



ANNUAL REPORT 2024





The Traverse Connect Annual Economic Summit brought together nearly 600 attendees to hear from local and state leaders sharing trends and projections on the economic outlook for the Grand Traverse region, in addition to showcasing ten individuals seeking career opportunities to relocate to the area.

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & CEO

RACHEL JOHNSON

Chair, Board of Directors
CEO, Cherryland Electric Cooperative

WARREN CALL

President & CEO, Traverse Connect

We are proud to share the 2024 Annual Report, highlighting the progress, projects, and successes that define our collective efforts in fostering economic growth and prosperity in the Grand Traverse region. Your companies and organizations created significant value for your stakeholders, growth for our region, and an economic model much of the Midwest would love to emulate!

The past year has been marked by groundbreaking initiatives, including successful partnerships in the advanced manufacturing and freshwater technology sectors. The Advanced Aerial Mobility project has brought together Munson Healthcare, Northwestern Michigan College, Central Michigan University and several other partners in an exciting pilot project focused on the deployment of drone

technology for both rural health innovation and freshwater research. Our trade mission to the United Kingdom and partnership with Saab North America have advanced opportunities in the aerospace and defense sectors. The e-boat and drone demonstration event garnered national attention for our region as a location for outdoor recreation technology development.

Our advocacy efforts have also yielded significant results, securing funding for key regional priorities such as educator housing, infrastructure improvements, and business development grants. These achievements underscore our commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment where enterprises can thrive and individuals can

find meaningful, family-sustaining careers. Through advocacy, strategic partnerships, and targeted investments, we have supported business growth, facilitated key workforce development programs, and strengthened the region's reputation as an attractive destination for talent and investment.

Working with local businesses, entrepreneurs, and educational institutions has fueled economic diversification and talent attraction, ensuring that our industries remain resilient and primed for future success. In 2024, Traverse Connect made 525 direct business-to-business referrals, welcomed over 100 new member businesses, and conducted over 900 employer outreach and retention visits.

Our region also continues to make significant progress toward our sustainable development goals. A key highlight, we are out-competing other regions around the state in the all-important metric of working age population growth, where we have seen an impressive 7% growth in the 35-to-49 age prime demographic cohort since we began tracking this metric in 2019.

These accomplishments are only possible due to the dedication of our investors, business leaders, elected officials, and community partners. Together, we are shaping a future where the Grand Traverse region remains a vibrant, thriving economic powerhouse.

Thank you for your support, commitment, and belief in our region. We look forward to another year of growth and success for your organizations.

ABOUT US

Traverse Connect is the lead economic development organization for the Grand Traverse region, which supports area businesses through a combination of business attraction and retention strategies, talent development efforts, and strategic coordination among partner agencies.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Brandie Ekren
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Laura Galbraith
Venture North

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Paul Heidbreder
Traverse City Record-Eagle

Don Howe
Truly Free

Joe Hurshe
Munson Medical Center

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.

Nick Jacqmain
Springfield Roofing

Kevin Klein
Traverse City Airport

Russ Knopp
Comfort Keepers

Fernando Meza
Oneupweb

Chris Morse
Rehmann

Nick Nissley
Northwestern Michigan College

Norm Plumsted
Honor Bank

Jen Seman
Priority Health

Amy Shamroe
Mayor, City of Traverse City

Jessica Sullivan
Legado Family Office Management

Whitney Waara
Traverse City Tourism

YEAR IN REVIEW

Enhancing the competitiveness of the Grand Traverse regional economy

Traverse Connect and the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance successfully advocated for key regional priorities to receive support in the annual state budget including the continued funding for the **Office of Rural Prosperity**, the new **Michigan Innovation Fund**, an allocation of **\$1 Million for Fish Pass**, and **\$5 Million for the Educator Housing** project in Blair Township. Additional items of note are a new MSHDA Technical Assistance program for housing field staff to support local capacity building and a **\$2 Million allocation for the redevelopment of the former Pugsley corrections facility into an agricultural tourism hub**.

We hosted the Consul General of Canada for a discussion covering economic cooperation between Canada and our region. Key topics included BlueTech collaboration, government procurement for our regional manufacturing and technology companies, and the possibility of air service to Toronto.

In partnership with Networks Northwest and other regional economic development organizations, Traverse Connect helped to produce the recent Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Study for Northwest Michigan. The study looks at the importance of outdoor recreation as an economic driver in the region. It provides baseline data and quantifies the impact of the outdoor economy. The study also includes recommendations for expanding on the strengths and opportunities in the industry.

Traverse Connect joined with partners from the Community Development Coalition of Northwest Michigan on the 2024 policy platform event in Lansing. The team met with House and Senate leadership and the Governor's administration to advocate for enhanced support for arts



Local officials and legislators joined Governor Whitmer to announce funding for educator housing in Blair Township.

Traverse Connect focuses its work on the strategic priorities of enhancing the competitiveness of the Grand Traverse regional economy, driving the growth of second-stage businesses and developing and attracting a talented workforce.

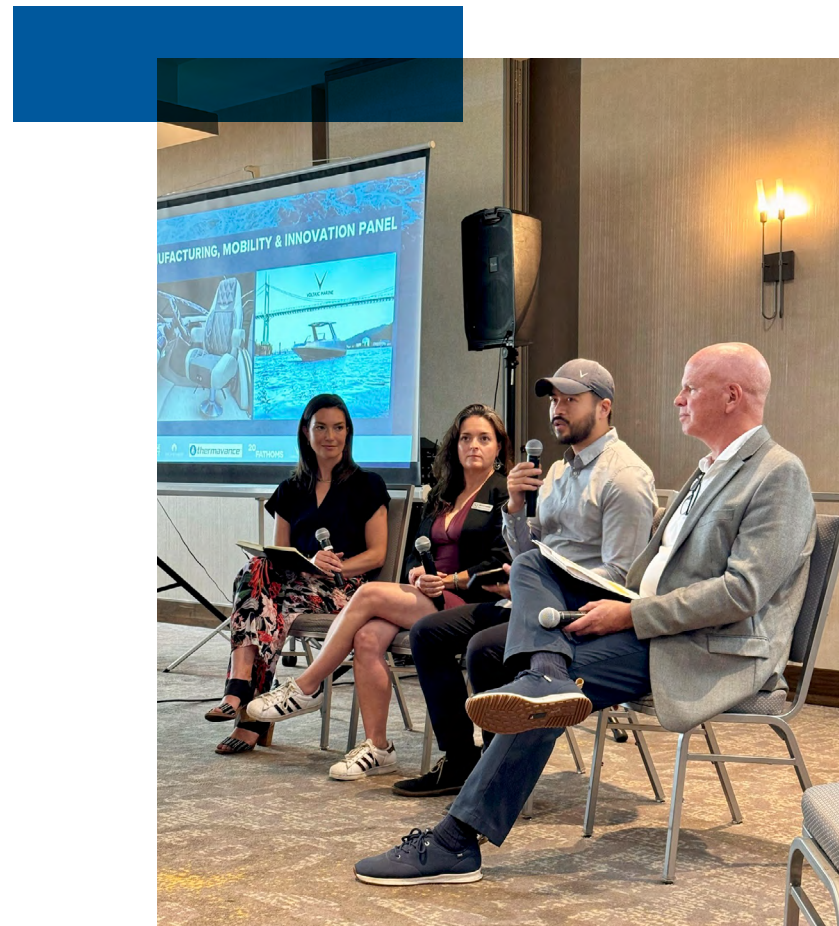
and culture funding in Northern Michigan as a key driver of economic development talent attraction and retention strategy. Additional topics included housing access, environmental and farmland protection, and the rural prosperity needs for our region.

Traverse Connect hosted State Senators Mallory McMarrow and John Damoose, several state agency directors, and a group of local business leaders for a roundtable

discussion focused on improving Michigan's economic development strategy to be more talent-development oriented with additional housing and transportation initiatives to support retention of current workforce and the immigration of new employees.

We partnered with MichAuto, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council to host an Outdoor Mobility roundtable forum promoting our outdoor recreation innovation and regional manufacturing industry with attendees from across the county.

Traverse Connect secured a state grant to launch a pilot program in partnership with Munson Healthcare and Northwestern Michigan College utilizing unmanned aircraft systems to test and scale the delivery of medical supplies and other critical healthcare services and test drones on Lake Michigan in use cases that include marine surveying, water testing, bathymetric mapping, and emergency response support.



Camille Hoisington (Traverse Connect), Delaney Johnson (20Fathoms), Richard Phamdo (Voltaic Marine), and Bill Myers (Promethient) at the MichAuto Outdoor Mobility Roundtable in August.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Driving the growth of second-stage businesses

Traverse Connect joined the State of Michigan trade delegation in July to the United Kingdom to promote our regional aerospace and defense industry and to attract new global businesses to our region.

Traverse Connect and our partners in the Freshwater Research & Innovation Center welcomed U.S. and international companies to a Bluetech Industry presentation in conjunction with the annual Lakebed 2030 Conference hosted by NMC to promote our marine technology and innovation business attraction efforts.

JanTec Inc., manufacturer of material handling and conveyor equipment & systems, purchased

B&T Bearing Inc., a producer of ball transfer units, conveyor rollers and cargo handling equipment out of Louisville, Ky. The acquisition will allow JanTec to offer customers an expanded, engineered solution for their material handling needs, and B&T Bearings customers gain access to JanTec's handling and conveyance solutions.

We welcomed record attendance for our Annual Economic Summit in November. Area businesses engaged in productive networking during the Business Showcase prior to the luncheon, which featured Consumers Energy CEO Garrick Rochow, an economic update from the Michigan Chief Deputy Treasurer, and a panel discussion with local leaders from Interlochen Center for the Arts, Hagerty, and Rehman.

Grand Traverse State Bank (GTSB) completed an acquisition of First State Bank of Decatur, the oldest chartered bank in the state of Michigan, with total assets of \$54 million. In early 2025, GTSB will seek regulatory approval to offer full-service banking to our region under the name Grand Traverse State Bank.

Traverse Connect hosted its second annual electric boat exhibition, with manufacturers

Traverse City's Wave Lumina delivers their award-winning pitch at the Great Lakes Aqua Hacking Challenge at NMC's Hagerty Center in May.



from around the world taking part in demos and highlighting our industry potential to companies who may relocate here.

We supported Cambium Enterprises in their successful application for a MEDC expansion grant to create 26 new jobs focused on analytical testing and product development areas to address PFAS chemicals for food, dietary supplements, and botanical products. The investment in Cambium from the Michigan Strategic Fund will create local, high-quality, family-sustaining careers, bolstering our region's year-round economy.

Traverse Connect worked with the MEDC, the Whitmer Administration, and partner organizations to secure a new project with Saab in northern Michigan. The project brings 70 advanced manufacturing jobs to the region and reinforces our local strength in aerospace and defense manufacturing, as well as the

growing impact of the Grand Traverse Area Manufacturing Council.

Along with a team of community partners, we led the third annual Northern Michigan Startup Week, which celebrates entrepreneurship, innovation, and the growing startup community in northern Michigan. This year's event focused on Rural Health Innovation and took place April 22 – 25.

Several key regional thought leaders served on the Great Lakes AquaHacking Challenge advisory committees and as mentors. Traverse Connect's Camille Hoisington served as a judge for the Semi-Finals in February, where the teams competing were narrowed down to ten finalists. In March, the ten finalist teams came to Traverse City for a two-day entrepreneurs' retreat. Four of the top ten teams that competed were from Michigan, with one a home-grown Traverse City company, Wave Lumina, winning second place at the Finals in May.



Michigan's Chief Mobility Officer, Justine Johnson, attended the Drone & E-Boat Demo Day at Elk Rapids Marina in August.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Developing and attracting a talented workforce.

We hosted a workforce development program with the Michigan Global Talent Retention Initiative designed to connect Michigan companies with international students and graduates to fill critical talent gaps by providing trainings and resources on immigration regulations, hiring processes, and visa issues.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation has awarded Prosperity Region 2 (Northwest Michigan) a \$500,000 talent program grant for 2025 to support a remote worker study, expansion of our Michigan's Creative Coast program, and rural talent attraction efforts. The grant will be awarded to Networks Northwest and the Collaborative Development Council, including Northern Lakes Economic Alliance (Petoskey), Traverse Connect, the Manistee Chamber, and the Alliance for Economic Success (Cadillac).

Traverse Connect hosted a roundtable discussion with Detroit Mayor Michael Duggan

and members of the Traverse City Young Professionals, NMC students, and TCAPS students focused on the outlook, priorities, and opinions of the millennial and younger "generation Z" future workforce.

Traverse Connect hosted Michigan's Chief Growth Officer Hilary Doe in Traverse City for tours and events focusing on talent attraction and the region's population growth. The day concluded with a Blue Economy Roundtable at the future site of the Freshwater Research and Innovation Center and a demonstration from Traverse City-based startup Wave Lumina.

We are working with partners, including the Interlochen Center for the Arts and the Northwest Michigan Arts and Culture Network, to develop



Hilary Doe joined partners in the region's Blue Economy to discuss opportunities to attract talent working in BlueTech and freshwater to the region.

a cohesive strategy to better coordinate and market our regional arts and cultural resources. We are leveraging our Michigan's Creative Coast brand and resources to improve visibility, highlight the economic impact, and promote the value of investing in arts and culture at the state and federal levels.

We joined Housing North at its annual Northern Michigan Housing Summit for a panel discussion on the region's educator housing development, which will support teachers and educational staff relocating to the region for positions with Northwest Education Services, Traverse City Area Public Schools, Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools, and Interlochen Center for the Arts. The housing will be located on TCAPS property in Blair Township.

Traverse Connect continues to collaborate with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation Talent Action team in the development of Michigan's 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. Midway through the year, Michigan's Creative Coast began transferring leads from You Can in Michigan's Michigan Career Portal to our local resume pack and database of talent.

Traverse Connect welcomed Central Michigan University as the newest tenant in the Traverse Connect Building with the expansion of its Innovation, Online Learning, and Rural Health initiatives.

New and existing professional development programs at Traverse Connect, including Leadership Grand Traverse, Let Her Speak, Leadership Roundtables, and the Women's Leadership Cohort are now free to small businesses in the region that qualify for free enrollment through the Small Business Association of Michigan's Small Business Support Hubs program.

The Northern Explorers program returned with talented individuals from a wide range of industries and background visiting the region for the Annual Economic Summit and Fresh Coast Quarterly Club.

Northern Explorer, Amaan Tezabwala and his Northern Navigator, Nick Olson, attended the Annual Economic Summit in November.




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. Three key metrics are trending positive, with our region’s growing working-age population outpacing the state average. A key sign of economic growth is the increase in GDP per employee. Since 2019, this figure has risen by over 15% to \$73,767 annually, signaling that local businesses are becoming more efficient and productive. Average wages still have room for improvement but have risen significantly from 82% to 86% of the Michigan state average.


TALENT ATTRACTION & DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

51% 


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

7% 

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

2,718 

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

\$73,767 

STATE AVERAGE WAGE PERCENTAGE
2030 GOAL: 90%

86% 

ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM GROWTH MODEL

Traverse Connect encourages the growth of our existing assets - healthy partner relationships, the scaling up of our existing companies - and attracting new businesses, we will see our already vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem continue to flourish and grow.

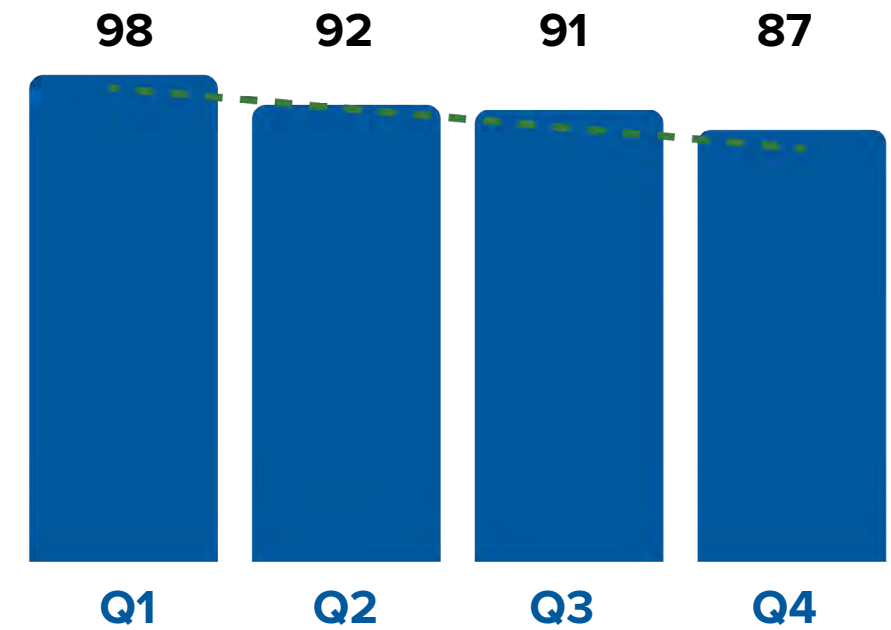
Traverse Connect conducts a quarterly Business Growth Barometer Survey of investor and member businesses, aimed at providing a snapshot of the regional business sentiment, outlook, and current challenges. Quarterly surveys inform Traverse Connect’s strategic priorities and help it respond to the needs of the business community. The survey asks two simple questions:

1. Is our region a good place to grow your business?
2. Is our region improving as a place to grow your business?

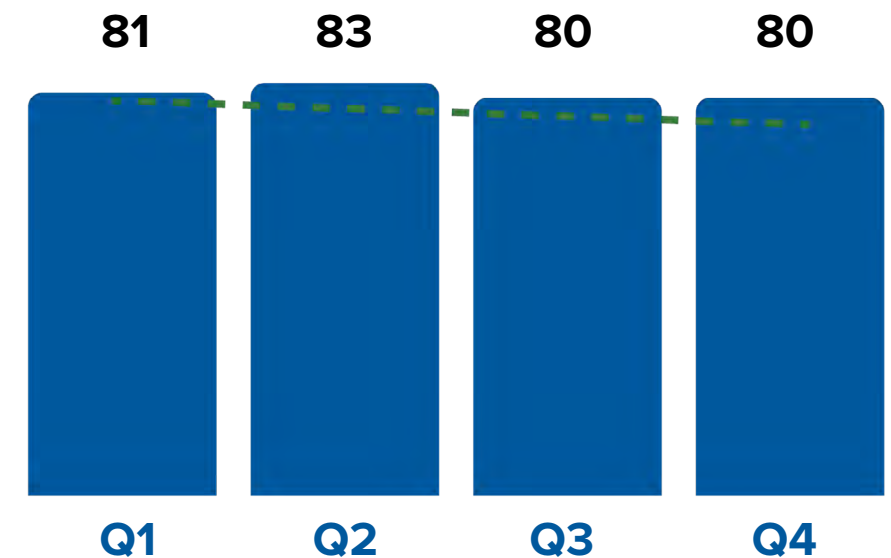
Trends for 2024 show that the year started off with strong sentiments, which we attributed to the warm winter season and signs of inflation relief and reduced interest rates. For the late spring - late fall tourism season, the favorable sentiments dimmed slightly due to continued pressures on staffing and attainable housing but remained solid due to extended business with a very warm autumn. The most recent quarterly measurement showcased uncertainty that some feel about recent increases to inflation, barriers to access in the local housing market, and continued challenges in staffing.

Respondents to the quarterly survey throughout 2024 routinely cited **staffing as the biggest barrier to their business growth**. In 2025, surveys will offer two response options related to staffing: skills gaps in talent and finding new talent and hiring challenges. We anticipate this informing future priorities for Traverse Connect in the future when it comes to advocacy and collaborative work with stakeholders and partners.

Is the region a good place to grow your business?



Is our region improving as a place to grow your business?



INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT

Mark Wanner, owner of Green Mitt in Traverse City, found a solution to a financial business problem by attending an investor-only Coffee Connection event.

high-interest loan. Without hesitation, Dan saw an opportunity to help, and together we embarked on a refinancing journey that would span nearly 10 months.

Throughout the process, Dan and the Dart Bank team demonstrated an unwavering commitment to understanding the unique needs of our business. They were transparent, responsive, and above all, deeply committed to finding the right solution—not just a quick fix. Dan brought in Eric Maly from MCDC, who added expertise on securing SBA 504 loans. Together, they presented a clear plan: by moving Green Mitt from an SBA 7A to a 504 loan, we could secure a significantly lower interest rate, positioning us for a more stable and sustainable financial future.

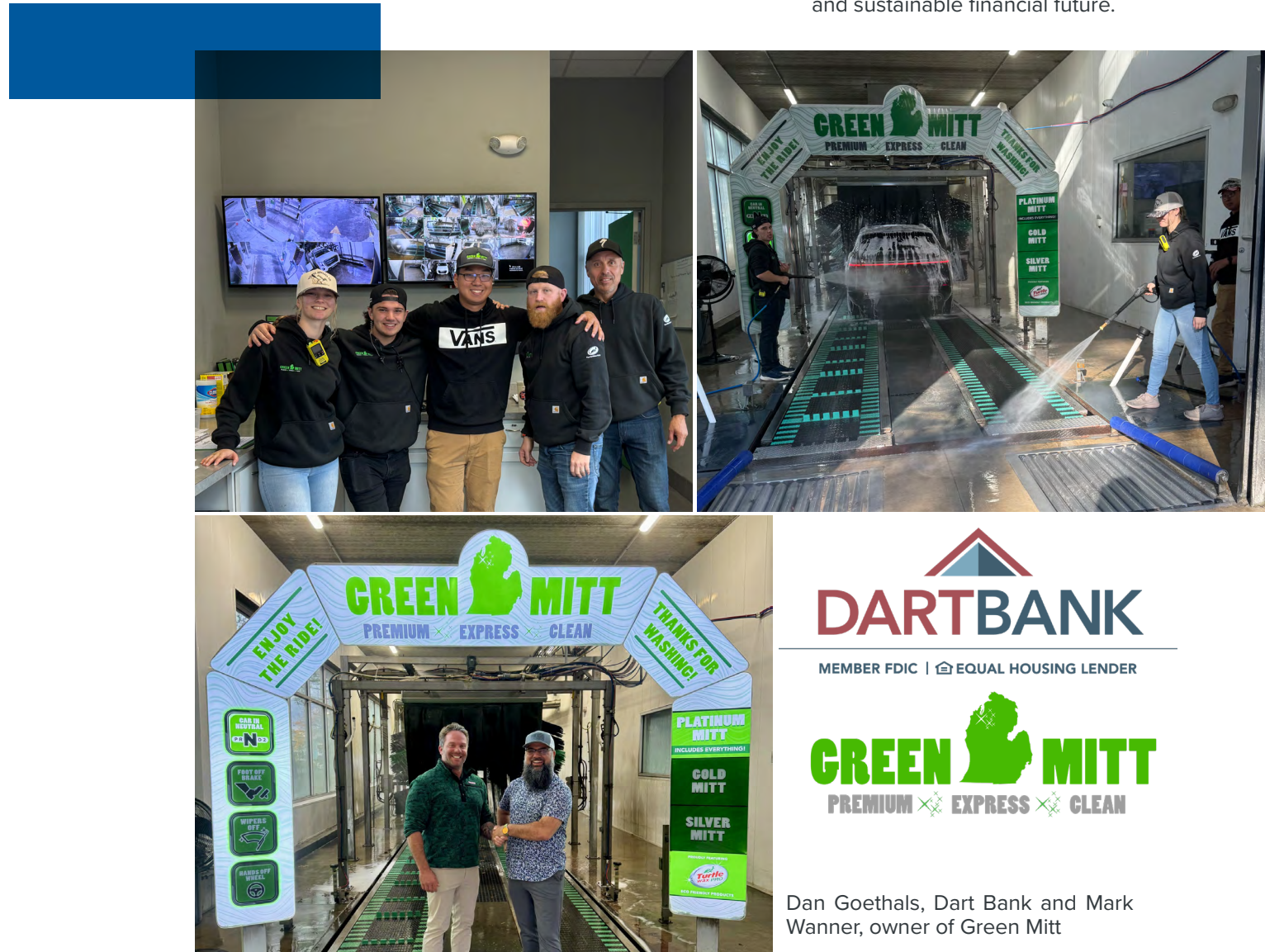
The SBA 504 loan process isn't an easy one, and it required patience, documentation, and a clear alignment with our long-term vision. However, Dan and Eric were with us every step of the way. They handled the paperwork, stayed in constant communication, and leveraged their expertise to streamline what could have been an overwhelming process. The result? A successful refinancing at a great rate that not only alleviates the financial strain but also allows us to reinvest back into Green Mitt to enhance our customer experience and broaden our impact.

Our success in transitioning to an SBA 504 loan has had a profound impact on Green Mitt, and it would not have been possible without the connections made through Traverse Connect and the Coffee Connection event. I'm incredibly grateful for Traverse Connect, which facilitates these meaningful interactions and fosters an environment where business owners and financial professionals can connect, share their challenges, and work toward real solutions.

Dan Goethals, Dart Bank, and Eric Maly from MCDC have been instrumental in helping Green Mitt secure a stronger financial position, and their dedication to our vision has been invaluable. Through this refinancing journey, we have not only gained a more favorable financial outlook but also built lasting relationships that strengthen our commitment to Traverse City's business community. This partnership is a testament to the power of community connections in driving business growth and resilience, and I look forward to seeing how Green Mitt and other local businesses continue to thrive with Traverse Connect's support.

Green Mitt has been a vision for delivering top-notch car wash services with an environmental focus, but like many businesses, navigating finances can be challenging, especially with fluctuating loan rates. Earlier this year, we started looking for ways to refinance our existing SBA 7A loan, which was set at a high interest rate. We needed a solution that would ease the financial pressure and give us a path forward to continue growing and evolving our operations.

The journey toward finding that solution began at a Traverse Connect Coffee Connection event. It was there that I first met Dan Goethals from Dart Bank, and what started as a simple conversation over coffee quickly became a path to reimagine Green Mitt's financial future. Dan and I connected naturally, and I shared a bit about our current challenges with the



Dan Goethals, Dart Bank and Mark Wanner, owner of Green Mitt

INVESTOR SPOTLIGHT

Diane Arnold continues northern Michigan’s tradition of manufacturing with her acquisition and expansion of Neuco Furniture & Upholstery.



Neuco Seating began in 1993, founded by Bryan and Gayle Neu in their garage. The business quickly blossomed, catering to both commercial furniture sales and professional upholstery needs. Over the years, Neuco served a diverse clientele, from large corporations seeking complete furniture overhauls to small businesses needing minor repairs. After an impressive 31-year journey, Bryan and Gayle decided to retire, passing the torch to a new owner.

Enter Diane Arnold, a lawyer and dedicated mother to three. With a background in prosecuting child sex cases, Diane moved to Traverse City, Michigan for her husband’s job. She was able to work part-time as a lawyer in Traverse City while her kids were babies. As her youngest child transitioned to full-time school,

the opportunity to acquire Neuco presented itself, signaling a timely shift in her professional trajectory. Diane’s background in law and her commitment to family and community resonated with Neuco’s values. To honor the company’s legacy while highlighting its core services, Diane rebranded the company as Neuco Furniture & Upholstery.

Under Diane’s leadership, Neuco’s commitment to quality, customer service, and community engagement has remained unwavering. The entire Neuco team is dedicated to creating beautiful spaces for clients while fostering a sense of fun and camaraderie. (Someone, please dare Diane to unicycle across the shop!). Whether through new furniture installations or meticulous upholstery work, Neuco takes pride in enhancing the spaces where people live,



Diane Arnold
Owner

work, and connect.

A key factor in Neuco’s continued success has been the support of Traverse Connect. This organization has played a pivotal role in Neuco’s growth by providing learning opportunities, networking events, and a sense of community. From the CEO Roundtable to social gatherings, Traverse Connect has fostered connections and friendships that have enriched Neuco’s journey.

Thanks to the unwavering support of Traverse Connect, the wonderful mentorship of the Neu family and Diane’s determination, Neuco is expanding its reach with a second location in Grand Rapids. This expansion allows Neuco to bring its exceptional service and products to a wider audience.

As Neuco looks toward the future, the company remains committed to growth and innovation. With a deep appreciation for its roots (and the Neu family!) and the support of its community, Neuco is poised to continue its legacy of quality craftsmanship and exceptional service for many years to come.

To learn more about Neuco please visit us at www.callneuco.com.

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING INVESTORS

Business engagement, referrals, directory views, and website clicks distill the value of membership.

525

Business referrals to investor businesses

950+

Business outreach and retention visits from staff and ambassadors

108

New business investors

695,342

Searches of our Investor Directory

52,008

Referrals to investor websites from our business directory

229,012

Views of the Traverse Connect website

91,876

Website users

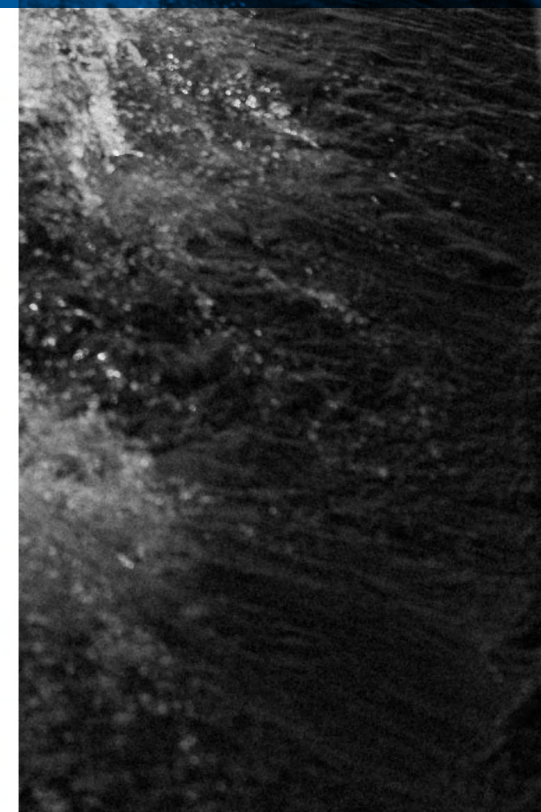
108,000+

Visits to the Michigan's Creative Coast Job Board



3,300+ ATTENDEES
74 EVENTS

At the request of our investor businesses, we provide a wide array of events for networking, professional development, business advocacy, business expansion and growth, and talent attraction & retention.





traverseconnect.com