](#)", as well as four interviews with families who have recently relocated to the area from Nashville, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Hawaii.



Saw traffic increases to the website via a total of almost 17 million ad impressions on the Google search and display network, which converted

1,250+
NEWSLETTER
SUBSCRIBERS

2,250+
INSTAGRAM
FOLLOWERS

4,500+
MONTHLY
WEB VISITORS

850+
MONTHLY
JOB BOARD VISITORS

39,000+
YEARLY
YOUTUBE VIEWS

to 122,000 clicks on the site. Seventy-two thousand of those clicks were unique users in 2021.

Grew digital engagement to include an average of two social media posts or stories per day on

Michigan's Creative Coast Instagram account and 1,250+ newsletter subscribers.

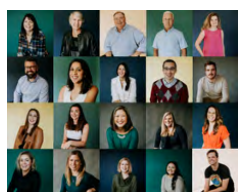
MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE COAST

Grew the use of the Michigan's Creative Coast job board to 123 employer accounts by the end of 2021, with an average monthly job view rate of 904.



Launched a new event series [Fresh Coast Quarterly Club](#), a gathering open to all and an opportunity for people to meet in a welcoming space with other people living in the Grand Traverse Region, as well as being a great way for remote workers and newcomers to the region to get plugged into a network, meet new people, and learn about one of the most vibrant arts & culture communities in Michigan. Each Fresh Coast Quarterly Club showcases an entrepreneur who has made Traverse City their home and who has brought with them exciting new ideas, interests, inspirations, and innovations. The first event took place at Oneupweb in July 2021, and the next was hosted by Hagerty Garage & Social in October 2021. The series will continue into 2022.

Developed 'Promote Living Up North' resources for employers to place on their career pages directly, including template verbiage, button



graphics, custom hyperlinks, and videos, available at the [Find New Talent](#) webpage.

Welcomed nine new Northern Navigators to the roster, bringing the total number of

Northern Navigators to 21. Over 100 Navigator <> Newcomer meetings have taken place (a Newcomer refers to a person who is considering a move to the Grand Traverse Region or who has recently relocated to the area). Northern Navigator meetings maintain a 4.9-star rating out of 5.

Hosted 11 'Northern Explorers' (individuals from outside the Grand Traverse Region) at Traverse Connect's Reconnect event in September 2021 for them to meet local employers, organizations, and entrepreneurs. In addition to attending the event, the [Northern Explorers](#) were matched with our

Northern Navigators, serving as their ambassadors for getting to know the region and its various opportunities. Explorer profiles were featured across Traverse Connect and Michigan's Creative Coast platforms. In addition, we began to track the stories of newcomers to the region and measure successes.



Hosted the North Coast Homecoming career fair and social event on Thanksgiving Eve, in partnership with TCNewTech and 20Fathoms, targeting job-seekers of the Grand Traverse Region and professionals who had made the trip home for the holidays and who would consider relocating to Traverse City or Northern Michigan.



"This program is awesome. I've told several people, and they couldn't believe you guys do this. I feel so much more confident about my move!"

Sarahbeth Ramsey, Digital Marketing Professional, relocated from Baltimore September 2021

"I think our biggest concern with moving to TC is not knowing anyone beforehand and being isolated in a new town. Meeting with [a Northern Navigator] alleviated a lot of that fear. It feels like we will be able to quickly get connected to other people in TC who are similar to us. I don't know of any other city or town offering that type of experience, which is truly amazing!"

Chris Spagnuolo, considering a move to Traverse City, Summer 2022



Grow your business