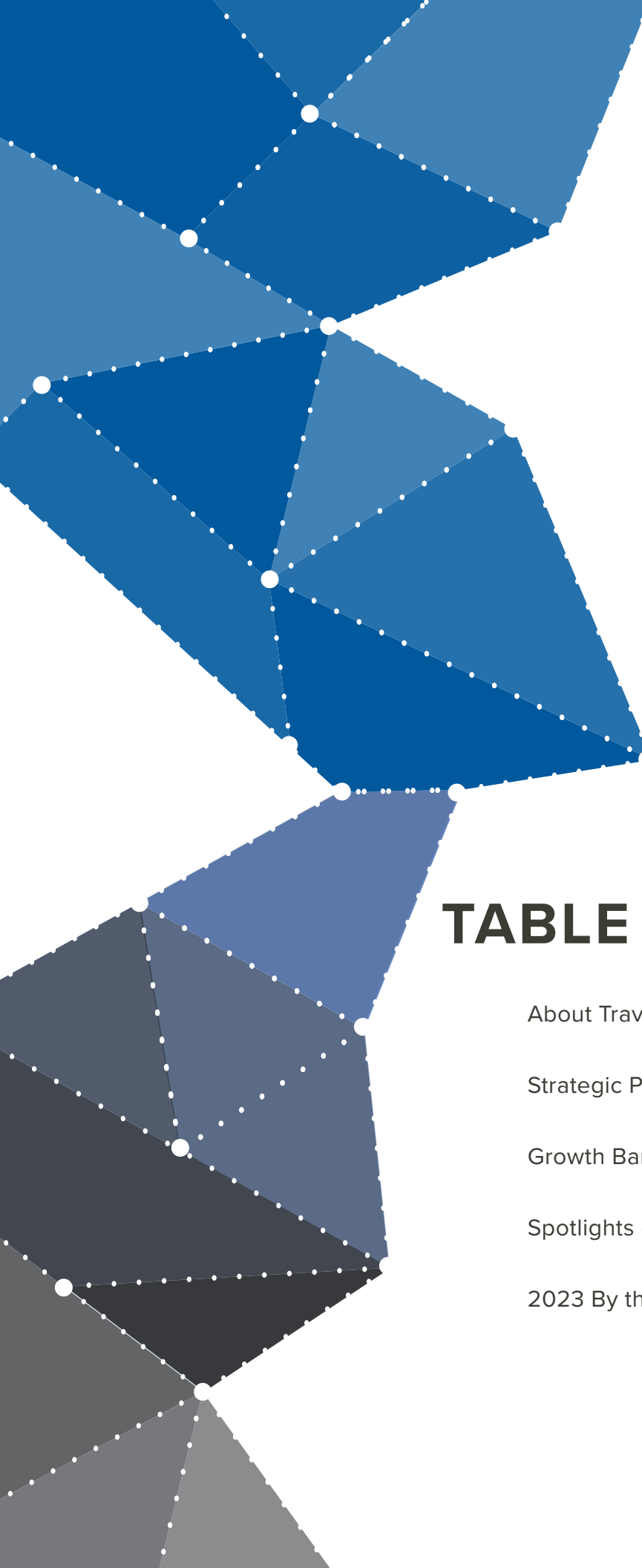




— 2023 —

# ANNUAL REPORT



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# TO OUR INVESTORS AND PARTNERS

The year 2023 was an incredibly vibrant one for the Grand Traverse regional economy. Your organizations continued to demonstrate incredible creativity and resiliency to grow your businesses and move our community forward. Thank you to our member companies, community partners, and public sector leaders for driving sustainable regional growth. Your continued success is our first concern.

This year, Traverse Connect conducted nearly 200 business outreach and retention visits across the region, and welcomed 122 new member businesses. More than 2,200 users view jobs each month on our Michigan's Creative Coast job board. Our public policy work saw continued momentum with the passage of the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act in Lansing, improvements to rural housing development policies at the Michigan State Housing Development Agency, and the adoption of a new federal immigration reform platform.

Blue Economy initiatives took center stage in 2023 with significant advancements for the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center, which received investments of \$1.6 Million from the federal budget and \$15 million in the Michigan State budget. This funding will support the establishment of the Grand Traverse region as a global hub for applied freshwater innovation and marine technology, offering research, education, commercialization, new business incubation, and startup acceleration programs. We worked with partners to host the second annual Northern Michigan Startup Week focused on Innovation in the Great Lakes. It initiated the Fresh Coast Maritime Challenge, a first-of-its-kind grant program in the United States that puts Michigan at the forefront of technology development for maritime mobility. The related Michigan E-Marine Event received national press as the largest demonstration of electric watercraft in the United States to date.

Traverse Connect and the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council entered into a new partnership to support a thriving manufacturing industry in the Grand Traverse region, incorporating services, programs, and joint membership. We have also partnered with the Grand Traverse County Economic Development Corporation to market and deploy its Tax-Exempt Revenue Bond program, providing manufacturers, nonprofit housing developers, and other qualified projects with loans for capital expenditures.

In the realm of talent development, we published our 2023 Grand Traverse Region Employer Benefits Survey, providing an overview of compensation and benefits offered by our region's employers, and launched Michigan's Creative Coast Freelancers & Independent Talent Directory, showcasing the creative freelancers and independent entrepreneurs of the Grand Traverse region.

Our collective efforts are leading to noticeable improvements in several key data points: 50.6% of our population now has a bachelor's degree or post-secondary certificate; we have seen 3% growth of our prime working age population of those 35-49 years of age; we have added new jobs in scientific, professional, technical, and IT fields; our GDP per employee has grown from \$67,000 to nearly \$70,000 per year; and local average wages have grown faster than the state of Michigan as a whole.

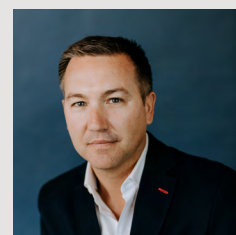
Forward-looking regional business sentiment is also on the upswing, with quarterly survey results showing that over 90% of businesses say that the Grand Traverse region is an excellent place to grow a business, and 83% of respondents say our region is improving as a place to grow a business. This figure has increased significantly from the initial reading of 56% when we first started tracking this metric in the first quarter of 2022.

The stories of local companies fostering economic expansion for our region, highlighted below, illustrate the significant positive impact you and your businesses have on our area. Two thousand twenty-four promises to be another successful and prosperous year!

It is Traverse Connect's distinct honor to support your hard work. We sincerely appreciate your ongoing partnership.



**Russ Knopp**  
Interim 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

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*Comfort Keepers*

**Sara Harding**  
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*Traverse City Record-Eagle*

**Don Howe**  
*Century Inc.*

**Jennifer Jones**  
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**Kevin Klein**  
*Traverse City Airport*

**Dave Mengebier**  
*Grand Traverse Regional  
Community Foundation*

**Fernando Meza**  
*Oneupweb*

**Chris Morse**  
*Rehmann*

**Nick Nissley**  
*Northwestern Michigan College*

**Amy Shamroe**  
*City of Traverse City*

**Jessica Sullivan**  
*Legado Family Office Management*

**Whitney Waara**  
*Traverse City Tourism*

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Traverse Connect's accomplishments for 2023 are summarized in relation to its six focus areas that are aligned to the strategic priorities of enhancing the competitiveness of the Grand Traverse regional economy, driving growth of second-stage businesses, and developing and attracting a talented workforce.

## IMPROVING THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

- Momentum is building in our efforts to create the [Freshwater Research & Innovation Center](#) with the January 2023 announcement that the project received \$1.6 Million in the federal budget. This funding allowed the Discovery Center to make further pier improvements and initiate architectural renderings, construction plans, and financial modeling for the project.



Traverse Connect spent the winter and spring working with state lawmakers to outline funding to support this regional project to drive economic growth. In July, the Center was notified that it would receive [\\$15 Million as part of the Michigan State fiscal year 2024 budget](#). The innovation center will establish the Grand Traverse region as a global hub for applied freshwater innovation, offering research, education, commercialization, new business incubation, and startup acceleration programs. The project is a collaborative effort of 20Fathoms, Discovery Center & Pier, Michigan Technological University, Northwestern Michigan College, and Traverse Connect.



- In the third quarter, Traverse Connect, Housing North, local municipalities, and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) shared that work was being done on implementing new housing tools enacted by the legislature, including PILOT, NEZ, and Brownfield TIF financing. Traverse Connect is also engaged with legislative leaders on a package of housing-related bills that will expand and strengthen housing development.



- In December, the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance released its [fourth quarter report](#) for 2023 with updates of the Alliance's progress to advance the business environment and community development opportunities for Northern Michigan. In 2023, the Alliance engaged with local, state, and federal policymakers on key issues including housing, energy policy, and rural development grants. It also announced the Alliance's expansion to now include the entire Upper Peninsula with InvestUP joining as a member of the coalition.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## TELLING THE STORY OF OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY

- The [Freelancers & Independent Talent Directory](#) grew over 2023 to include more than 50 creative freelancers and independent entrepreneurs of the Grand Traverse region. It offers these entrepreneurs a microsite to showcase their resumes, portfolios, and services to businesses and employers looking for local talent and creates business-to-business development among freelancers. Those with a “Featured Freelancer” listing also receive social media spotlights, Michigan’s Creative Coast highlights, and opportunities to speak to Fresh Coast Quarterly Club gatherings.

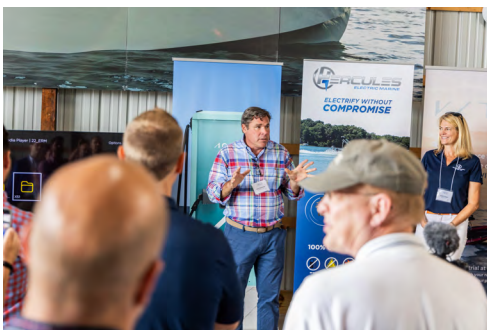


- In the second quarter, Traverse Connect hosted [“Innovation in the Great Lakes: Northern Michigan’s Blue Economy”](#) as the part of the second annual Northern Michigan Startup Week. The events promoted our regional entrepreneurship, investors, and startup businesses, with a focus on water innovation. The program was organized by 20Fathoms, Northern Michigan Angels, Newton’s Road, Common Place, TCNewTech, and Traverse Connect. Northern Michigan Startup Week will return in April 2024.

- Traverse Connect partnered with the MEDC on the first [Fresh Coast Maritime Challenge grant program](#), the first of its kind in the United States for technology development in maritime transportation. Grant recipient Aqua superPower, hosted the Michigan E-Marine Event on August 24 at Elk Rapids Marina, which brought together key players in the electric marine sector to demonstrate the technologies and fast-charging infrastructure that exist for zero-emission watercraft. Event attendees included legislators, funding agencies, boat-builders, marina owners, and charging operators from across the county. It received national press as the largest demonstration to date of electric watercraft in the United States.



Rapids Marina, which brought together key players in the electric marine sector to demonstrate the technologies and fast-charging infrastructure that exist for zero-emission watercraft. Event attendees included legislators, funding agencies, boat-builders, marina owners, and charging operators from across the county. It received national press as the largest demonstration to date of electric watercraft in the United States.



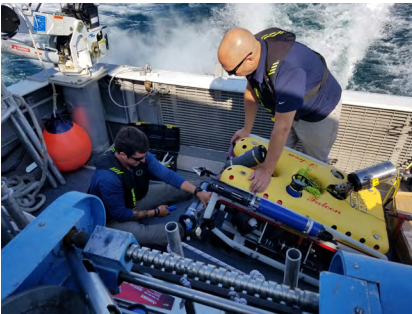
- Traverse Connect published its first [Regional Economic Ecosystem Report](#) to highlight the vibrant economy growing and flourishing in the Grand Traverse region. Traverse Connect’s public and private partnerships are highlighted within its pages, as well as regional economic trends noted in the results of its Business Growth Barometer Survey conducted on a quarterly basis. The report introduces target industry clusters and the work being done to attract new businesses and help existing businesses in the region

grow and scale. Traverse Connect is also engaged in ensuring these industries and businesses have access to a talented workforce and can attract specialized and skilled professionals to engage in a fulfilling career.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF GROWING FIRMS

- In early 2023, Traverse Connect entered into an agreement with the Grand Traverse County Economic Development Corporation to market and deploy its [Tax Exempt Revenue Bond program](#). This tool provides manufacturers, nonprofit housing developers, and other qualified projects with loans for capital expenditures. The involvement of the Grand Traverse County EDC authorizes the lender to issue the bond with tax-exempt status, resulting in a lower-than-market interest rate for the borrower. This resource can provide substantial savings in financing costs over the life of the project.



- Regional economic development, education, and technology partners, tribal entities, and several private businesses collaborated on a Federal EDA grant related to our freshwater initiatives. Partners in the blue economy project continue to seek out additional funding opportunities that will significantly expand and build on our existing water-related initiatives with local, regional, and global partners that find value in a water technology cluster headquartered in our area.

- Earfab Americas, a new joint venture between Traverse City-based Altus Brands, LLC, and Denmark-based Earfab ApS, joined forces to manufacture custommade ear protection for private labels and OEMs. This dynamic project will help expand

the capabilities of this company and bolster the region with a robust workforce in the key sector of manufacturing. The footprint of the project will expand to 15,000 square feet, including production, packing, shipping, the construction of offices, parking, and employee lounge. The project is expected to generate a total capital investment of \$2,740,000 and create up to 93 new jobs. The company has chosen Green Lake Township, Grawn over a competing site in Tampa, FL. Altus Brands' new venture with Earfab is another example of Michigan's leadership in the outdoor recreation economy and Grand Traverse County's globally



competitive manufacturing sector. With the creation of more family-sustaining jobs, this investment will support the continued growth of our high-skilled and technologically-advanced workforce, strengthening our regional economy.



- In December 2023, Traverse Connect and the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council entered into a [new partnership](#) to support the long-standing and thriving manufacturing industry in the Grand Traverse region. The centerpiece of the partnership will be a [new joint membership for manufacturing companies](#) in the region incorporating services, programs, and events from both

Traverse Connect and the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council, including the annual Northern Michigan Manufacturing Summit.

- Also in December, Traverse Connect delivered the East Bay Township Commercial Corridor Improvement Study & Regional Business Trends report. The Study focused on the further development of commercial corridors, East Bay Beach District and East Bay Corners. The recommendations build upon the Township's Master Plan and vision to enhance economic development, attract business, improve transportation routes and walkability, improve access to the water, generate workforce housing and mixed-use development, revitalize public space, and encourage the community to engage with local restaurant and retail.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## CREATING INTERACTIONS FOR BUSINESSES

- Business engagement was robust in the first quarter, with Traverse Connect providing over 80 business referrals and welcoming 32 new member companies. We conducted over 60 business outreach and retention visits and hosted eight events with well over 1,200 total attendees. These events and activities continue to provide valuable opportunities for business and community leaders across our region to discuss issues, develop partnerships, and grow their businesses.
- In the second quarter, Traverse Connect's business engagement included 107 direct business referrals and welcomed 33 new member companies. We conducted over 40 business outreach and retention visits and hosted eight events with nearly 700 total attendees, including the Distinguished Service Award Luncheon and the spring Economic Strategy Session, providing valuable opportunities for business and community leaders across our region to discuss issues, develop partnerships, and grow their businesses.
- The third quarter saw continued momentum with Traverse Connect's business engagement. We made 118 direct business referrals and welcomed 27 new member companies. We conducted over 30 business outreach and retention visits and hosted 12 events with 575 total attendees, including our annual golf outing and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance Bully Pulpit event, providing valuable opportunities for business and community leaders to discuss issues and develop partnerships.
- Traverse Connect's business engagement continued on a strong trend for the fourth quarter, with 146 direct business referrals and 30 new member companies. We conducted 66 business outreach and retention visits and hosted 1,008 total attendees at 13 events including our Annual Economic Summit and Energy Forum for the final Economic Strategy Session of 2023. These events and activities continue to provide valuable opportunities for business and community leaders across our region to discuss issues, develop partnerships, and grow their businesses.



- Traverse City Young Professionals hosted 31 Morning Meetup, Volunteering, and Happy Hour events in 2023 at venues across the Traverse City area. TCYPs volunteered for festivals from the Traverse City Comedy Fest to the National Cherry Festival, and for nonprofit organizations like TART Trails, the Traverse City DDA, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.





# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## BUILDING THE TALENT PIPELINE

### EMPLOYER BENEFITS SURVEY

Employer-offered benefits play a significant role in attracting and retaining talent. In the first quarter, Traverse Connect collaborated with Networks Northwest to develop a benefits benchmarking tool for our regional businesses with a survey distributed to employers across the region. In the second quarter, Traverse Connect published the [2023 Grand Traverse Region Employer Benefits Report](#). The report provides an overview of the benefits offered by our region's employers and is designed to assist employers in making informed decisions about their benefits packages and to support employees in evaluating their overall compensation and benefits. Over a dozen industry sectors are represented in the data and includes 200 individual responses. In conjunction with the release of the report, Traverse Connect hosted an Economic Strategy Session with Advantage Benefits, Cherryland Electric Cooperative, the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation, and Fustini's Oils & Vinegars.



### NORTHERN EXPLORERS DISCOVER LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES

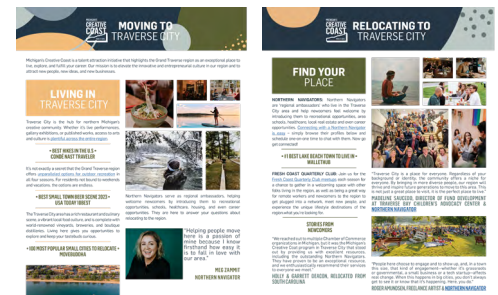


Each fall, we invite ten individuals residing outside the Grand Traverse region to attend two Traverse Connect and Michigan's Creative Coast events as our VIP guests to explore the exceptional career opportunities and lifestyle available here.

Known as the [Northern Explorers](#), these individuals traveled from as far away as Nashville, Tennessee to get a sense for our business community and take steps toward relocating to the Traverse City area. Each year, at least one Northern Explorer has landed a local opportunity, and this year was no exception. Kris Doran's Northern Explorer profile was noticed by Northwest Education Services, and she was hired as their Director of Finance before even attending the events as an Explorer. Congratulations, Kris!

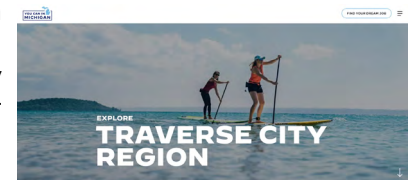
### INFORM & INSPIRE TALENT TO MAKE IT HERE.

New this year, the Michigan's Creative Coast Employer Toolkit now features two one-pagers designed to illustrate what it's like to live, work, and explore in the Grand Traverse area. Download and share ["Moving to Traverse City"](#) to provide a high-level overview of life and career opportunities up north, as well as inspiration for making northern Michigan home. Or, do you have a new hire relocating to the area and looking for help with logistics like housing, child care, meeting people, etc.? Download and share ["Relocating to Traverse City"](#) as a relocation guide to help make their move a breeze.



### ATTRACTING TALENT BEYOND MICHIGAN

Traverse Connect engaged with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation in the development of a new state-wide talent attraction program, [You Can In Michigan](#). The state's initiative highlights the Traverse City region and borrows heavily from Traverse Connect's Michigan's Creative Coast program branding and marketing. Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance were actively involved in the Governor's Growing Michigan Together Council and hosted a field hearing for the Council's Jobs, Talent & Economy workgroup in August.



Thanks to grant funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Michigan's Creative Coast boosted its talent attraction marketing to a national level and updated the content library with new local photography and videos. A new series of videos features Northern Navigator advice on child care, housing, careers, and social life. Two new "Newcomer Story" videos were produced and enhance the existing library of videos produced for Michigan's Creative Coast. These newcomers utilized the resources and programs offered by Michigan's Creative Coast to assist their moves "up north."

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

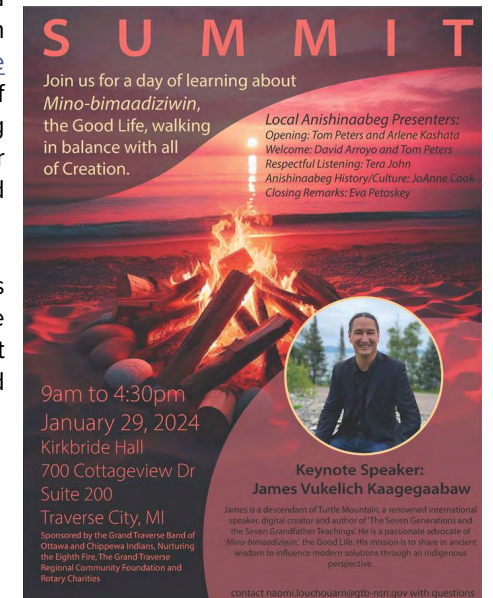
## FOSTERING A CULTURE OF OPENNESS AND CREATIVITY

- Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance joined several other prominent business groups, including the Michigan, Grand Rapids, and Detroit Chambers, at the March 16 bill signing in Lansing for the expansion of the [Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act](#). The legislation includes workplace and legal protections for the LGBTQ+ community.



- As part of our continued Michigan's Creative Coast talent attraction efforts, Traverse Connect implemented [quarterly marketing collaborations](#) to showcase the work of our regional nonprofit community. The collaboration includes cross-promotional communications, social media campaigns, and newsletter stories about how our organizations work together to foster a culture of creativity and openness in the Grand Traverse region across environmental, educational, and human services fields.

- In 2023, Traverse Connect adopted an organizational priority of strengthening our partnership with the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and the Band's economic development organization, Grand Traverse Economic Development. Tribal entities play a key role in our freshwater initiatives and the Grand Traverse Band is a primary member of the Discover Blue Consortium that applied for an EDA Tech Hubs grant. We are also supporting GTB's application for a Tribal Climate Resilience grant through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Traverse Connect also participated in the [Nurturing the Eighth Fire Summit](#), hosted by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. This event focused on sustaining Anishinaabek cultural voice in water-related and other environmental initiatives in Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Manistee counties.

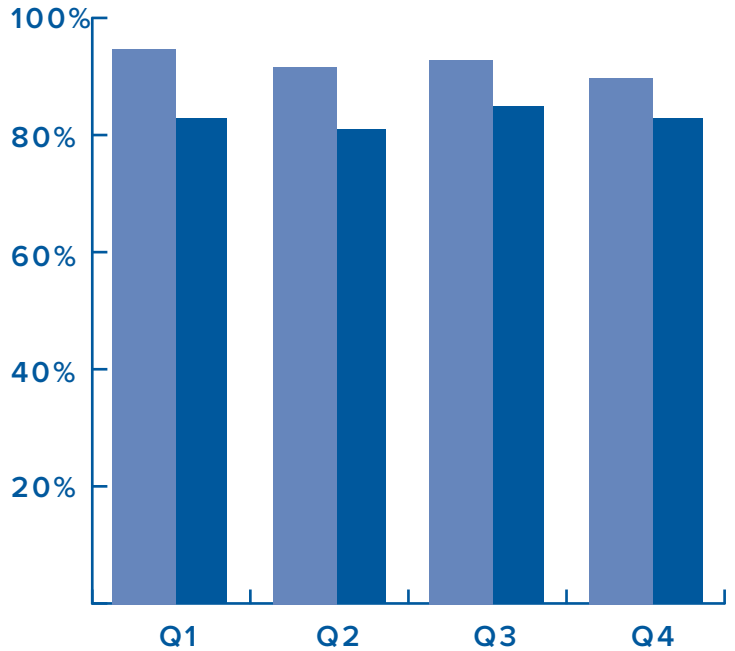


- Traverse Connect will be collaborating in 2024 with members of the Community Development Coalition to advocate for the economic impact of the region's arts and culture sector in our Michigan's Creative Coast talent attraction outreach, in addition to Traverse Connect's work to support a diverse and thriving economic ecosystem.

# GROWTH BAROMETER & REGIONAL DASHBOARD

Measuring Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building can be difficult and complex, but there are key performance indicators to highlight progress. We have adopted the use of a local Scale Up Growth Barometer measurement, adapted from the Babson College Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Platform, which asks two important questions of our local business community:

- IS OUR REGION A GOOD PLACE TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS? ■
- IS OUR REGION IMPROVING AS A PLACE TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS? ■



## REGIONAL DASHBOARD

Traverse Connect is tracking five metrics in Talent Attraction & Development and Economic Development to measure the region’s progress against our organization’s vision and goals for 2030. The 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. Data is an imperfect, yet necessary, tool to measure those gains. All five key metrics on the Traverse Connect [Regional Dashboard](#) have trended positive for 2023.

### TALENT ATTRACTION & DEVELOPMENT

BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR POST-SECONDARY CERTIFICATE  
2030 GOAL: 60%

**50.6%**



GROWTH OF PRIME WORKING AGE POPULATION (35-49)  
2030 GOAL: 5%

**3%**



SCIENTIFIC, PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL, & IT JOBS  
2030 GOAL: 3,200

**2,761**



### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ANNUAL GDP PER EMPLOYEE  
2030 GOAL: \$84,000

**\$69,845**



STATE AVERAGE WAGE PERCENTAGE  
2030 GOAL: 90%

**87%**



# INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT

## MUNSON HEALTHCARE

Munson Healthcare, a non-profit healthcare system and the largest employer north of U.S. 10, has continually evolved the way care is delivered in Northern Michigan for over a century. This fall, it unveiled a new vision for the future, shaped by the voices of local communities and patients, and designed to sustain the healthcare system in a post-pandemic world.

Rising costs, lower reimbursements, and pandemic-induced staffing shortages continue to challenge healthcare systems across Michigan and around the nation. While Munson is not immune to these challenges, it is making changes that benefit patients and ensure the strength of the healthcare system in the decades to come. These topics were explored



in further detail during Traverse Connect's Economic Strategy Session in March. Ed Ness, CEO of Munson Healthcare, and Shelley Spencer, chief human resources officer, gathered with area business leaders for a conversation about Munson's role to improve the health of our communities, recruit new employees to the healthcare industry and grow the healthcare talent pipeline for the future.



The Regional Care Transformation Plan is focused on expanding access and advancing the level of high-quality care that's earned Munson a place among the Fortune/PINC AI Top 15 Healthcare Systems in America. Over the next three years, strategies will be implemented to increase preventative, outpatient, and primary care; maximize system resources and ensure a seamless experience across the region; and elevate Munson Medical Center's (MMC) position as a center for high-level specialty care.

For patients, this means it will be easier to find a primary care doctor and access medical records from any Munson facility. There will be greater access to virtual care from the comfort of home. Continued growth in high-level specialty care at Munson Medical Center like stroke, neurology, and oncology will ensure as many patients as possible are able to receive care closer to home in Northern Michigan.

Under this new plan, each of Munson's hospitals will remain hospitals and continue to provide emergency services and observation care. Hospitals in Cadillac, Gaylord, and Traverse City will serve as regional hubs with resources in place to care for the most acutely ill.

In many ways this vision is already coming into focus. MMC earned designation as Northern Michigan's first and only Comprehensive Stroke Center in December and Munson Orthopedic Institute's roster of fellowship-trained specialists continues to grow. A new primary care clinic has opened at Foster Family Community Health Center. The free Ask-A-Nurse Hotline service is now available 24/7.



This work is also reflected in community partnership. The Grand Traverse Center for Mental Wellness, to be located on the Munson campus, is projected to begin offering some behavioral health services by as early as the end of the year. As a non-profit, giving back to the community is part of Munson Healthcare's mission and last year the system provided \$171 million of support to patients in need, health programs, and community projects.



The past few years have seen change in healthcare and for us all. However, Munson is committed to opening new doors for our patients and keep care local in Northern Michigan for the next 100 years.

To learn more about our transformation plan, please visit [munsonhealthcare.org/transformation](https://munsonhealthcare.org/transformation)

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SPOTLIGHT

## CHERRY CAPITAL AIRPORT

Cherry Capital Airport provides the economic ingredient that attracts both business and tourism development, designed to provide connectivity to the world. TVC is the primary commercial service airport in northern lower Michigan, serving 700,699 total passengers in 2023, ranking third overall in the state of Michigan. TVC currently serves 18 nonstop destinations by five airlines: Allegiant, American, Delta, Sun Country, and United. Cherry Capital is home to over 30 tenants and 105 based aircraft. Freight services are provided by both FedEx and UPS. The airport's economic impact has been measured at over \$1 billion annually.



Traverse Connect kicked off the 2023 Northern Michigan Startup Week at Cherry Capital, showcasing the connection between the growth of the region's technology and startup sector with access to talent and business partnerships provided by the robust service to cities across the United States. Thanks to a pledge from Traverse Connect, TVC is adding Saturday service by United to Houston this summer.

In 2023, the airport has invested nearly \$15 million in upgrades to make TVC more accessible and reliable for our community. The installation of a new Instrument Landing System on

Runway 10 will assist those aircraft to land safely into the wind during east winds and low visibility. Over the past summer, we expanded our airline terminal ramp to provide additional space for aircraft parking to accommodate our busy gates. The replacement of passenger boarding bridges at gates 1, 3, and 4 will be facilitated in 2024. These new bridges will create more flexibility in our gate usage for the airlines. These investments will improve on-time performance and reliability to make TVC an even better choice for your travels for work or play.



Remote workers have found Traverse City to be a preferred option for those seeking access to a northern Michigan outdoor lifestyle without having to give up a job headquartered elsewhere. When sales meetings, conferences, and calls back to the head office arise, Cherry Capital provides the connections that make life on Michigan's Creative Coast possible.



As we look to grow in 2024, the development of additional airline terminal gates will be the focus. Team TVC is currently working on the environmental review, 30% design, and financial planning. The estimated overall development costs are anticipated at \$130 million. The Airport Authority's mission is to be a significant driver of economic growth by providing world-class service, as we want to be the airport of choice for residents and visitors of Northwest Michigan.

# TALENT SPOTLIGHT

## RJG



RJG Inc. is an injection molding solutions company focused on helping our clients improve the quality of plastic parts to ensure product safety and reduce plastic waste. Our clients use RJG's groundbreaking technology and unsurpassed industry knowledge to improve everyday products for people around the globe.

Our mission to improve people's lives aligns well with Traverse Connect's vision for businesses in our local community. RJG is, at its core, a people-centered company focusing on improving lives by elevating the quality and safety of plastic products and building and sustaining high-quality careers in a great work environment. Our dedication to

providing employees with sustaining and rewarding careers has earned RJG' Best Place to Work' and "Healthy Work Site' awards this past year.



Like Traverse Connect, RJG knows that to 'take care of business,' you must first take care of your employees and their families. We are proud to support our RJG team members with competitive compensation, generous and inclusive family-friendly benefits, professional development and training opportunities, and a fun, healthy workplace culture. Our benefits include options for employer-paid health care premiums for employees and dependents, contributions to health savings and retirement accounts, disability insurance, fertility care, prescription coverage, and even pet insurance!



Work-life balance and well-being are supported by offering paid time off, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, and a comprehensive Employee Assistance Program that includes counseling services. Our 'hybrid work' model allows work from home and flexible schedules to make it easier to care for families and attend important events. Our award-winning wellness plan includes healthy snack choices in the office, health and fitness resources, challenges and incentives, and paid time off to complete annual wellness checkups. Employees can enjoy our beau-acre property by paddling one of our kayaks down the Boardman River, grabbing co-workers for a round on our disc golf course, hiking or snowshoeing our wooded trails, and getting paid up to an hour a week to do it!

Traverse Connect supports RJG's mission to improve our clients' and employees' lives. Through their Public Policy Engagement and Advocacy program, they arranged a visit with RJG and Congressional Representative Betsy Coffia to learn about our injection molding technology and training. Representative Coffia's work to pass legislation for the Michigan Research and Development Small Business Tax Credit could provide RJG with important financial resources to continue investing in developing our innovative technology.



RJG has also benefited from the employee training resources we learned about through Traverse Connect. RJG has been awarded thousands of dollars in grant money and reimbursements to 'upskill' our team through the Going PRO Talent Fund and the Michigan New Jobs Training Program.

Traverse Connect has been an invaluable resource for RJG this past year, and we look forward to another year of continued growth and success!

# ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT

## TRAVERSE CONNECT AND CHAMBER ALLIANCE ADVOCATE FOR REGIONAL HOUSING CHANGES

As housing continues to be a critical issue, Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance actively engaged legislators and stakeholders to advance attainable housing priorities in 2023.

Early in the year, two Alliance Partners received gubernatorial appointments to key housing authority positions.

President and CEO of Traverse Connect, Warren Call, was appointed to the board of MSHDA for a term commencing February 23, 2023, and expiring March 10, 2026. President of the Petoskey Regional Chamber, Nikki Devitt, was appointed to the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) Statewide Housing Partnership, which exists to develop a strategy to implement the 2022 Michigan Statewide Housing Plan and advise MSHDA's strategic goals.



With these two appointments, the Alliance achieved key wins such as rewriting the MSHDA's Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP), a document outlining the criteria and process for allocating Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) within Michigan. LIHTC is a federal program designed to incentivize the development of affordable rental housing for low-income individuals and families.



Through the rewriting of the QAP, the Alliance successfully advocated for new rural scoring criteria that utilize a new “proximity to amenities” scoring rubric to replace the impractical “walkability score,” new language with differentiated rural weightings and more tribal-specific language, and additional support and focus for smaller developers.

In the summer, the Traverse Connect traveled to the Detroit Regional Chamber's Annual Mackinac Policy Conference to discuss economic development issues, including housing objectives, with business and government leaders.

While attending the conference, Partners engaged in productive discussions with leaders from the Michigan Manufactured Housing Association, Michigan Department of Transportation, Labor and Economic Development, and Office of Rural Prosperity.

Additionally, Traverse Connect observed several panel discussions, including one on “How Employers Can Help Solve Michigan's Housing Affordability Crisis.” The session illustrated how businesses can be agents of change in the housing landscape, leading to positive outcomes for their companies, employees, and communities. The panel included Cherry Republic President Bob Sutherland.

In the fourth quarter, Alliance members joined Housing North and its partners for the annual Northwest Michigan Housing Summit.

Each year, regional housing partners come together to exchange ideas with partners and supporters on housing solutions for communities in northern Michigan. The summit featured several updates and presentations highlighting solutions and tools for housing being used in the region.

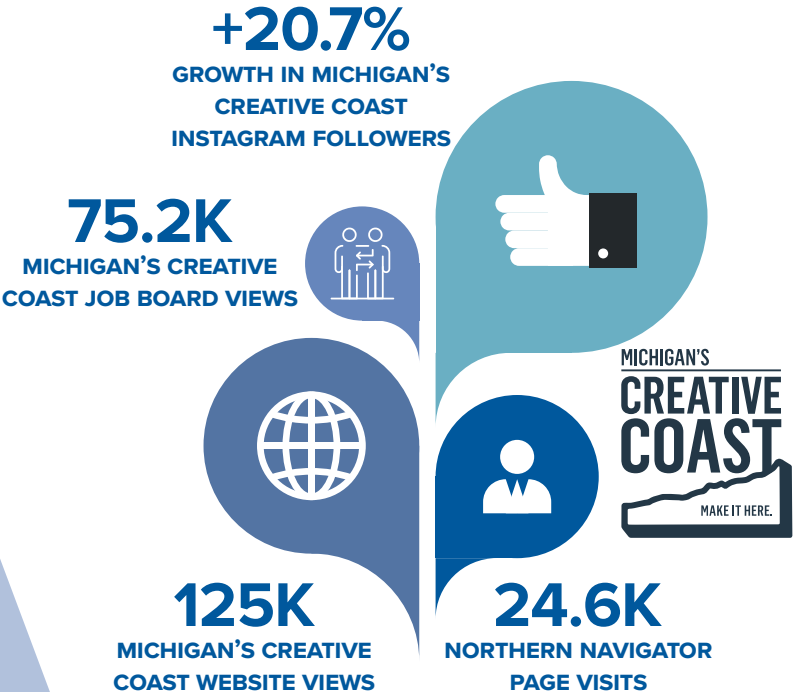
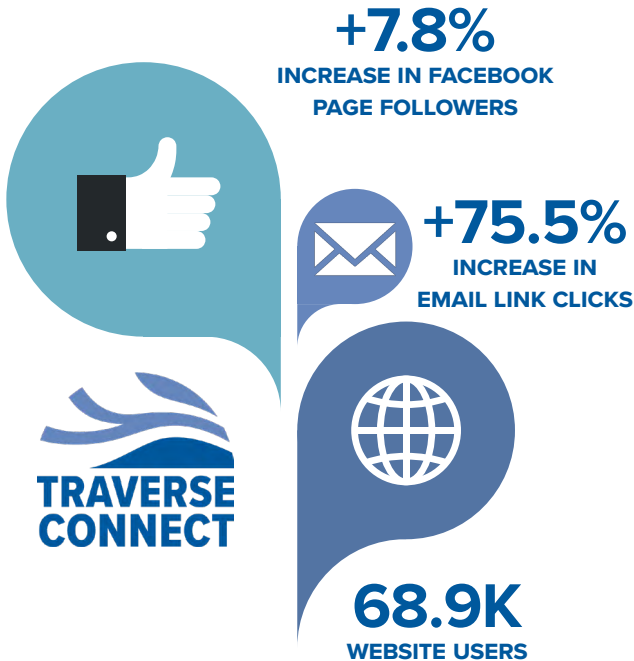
# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

**548**  
DIRECT MEMBER REFERRALS  
IN 2023

**337,774**  
SEARCHES OF OUR  
INVESTOR DIRECTORY

**+46%**  
REFERRALS TO INVESTOR  
WEBSITES FROM DIRECTORY  
FROM 2022 TO 2023

**150+**  
MENTIONS BY LOCAL AND  
STATE MEDIA







*Grow your business*