



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

202 East Grandview Parkway
Traverse City, MI 49684
traverseconnect.com
info@traverseconnect.com

2020:
Our first year as one focused economic
development organization.

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TO OUR INVESTORS AND PARTNERS:

On January 1, 2020, the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce and Traverse Connect officially merged together as a result of a multi-year planning effort led by stakeholders from across the community to modernize business advocacy and economic development in the Grand Traverse region.

We began the year with an aggressive set of new development goals to improve educational attainment, add scientific and technical jobs, and increase our core working-age population by supporting the growth of existing businesses and attracting entrepreneurs to the region.

While our planning efforts were done in an environment of economic prosperity, our world soon changed as we confronted one of the greatest health threats of a generation. COVID-19 brought profound impacts for the global economy and restrictions that represented an existential threat to our region's small businesses.

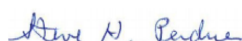
Traverse Connect quickly shifted to pandemic response efforts in order to protect the long-term economic growth prospects of our region and aid in the survival of our local companies navigating the economic crisis. To fulfill our long-term goals, we needed to protect the backbone of regional employment – our small businesses.

Our government advocacy work, in partnership with the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance, brought the voice of struggling businesses to policymakers at every level of government. Traverse Connect webinars and forums addressed business concerns, federal aid programs, and industry-specific reopening procedures. With community partners, we developed the “Stay Safe to Stay Open” messaging to demonstrate that our businesses were prepared to set the example for the state of a healthy environment for customers and employees.

Along with these recovery and resiliency efforts, Traverse Connect continued to pursue our strategic priorities to move our region forward as a year-round economic destination. We supported the growth of our investor companies through the Scale Up North Awards, Economic Strategy Sessions with national leaders, revamped Leadership Grand Traverse and Leadership Roundtables, a new community-wide Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion effort, and the launch of our region's talent attraction website: Michigan's Creative Coast.

The Northern Michigan economy runs on small businesses and throughout the pages of this annual report we have highlighted local companies that made it work this year against incredible odds. These stories illustrate the impact our local firms have on the vitality of our region and why our support for these companies matters.

We remain committed to helping our community's employers and workers through the next 12 months of pandemic eradication and economic recovery. This work is only possible with the engagement of our investors and partners. We deeply appreciate your continued support.



Steve Perdue
Chair
Board of Directors



Warren Call
President & CEO
Traverse Connect

ABOUT TRAVERSE CONNECT

To support its new strategic plan and the merger of Traverse Connect and the Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce, a new mission and vision were adopted by the Board of Directors in early 2020.

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

Steve Perdue
Chair

Grand Traverse Industries

Chris MacInnes
Past Chair

Crystal Mountain

Russ Knopp
Vice-Chair

Comfort Keepers

Sara Harding
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PeakTactic

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Janis Adams

Danbrook Adams Raymond

Suzanne Allen

*Blue Cross Blue Shield
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Burdco Inc.

Dan Buron

*Goodwill Industries of Northern
Michigan*

Casey Cowell

Boomerang Catapult

Trey Devey

Interlochen Center for the Arts

Doug DeYoung

Consumers Energy

Paul Heidbreder

Traverse City Record-Eagle

Kevin Klein

Traverse City Airport

Jordan Lindberg

*Stardust Memorials &
eFulfillment Service*

Fernando Meza

Oneupweb

Nick Nissley

Northwestern Michigan College

Michael Schrader

Grand Traverse Resorts & Casinos

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

- Launched new Traverse Connect website providing comprehensive regional resources
- Hosted three Economic Strategy Sessions:
 - Talent Attraction & Retention; Lessons from Cincinnati
 - Attracting a Remote Workforce for the Future Economy
 - Enhancing the Creative Economy to Attract Talent
- Provided 2020 Voter Information Program: over 12,000 page-views of candidate forums and candidate profiles
- Reorganization and expansion of the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance
- New legal structure for Venture North and Great Start Collaborative



ATTRACTING AND DEVELOPING TALENT

- New Creative Coast website and initiative with recruiting resources
 - Views from 43 states and 5 countries (prior to full roll out)
 - New Creative Coast Job Board, with 1,170 views of job postings
 - New Northern Navigators welcome and recruiting program
 - Over 30,000 listens of new Creative Coast Podcasts
- New Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging initiative:
 - New DEIB committee overseeing webinar series and community engagement
 - Partnered with Northwestern Michigan College, Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District, Traverse City Area Public Schools, United Way, Rotary Charities, Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, and Northern Michigan E3
 - DEIB Summit event set for Q1 2021
- IFF Childcare Study completed and published in partnership with Rotary Charities
- Mental Health & Wellness Webinar Series debuted in November 2020



DRIVING BUSINESS EXPANSION

- New Scale Up North Awards: over 4,000 virtual attendees for contest finals
- Revamped Leadership Grand Traverse program
- New Leadership Roundtable program established
- Comprehensive Economic Development survey program: over 600 total businesses
- New Professional Services Referral Program: 115 referrals generated since June
- Traverse City DDA professional services agreement to support local businesses

NEW 2020 PROGRAMS & EVENTS

- **SCALE UP NORTH AWARDS**
- **LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLES**
- **ECONOMIC STRATEGY SESSIONS**
- **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING COMMITTEE**
- **MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE COAST TALENT ATTRACTION INITIATIVE**

2020 BY THE NUMBERS

+41%

INCREASE IN MEMBER
INVESTOR PAGE ACTIVITY

115

DIRECT MEMBER REFERRALS
JUNE - DECEMBER

41,250

SEARCHES OF OUR
INVESTOR DIRECTORY

6,116

LINKS TO INVESTOR
WEBSITES FROM DIRECTORY

90+

MENTIONS BY LOCAL AND
STATE MEDIA

+5.4%

INCREASE IN FACEBOOK
PAGE FOLLOWERS

+88.1%

INCREASE IN
EMAIL LINK CLICKS



51.5K
WEBSITE USERS

1,306

CREATIVE COAST
INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS
SINCE JULY LAUNCH

1,170

CREATIVE COAST JOBS
VIEWED



67K
CREATIVE COAST
WEBSITE USERS



87,273
CREATIVE COAST AD
CLICK-THROUGHS

ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT: FROM IDEA TO ACTION

As part of Traverse Connect's COVID-19 response and recovery, we want to ensure that businesses can access the necessary liquidity to keep their doors open. Chris Morse at Rehmann brought to our attention that expenses paid with a forgiven PPP loan were considered non-deductible. Although Congress was trying to help our nation's businesses keep people on payroll and didn't want to burden businesses with the tax impact from the forgiven loan, the IRS saw things differently. Based on pre-existing law and regulations, the IRS deemed any expenses paid with loan proceeds that were eventually forgiven as nondeductible.



SIELOFF

Traverse Connect contacted Congressman Jack Bergman's office, and Chris and Kirstie Sieloff, Traverse Connect's Director of Government Relations, met via Zoom with the Congressman's D.C. staff member. This led to the Congressman cosponsoring H.R.6821, the Small Business Expense Protection Act of 2020, that would help alleviate the issue. To help Congressman Bergman see the local impact, Rehmann brought in a few of their clients for a meeting with the Congressman.

Kirstie also raised this issue with staff in U.S. Senator Gary Peters' office and of Michigan's Lt. Governor, Garlin Gilchrist. Ultimately, Congress passed a relief package that included a PPP fix for our businesses, making the PPP-related expenses deductible. That's how Traverse Connect supports



GILCHRIST



PETERS

businesses – from problem, to advocacy, to solution.



MORSE



BERGMAN

INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT: SHORT'S BREWING COMPANY

Christa Brenner, creative and marketing manager for [Short's Brewing Company](#), reflected on the company's biggest win from 2020, "The love and support we've gotten from our community—both locally and afar. Our community and team showed up and met the challenges of 2020 head-on. We literally had to pivot daily with the CDC changes. Our customers have adapted to our COVID procedures, even though we had to be candid with our customers in a social post that went viral in August." (The post garnered 1.5M impressions and prompted many regional hospitality businesses to echo the Short's team's sentiments.)



In response to the pandemic, Short's changed their Bellaire pub's business model, only accepting reservations, creating more expansive takeout options, and working with their local Bellaire community development team to create park spaces that brought business to downtown Bellaire, such as the Kegger Campground (pictured above). Their staff rolled with the changes and brought new and innovative ideas to the table week after week. They created multiple beers for charity, donating \$3,000 to The Pink Fund through their flagship brand Soft Parade, and launched Craft Libations for Collective Liberation—an anti-racism task force with community nonprofit Title Track. This summer Short's saw their growler sales double and benefited from the industry-wide increase of their bottled and canned beer, cider, and hard seltzer.

While tackling all the changes that business operations required, the company also launched a new year-round flagship brand and brought Arcadia Brewing Co.'s well-loved heritage brands back to the market, which will continue in 2021. During the months of the Stay Home order, Short's temporarily offered in-home beer delivery to select Michigan counties even while they were adding more states to their distribution footprint for ciders and seltzers, including New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and New York - even New York City and the five boroughs!



If it wasn't enough to focus on their retail operations, Short's also tackled some pretty big capital improvements—from a new kettle allowing their team to simultaneously produce multiple products to a 6,000 square foot warehouse, which was critical to solving supply-chain issues. They also added a new packaging line operating at twice the rate as their former machine.

This year the Short's team has a full schedule of improvements and new plans in the works. Catch them at facebook.com/shortsbrewing.

TALENT SPOTLIGHT: NAVEEGO

[Naveego®](#) is a leading provider of cloud-native data integration platforms with built-in data quality, data accuracy, and governance. Leveraging cloud technologies, they provide a self-service platform built for a non-technical user to configure for rapid results. The no-code platform allows business analysts to actively manage data and eliminate inconsistencies and other issues caused by data being scattered across an organization.



When it comes to the Naveego team, they have a singular mission – assemble a diverse and active team of talent from across the world and enable them to develop their skills using cutting edge technologies. Naveego is committed to providing an awesome environment to work and learn – their culture does not allow ego to get in the way of great ideas. They recognize that their team is their #1 asset and are committed to fostering a collaborative environment while always pushing forward with new technology.

“We have a pretty rigorous interview process - kind of like what Microsoft is known for with tests and coding challenges,” said Katie Horvath, Naveego CEO. “A result of that process, and a secondary benefit of having national talent apply for a job with us, is that the people who are floating to the top with the best skills have very diverse backgrounds. It makes us a stronger team and I’m pleased that we’re able to participate in increasing diversity in Traverse City.”

“I am proud of helping create jobs in Michigan, and of Naveego being a big piece of the new technology industry here in Traverse City,” added Horvath.



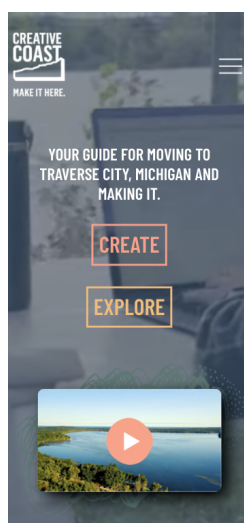
MICHIGAN'S CREATIVE COAST

Traverse Connect's Strategic Plan clearly outlines a top priority for us to lead the region's talent attraction efforts. Creative Coast is our talent attraction initiative that highlights the Grand Traverse Region as an exceptional place to live, explore, and fulfill your career. The mission? To elevate the innovative and entrepreneurial culture in our region and to attract new people, new ideas, and new businesses.

We've created a regional brand and resource to inspire professionals from across the country and beyond to make the move to northern Michigan. This regional brand name – Creative Coast – will place the Grand Traverse Region on the map as a recognizable career and lifestyle destination. The 'creative' in Creative Coast is intended to inspire the entrepreneurial mindset, the families seeking a higher quality of life, and the digital nomads who can live anywhere.

2020 MILESTONES

Created branding and marketing for a Regional Branding Initiative – Creative Coast



Launched the Grand Traverse Region's only Talent Attraction and Relocation Website at michiganscreativecoast.com.

Launched the [Creative Coast Job Board](#) - a high-quality and curated showcase of key employers and family-sustaining job opportunities available in the Grand Traverse Region.

Produced four talent attraction video shorts to showcase our region as a great place for people to live, work, and explore.

The ["What If"](#) video short serves as a three-minute talent attraction marketing piece for the region, while three profile videos showcase real-life examples of people who have 'made the move' and chosen to live in our region. Examples can be viewed on the [Explore Here](#) page.



Launched the [Northern Navigators](#), a first of its kind personalized concierge service for newcomers, or potential newcomers, to the Grand Traverse Region, to connect with people who already live here, who have chosen to live here, and who can help the newcomer feel welcomed and connected, all while offering knowledge of the region in terms of lifestyle, recreation, schools, healthcare, real estate, and industry and career opportunities.



The Creative Coast initiative was made possible in 2020 thanks to generous support and funding from the Michigan Film & Digital Media Office.



Produced the Creative Coast Podcast Series - a 12-part podcast series exploring the stories of



creative entrepreneurs who have made Traverse City their home and who have brought with them exciting new ideas, interests,

inspirations, and innovations. To date, the podcast has received over 30,000 'listens' via Interlochen Public Radio and other podcast platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

Produced the *Creative Coast Guide: A Guide to Great Creatives of the Grand Traverse Region* to elevate and recognize the cultural and artistic vibrancy of Michigan's Grand Traverse Region. The Guide showcases almost 100 creative freelancers and entrepreneurs doing business in the region. Creatives highlighted in the Creative Coast Guide were recently featured on *Marketplace* and in *Traverse City Ticker*.



CREATIVE COAST

MAKE IT HERE.

Granted Scholarships to five creative professionals to participate in Traverse Connect's Leadership Grand Traverse program, covering 90% of the participant's tuition fees.

Delivered a 6-part webinar series designed for the innovative mindset, focusing on entrepreneurship lessons for small businesses, startups, and creative freelancers.

Provided access to Traverse Connect Executive-level investor memberships (valued at \$1,000 annually) at a 75% discount for creative businesses, thanks to funding from the Michigan Film & Digital Media Office.

Launched a Digital Marketing Campaign to target key audiences and to point viewers to visit the Creative Coast website. Social and search ads are directed at users between the ages of 20-55 in major cities in the Midwest, New York, Florida, and Texas and the top ten outbound states, defined by the highest percentages of moves where COVID-19 was a contributing factor in leaving the state.



COVID-19 ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

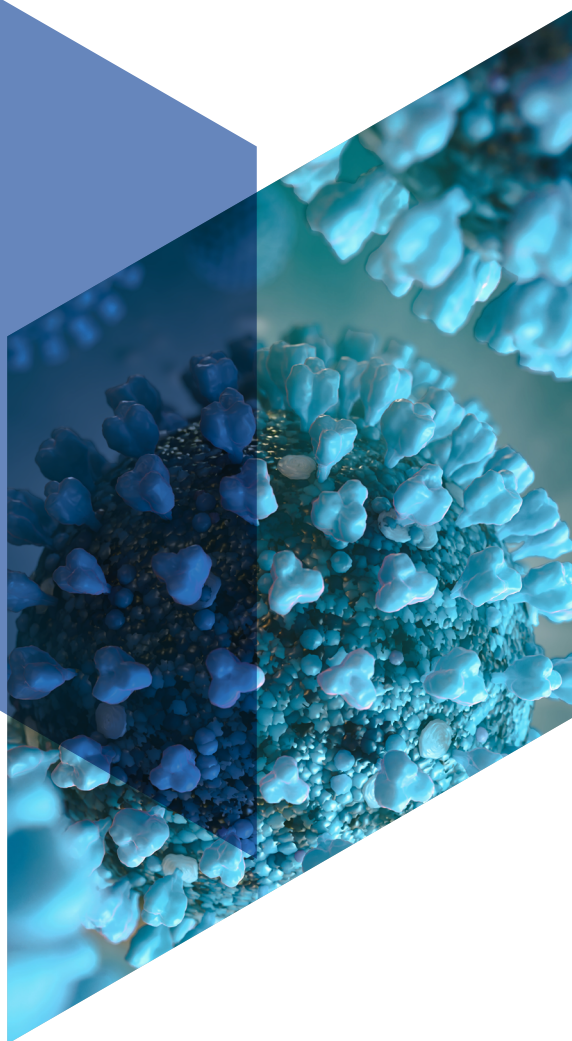
In mid-March, Traverse Connect's entire team responded to the looming pandemic and the economic crisis by working with a singular focus on helping all businesses in our community. Staff provided support by working with local and state government, offering emergency business support, timely and enhanced communication, and continued advocacy for safe reopening strategies to minimize the economic crisis.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

- Served as the Grand Traverse County Cross-Sector Business and Infrastructure Emergency Support Function Coordinator.
- Volunteer member of communications support team for the Grand Traverse County Joint Operations Center (JOC).
- Provided insight and updates on state and federal policy issues and supported partner organizations represented at the G.T. County Joint Operations Center in surfacing issues to local, state, and national policymakers.

EMERGENCY BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Launched new Business Resources page with a cohesive library of information on Business Grants and Loans, CARES Act, Employment Law, Executive Orders, Families First Coronavirus Response Act, GT County EO, Insurance, Learning Resources, Remote Workforce, Tax Credits & Filings, Unemployment, Success Stories, and Inspiration & Support.
- Continue to publish updates to Executive Orders, Emergency Orders, and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Epidemic Orders.
- Traverse Connect and Venture North reviewed more than 500 Michigan Small Business Relief Program grant applications submitted to the Northwest Small Business Relief Fund Collaborative for the Grand Traverse Region.



CONNECTING THE DOTS

INDUSTRY FORUM DISCUSSIONS



- Supported the launch of Venture North's Regional Resiliency Program, which has distributed nearly \$500,000 in grants to more than 100 small businesses with less than 9 employees.
- Produced Connecting the Dots and Industry Forum Discussion webinar series to support businesses and industries as they pivoted to reopen.

ALLIANCE ADVOCACY

During the pandemic, Traverse Connect leadership moved much of its governmental advocacy through the Alliance to offer a broader coalition of support. While much of the Alliance's work is behind the scenes, the coalition called for the safe reopening of northern Michigan more publicly and for our rural northern Michigan differences to be recognized.

Early on in the pandemic, after weeks of advocacy for a safe reopening of northern Michigan, Alliance chair Stacie Bytwork was invited to join Governor Gretchen Whitmer on stage in announcing the first phase of reopening for regions 6 and 8.

The Alliance spoke with a unified voice and used media to get out the coalition's message and move advocacy forward. This past year, the Alliance was picked up in the news over 25 times for their COVID advocacy – with coverage even in the Detroit News.

The Alliance partnered with other chambers and business organizations to advocate for business needs during COVID, like joining chambers across

the Midwest and Great Lakes region to support a coordinated reopening of our economy or calling for additional funding to state and local governments.

The coalition advocated for the inclusion of programs within the Fiscal Year 2021 budget they felt the state should lean on during COVID-19 recovery, like the Going Pro Talent Fund and Pure Michigan.

They supported COVID liability protections for businesses and opportunities for businesses to diversify their operations, like social districts and liquor to go.

During all of their advocacy work, the Alliance ensured they represented the genuine need of businesses. The coalition solicited the feedback of over 300 businesses from all across northern Michigan to guide their engagement in the COVID-19 crisis.



[INVESTORS](#)

[EVENTS](#)

[CREATIVE COAST](#)