Dear Members, Business Leaders and Community Supporters,

What a year. As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected businesses across every industry in a variety of ways. Over the past year, the West Michigan business community has stepped up to the challenge, as they have many times before. We have learned a lot about ourselves, our teams, and our businesses. These individual stories come together to create a strong and resilient community.

For the Grand Rapids Chamber team, meeting the adversity of COVID-19 means action. As we have done throughout 2020, we will continue to work tirelessly with our members to ensure we have the strongest recovery possible, by pursuing any opportunity or innovation to support our community and continue our momentum in West Michigan.

On behalf of the Grand Rapids Chamber, thank you for your support. As we reflect on 2020, we are especially grateful for your continued commitment to our community. It is your time and investment in our organization that allows us to continue our mission of fostering a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for all.

We are confident that our region is ideally suited to thrive in the new normal. We look forward to continue working with our members, elected officials, and business leaders as we embark on a smart restart. Together, we can build a magnetic community and a business environment built for your success.

Sincerely,

Rick Baker
President & CEO
Grand Rapids Chamber

THE GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER HAS THREE FOCUS AREAS:

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS  BUSINESS SERVICES  TALENT DEVELOPMENT

WORKING TO CREATE GREAT:

BUSINESS COMMUNITY POLICY CONNECTIONS LEADERS

TO FOSTER A THRIVING AND PROSPEROUS WEST MICHIGAN FOR ALL.
In 2020 more than ever before, the Grand Rapids Chamber stepped up to support our business community with guidance and resources. As news of the pandemic spread, we quickly compiled the Coronavirus Toolkit to keep information accurate and up to date, including links to executive orders, funding and unemployment resources, and other tips for local businesses.

Immediately after the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus a global pandemic, we started hosting complimentary resource calls to answer questions that were top-of-mind for our members. Topics ranged from preparing for remote work, the paycheck protection program, workplace wellness, navigating cash flow, and more.

Throughout the year, we focused on providing up-to-date information to help members safely reopen their businesses, protect their employees, understand executive orders, and navigate changes to state and federal laws. Our virtual events provided access to policymakers and business leaders including: Governor Whitmer, Lt Governor Gilchrist, Senator Stabenow, Senator Peters, Congressman Huizenga, Majority Leader Shirkey, Speaker Chatfield, Kent County Health Department Health Officer Adam London, and many more.

Our team worked tirelessly, fielding hundreds of calls and answering specific questions on everything from unemployment issues to PPE resources. With more than 5,000 business outreach meetings, we were able to provide nearly 1,400 one-on-one business assists.
In a time of crisis, the Grand Rapids Chamber stepped up in a big way. COVID-19 hit all of us fast and hard, and businesses - especially small ones - were scrambling. If you are part of the Chamber, you probably know Director of Business Services Mark Allen. What Mark doesn’t know is that he has become one of our best friends. He answered every email and frantic phone call, and walked alongside us through every setback and change.

Amy Venema, Office Manager, 8THIRTYFOUR Integrated Communications

When the pandemic hit, the Chamber was one of the first organizations to reach out to us with different opportunities - from webinars, support groups, and even funding sources. I cannot say enough good things about the Chamber. I am humbled by and thankful for their consistent support.

Lisa Beene, Owner, Rising Grinds Cafe
In April 2020 the Greater Grand Rapids Chamber Foundation established the **Rapid Response Economic Relief Fund** to quickly deliver short-term economic relief grants to small, for-profit businesses in Kent County. In addition to the funding, grant recipients also received backroom financial support and the services of a business consultant to assist with cashflow projections. Ultimately, the fund served as a financial bridge to small businesses awaiting assistance from government-sponsored programs and to organizations that cannot access local, state, or federal relief funds.

**$1.35M AWARDED TO 211 SMALL BUSINESSES**
- **44%** WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES
- **47%** MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES

In June 2020, Kent County announced the **Kent County Small Business Recovery Program**, created with funding from the federal CARES Act. The program worked to quickly and efficiently distribute short-term financial support to businesses in Kent County, with the purpose of supporting and cultivating a strong economic recovery. The county chose to partner with the Grand Rapids Chamber to administer the program.

The grants focused on businesses dealing with additional barriers, including but not limited to: language, general business knowledge, and those from underserved communities. Additional support was allocated to childcare providers and businesses closed by Executive Order.

The Chamber took an all-hands-on-deck approach to this work. Team members worked to promote the opportunity, assist businesses in their applications, review submissions, and make recommendations for funding.

**$33.1 MILLION AWARDED TO NEARLY 4,000 KENT COUNTY BUSINESSES**
- **37%** WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES
- **47%** MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES
- **18,800** KENT COUNTY EMPLOYEES
La Camara de comercio estuvo presente cuando mas los necesitaba. Al entrar la pandemia no estaba segura de lo que debia hacer. ¿Como afectaria mi negocio? ¿Como iba a pagar mis facturas sin clients? Fue la Camara de comercio de Grand Rapids y personas como Dante, Yadira y Omar los quien me llamaron para asegurarme que estaban aqui para mi. Me ayudaron con la solicitud del subsidio y respondieron todas las preguntas que tenia y me mantuvieron al dia sobre como abrir de forma segura. No solo me ayudaron a mi, sino tambien a otros contratistas que trabajan en mi salon. Cuando recibí el cheque junto con otras personas en mi edificio, nos emocionamos. Todos teniamos facturas que pagar y ahora ibamos a poder mantener la puertas abiertas. No sabes el alivio que sentimos. Estoy agradecida a la camara por estar alli cuando mas lo necesitaba. Realmente se preocupan por los duenos de negocio como yo.

I wasn’t sure what I was supposed to do when the pandemic hit. How was this going to affect my business? How was I going to pay my bills without customers? It was the Grand Rapids Chamber and people like Dante, Yadira and Omar that reassured me they were here for me. They helped me with the grant application, answered all my questions and kept me up to date on how to open safely. You don’t know the relief I felt when I received the check with grant money. I am so thankful to the Chamber for being there when it counted.

Mireya Correa, Owner, Mireya Beauty & Grooming LLC
FIERCE ADVOCACY

Our Government Affairs team has always been an extension of your team, influencing the policies that matter most to your business and connecting you with timely information and decision makers.

In 2020, we focused on pursuing every potential avenue to help West Michigan businesses survive the pandemic and the shutdowns initiated to protect public health. From unemployment issues to vaccines and everything in between, your Government Affairs team is here to help our West Michigan businesses survive and thrive.

Notable Highlights:

- Supported restaurants and bars by working with state and local partners on social district legislation “extending” liquor licenses to outdoor public spaces.
- Successfully advocated for the Going Pro training dollars.
- Supported legislation to protect the employer-funded unemployment system.
- Served as a Future for Frontliners champion to support individuals who worked through the pandemic in essential industries to upskill and reskill.
- Leading business organization on expungement legislation, a nation-leading criminal justice reform to help citizens with a criminal record get back in the workforce.
- Spearheaded a statewide coalition to solve the complex issue of creating access to affordable, high quality childcare. The coalition developed a first-of-its-kind, tri-share pilot program that was successfully adopted into the 2021 State Budget.
- Presented a phased restart plan, signed by hundreds of members, to policymakers to create pathways for a responsible reopening to rebuild our economy as quickly, and as safely, as possible.
- Completed Grand Rapids and Kent County Housing Study
- Led on property tax deferment legislation to provide relief for severely impacted businesses on property tax interest, penalties and fees. The Governor vetoed this legislation twice last year, but we are focused in trying again in 2021.
In addition to the global health crisis, in 2020 our community grappled with systemic racism and injustices as the disparities of marginalized communities were amplified throughout our nation.

The Grand Rapids Chamber joined our community in digesting these events across our country and in our city. We stood in solidarity with all communities of color as we worked to address the fears and the racial disparities that exist and plague them.

Led by Director of Inclusion Ken James, we doubled down our Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) efforts. In addition to our annual Diversity Summit, in 2020 we added the DEI Series to provide opportunities for deeper discussions.

We observed and supported a positive trend in the business community as requests for trainings increased significantly. Over the year, we saw a nearly 200% growth in Implicit Bias trainings and 150% growth in organizational DEI Assessments. Institute for Healing Racism workshops consistently reached capacity.

The Grand Rapids Chamber remains committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as it works to foster a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for all. We join in the effort to address systemic racism and will continue to take that energy to move towards justice, equity and inclusion.

“As we navigate the two pandemics—COVID-19 and systemic racism—we have been assisting employers with starting and sustaining conversations around race while helping them understand the notion that silence is not an option when it comes to advancing DEI. As we have converted our programs to a virtual format, we have been able to reach a wider audience. Virtual participants have been willing to be vulnerable by asking tough questions, and chat features have led to rich conversations.”

Ken James
Director of Inclusion
Grand Rapids Chamber
The Grand Rapids Chamber remains proud to represent one of the most incredible business communities in the world. Our collaborative spirit, along with the work ethic of West Michigan, will help guide us into a brighter future, together. We look forward to continuing to work with our members, elected officials, and business community as we embark on a smart restart.

In our 2021 West Michigan Business Advocacy Survey, responses from more than 700 members show the top three issues for West Michigan businesses as the following: COVID-19 business relief and recovery, a talented workforce, and healthcare affordability.

Over 70% of survey respondents said that our West Michigan business climate was either favorable or very favorable – a significant backtrack from last year’s 94% favorability and many preceding years in the upper 90’s.

We remain confident that West Michigan is ideally suited to thrive in the new normal. We have learned a lot about ourselves, our teams, and our businesses over the past year. These individual stories come together to create a strong and resilient community.

Building upon our work in 2020, the Grand Rapids Chamber team will continue to help our West Michigan businesses survive and thrive.

"With vaccines and an end to the pandemic on the horizon, we are looking at valuable input from our business community as we work to build a strong recovery. The message is clear: create a business climate that supports small businesses and those impacted by public health restrictions as well as tackle barriers to business growth, like talent, to make West Michigan a prosperous region for all."

Rick Baker
President & CEO
Grand Rapids Chamber
OUR 2021 PRIORITIES

Building upon our experience, the Grand Rapids Chamber priorities for 2021 will remain laser-focused on the challenges faced by our businesses with special consideration for small and minority-owned businesses. Our priorities align our team around high impact initiatives for both our members and the organization.

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC GROWTH
Strengthen business sustainability and the leadership capacity of our small business owners and their teams.
• Implement initiatives that ensure Kent County is a welcoming and inclusive environment for new Americans.
• Deliver high-impact, content rich programs.
• Intentional engagement of minority business owners.
• One-on-one technical assistance and coaching.

PUBLIC POLICY & ADVOCACY
Minimize the obstacles to business growth through good public policy and support for candidates who embrace business’ contribution to the community.
• Improve access to affordable, high quality childcare.
• Increase diverse housing supply and affordability.
• Attract talent to West Michigan.
• Present a pro-growth agenda to the City of Grand Rapids.
• Actively identify and recruit business friendly leaders to elected and appointed positions of influence.
• Advocate to reduce the financial, economic, and personal health impact of COVID-19 and promote a strong recovery.

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH
Ensure the Chamber has the financial and intellectual capacity to deliver on our brand promise to our investors.
• Adapt our space, communication, and technology capacity to meet the needs of our business community.
• Exceed budgeted financial projections.
• Provide high quality, high impact programming that exceeds a 70% NPS®.
• Retain and attract the right people for the right seats.
• Explore strategic partnerships.

Much of the 2021 Work Plan is achieved through strategic, in-the-trenches work that our team of subject matter experts delivers day in and day out. The other half of the work is delivered through the programming aspect of the Grand Rapids Chamber. Find details for our programs in the first quarter of 2021 in the following pages.
The Grand Rapids Chamber’s work with the Kent County Small Business Recovery program provided significant market research on the state of small business in our region. In addition to financial support, the Grand Rapids Chamber will also provide ongoing technical assistance to grant recipients, with the goal of enabling businesses to survive the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn, and to bolster the recovery locally.

Certified business consultants provide grant recipients with assistance on cutting costs, connecting with resources and projecting six-month cash flow. This ongoing support includes follow up after 30, 60 and 90 days to provide timely assistance, such as a shift in business model, marketing, or help with cash flow.

The Grand Rapids Chamber is committed to partnering with community centers of influence to deliver this programming to minority business communities in underserved areas. We have also expanded capacity internally to support growing Latino business community needs.

“Money can only go so far. With the expertise we have at the Chamber, we’re able to provide additional technical assistance from our subject matter experts that will help to improve the survivability of some of these businesses. That’s what it’s really all about. If we can support small businesses through this time, Kent County is going to be in a much stronger position coming out of this.”

Dante Villarreal
Vice President of Business & Talent Development
Grand Rapids Chamber
OUR FOCUS
The Grand Rapids Chamber is the largest business organization in West Michigan. Our passion is a Thriving and Prosperous West Michigan for ALL. We are unique in the region with a focus on serving as fierce advocates for business.

We serve our members by:
• Advocating for public policy at the local, state, and federal level that creates an environment where businesses can thrive.
• Providing world class leadership development programs to maintain Grand Rapids’ unique heritage of business-driven community growth.
• Supporting our business community’s diversity, equity and inclusion priorities through nationally recognized programs and services.
• Championing business and economic growth by assisting small and minority business owners as they work on their business and build their capacity for growth.
• Serving as the physical and virtual hub for business activity in West Michigan.

OUR VALUES
At the Grand Rapids Chamber, our diverse team of subject matter experts is committed to a dynamic culture driven by our shared core values.

• We believe team members who passionately embrace the mission of the Grand Rapids Chamber put more of themselves into their work. We attract and retain people who are committed to high standards and pursue excellence in every aspect of their role.
• We foster belongingness by providing a space where our employees and our members feel they can bring their whole selves to authentically engage with our organization and each other.
• We are committed to the highest level of service for both our internal and external customers. We proactively seek to identify potential problems before they occur and begin with a “Yes” mentality to find an optimal solution.
• We focus on member value and experience to anticipate their needs, provide a welcoming environment where everyone feels they belong, and we listen with intent to understand.
• We have complete accountability for our successes and failures. We share a responsibility to be transparent, honest and act with humility.

“Like every other crisis that Grand Rapids has endured, we are not going to just sit on our hands and wait for things to happen. We are going to put on a mask, put on some gloves, and get to work.”

Omar Cuevas
VP of Sales & Marketing
Grand Rapids Chamber
LOOKING AHEAD
2021 Q1 PROGRAM SCHEDULE
2021 Q1 Program Schedule

CREATE GREAT POLICY
Breakfast with Legislators | February 1, March 1, March 29
This breakfast event provides Chamber members and their employees the opportunity to establish relationships with key decision makers and voice opinions on issues that matter to their business.

2021 Health Care Summit | March 23
The Health Care Summit is a popular half-day event featuring health care leaders and reform experts who present facts on the future of health care and share options for businesses. Join fellow members to explore the latest health care trends, the impact of health care policy, rule changes at the state and federal level, ways to reduce and contain costs as well as what needs to be done in order to build a healthier community.

CREATE GREAT COMMUNITY
ATHENA Leadership Forum | February 9
The ATHENA Leadership Forums celebrate women in leadership by featuring local women sharing their leadership lessons. The February ATHENA Leadership Forum will feature Latesha Lipscomb, JD, Director of Engagement for Amplify GR, to help participants discover why they should own their strengths and learn ways to increase confidence and impact in the workplace.

Diversity & Talent Series | February 23
The Diversity & Talent Series will address various talent needs of the West Michigan business community. The series will also focus on the different ways to attract and retain top talent and include best practices in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

OutPro | March 10
OutPro is an LGBTQ+ professional group that promotes a welcoming culture in the West Michigan business community for LGBTQ+ professionals and allies. OutPro offers opportunities for both social and professional networking through programming and gatherings at various venues in the community.

CREATE GREAT BUSINESS
EOS Talks | February 17
Join the Chamber for an introductory workshop on “What the Heck is EOS?” Whether you are interested in implementing, have tried to implement without success, or are in the process of self-implementing, you will be provided with the tools to help guide your company to a successful launch of EOS. The tools provided include peer connections, conversations, and access to a certified EOS implemener.

EOS Quarterly Meet-Up | March 2
Each quarter, the Chamber will be hosting a meet-up to dive deeper into one of the components of the Entrepreneurial Operating System. Businesses utilizing EOS and those looking to implement will be provided with an opportunity to connect with peers while gathering a deeper understanding of best EOS practices.

Business Growth Series | March 25
The Business Growth Series seeks to provide members with seminars on a variety of relevant and highly sought-after business topics presented by subject matter experts. Examples include sustainability, interacting with the media and beyond.

LEARN MORE OR REGISTER AT WWW.GRANDRAPIDS.ORG