The Grand Rapids Chamber has been a major player in the business community for more than a century. Since 1887, we have been working fiercely to advance the interests of our area businesses. We've come a long way, and we're just getting started.

Today, the Chamber still works to champion business and economic growth. We’re not just focused on today, but tomorrow, too. We are working to build a community that is competitive and here to stay.

From talent attraction and retention to child care and housing, the Grand Rapids Chamber is investing in work to set up our future generations for success. We are focused on developing strong leaders who will build strong companies.

When we say we’re dedicated to fostering a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for all, we really mean for all. We are working to ensure everyone has a seat at the table through programs including West Michigan Minority Contractors and Minority Business councils. Through the Kent County Welcome Plan, we are helping to make this community a place that refugees and immigrants call home. And this, in turn, will bring great talent to the community and set us up for success both now and 10, 20, 50+ years down the road.

As a Chamber member, your investment makes this work possible. We are a member-driven organization. Your engagement advances our work. This is about you, the leaders who have come before you, the leaders who are alongside you, and the leaders you will leave a legacy for in the future.

Thank you for your membership and continued commitment to our community!

Reflecting on what we have gone through, our members tell us we can’t go back – and the numbers tell the story. The Michigan business community was severely impacted by COVID restrictions. We have learned a lot and it was great to see rules being lifted. But we must remember that just because impacted businesses are back open, it doesn’t mean they are healthy. They still need support from customers, colleagues and policymakers. By moving forward together and continuing to collaborate, we have a tremendous opportunity to address pressing issues that have come to light, such as child care, inclusion, inequities, public health, the future of work, infrastructure and talent.

RICK BAKER
President & CEO, Grand Rapids Chamber
June 2021
THE GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER HAS CONTINUED TO PROVIDE CUTTING EDGE PROGRAMMING, TOOLS, AND SERVICES FOR OVER 2,400 MEMBERS.

During another year that didn’t quite go according to plan, the Grand Rapids Chamber continued to safely learn, innovate and grow together. Our team worked to support our business community with guidance, resources and impactful programming, with nearly 800 one-on-one business assists. As offices reopened and workers returned to in-person work, we innovated to offer outdoor networking opportunities and were among the first to return to in-person events when it was safe to do so.

Our annual golf outing, The Chamber Open, returned as a sold-out event with 148 golfers. We were also thrilled to bring back the 11th Annual EPIC Awards Gala. More than 120 nominations were submitted for consideration. After a selection committee comprised of Grand Rapids business leaders studied the nominees’ newest initiatives, collaborative efforts, and community impact, 31 finalists were announced in September, and eight recipients were honored at the EPIC Awards Gala. New in 2021, the Chamber also celebrated three diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused recognitions, including the LGBTQIA+ organization of the year. These recognitions honored those have been courageously fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in their communities.
IN 2021, THE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS TEAM MADE HUGE STRIDES FOR BUSINESSES AT THE LOCAL AND STATE LEVEL.

The Grand Rapids Chamber advocates on your behalf to solve the issues that matter most to you and your business. We take an intentional approach to our policy positions by listening to members who direct our advocacy efforts. Below are our top wins, directed by you, in 2021.

- We received additional funding for top Chamber talent priorities, including the Going Pro Talent Fund, Michigan Reconnect, Futures for Frontliners, the Tri-Share pilot program and child care.
- We launched a legislative agenda to address the state’s housing crisis through the Housing Michigan Coalition.
- We supported businesses through COVID-19 mandates and championed advocacy for offices, restaurants, banquet, event and wedding venues to reopen after being severely restricted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Several criminal justice bills were signed into law.
- We led advocacy on Social Districts extension and improvements.
- Led locally for a unanimously approved Grand Rapids Continuation Budget and public safety support.

NEARLY

1000 LETTTERS
Sent from Michigan residents urging Governor Whitmer to reopen wedding and event venues to a higher capacity

140 CONTACTS ON THE HOUSING MICHIGAN COALITION LIST
State-wide coalition dedicated to improving the accessibility and affordability of housing across the state.

380+ BUSINESS ADVOCACY ASSISTS
From road name changes and liquor licenses to connecting employers with elected officials and facilitating connections and conversations.
As an aspiring diversity and inclusion practitioner, there aren’t ample outlets within my workplace to have candid conversations about racism. The Institute for Healing Racism provided me a safe space to ask sticky questions and engage in dialogue with a diverse set of community members. I walked away feeling more confident in language around diversity and inclusion that I can use in my day-to-day work. I also walked with resources that I can share with my colleagues to help them in their learning journey as well. I highly recommend the Institute!

CORDELL ZACHERY
Diversity Recruitment Specialist, Human Resources
Steelcase

The Grand Rapids Chamber is committed to creating a thriving and prosperous West Michigan for ALL. Our team works tirelessly to create an equitable and inclusive business community for our diverse business community. By cultivating a welcoming community in West Michigan, we strengthen our region’s talent, resources and business opportunities to stand out in the global marketplace.

In 2021, our Inclusion team explored a wide variety of topics in the DEI space with the West Michigan community. Through the Diversity & Talent Series & Summit, we were able to hear from high-profile guests including Dr. Derreck Kayongo and former New York Governor David Paterson.

Our team of subject matter experts continued to provide customized services for organizations across the region. Through trainings and consultation, we worked to steer businesses through different phases of learning, planning, and implementation. With more than 50 customized services delivered, our data-driven guidance provided concrete, actionable solutions.

This was the most interesting and thought-provoking conference I’ve attended in recent memory. All speakers were skilled, insightful and brought distinct perspectives. Thank you – absolutely terrific.

ANONYMOUS ATTENDEE
2021 Diversity & Talent Summit
AMIDST A TALENT SHORTAGE, THE GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER CONTINUED TO PROVIDE TOP LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS TO CULTIVATE THE REGION’S BEST TALENT.

The Grand Rapids Chamber’s portfolio of leadership programs continued to expand in 2021. We were proud to introduce *Speak with Purpose* and *LeadUp*, programs designed to meet the expressed training demands for new managers in skilled trades. In celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, we partnered with *Dos Bold Latinas* to present *ATHENA para Latinas*, a special event presented fully in Spanish. With new program offerings and expanded accessibility to cohorts, we remained committed to bringing people together and cultivating relationships across sector, belief, community, and identity.

The power of these relationships has lasting impact. During a time when there was a critical need for blood, the Emerging Leaders class partnered with Versiti Blood Center of Michigan to run six blood drives, resulting in more than 270 lives saved.

Program participants have continued to remain engaged with the expansion of the Create Great Leaders Alumni Network and alumni engagement events throughout the year.
THE GRAND RAPIDS CHAMBER WORKED COLLABORATIVELY TO MAKE GRAND RAPIDS THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND PLAY.

Throughout 2021, we continued to provide information and resources to keep our business community up-to-date with the latest COVID-19 guidelines and vaccination information. We also partnered with local and woman-owned Green Giftz on a t-shirt fundraiser. Proceeds allowed us to purchase meals for the more than 300 staff and volunteers who made the West Michigan Vaccine Clinic at DeVos Place Convention Center a reality.

In partnership with the City of Grand Rapids, Experience Grand Rapids, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., and SweatNET Grand Rapids, in 2021 we introduced Grand Rapids Fitness Fest as an effort to support local gyms and fitness entrepreneurs. The event brought over 75 events and workshops to parks throughout the city with multiple outdoor class offerings throughout the day.

We also partnered with local organizations to support downtown restaurants and retailers as offices reopened downtown, encouraging workers to shop and eat locally.

We were thrilled to welcome visitors back to our work café, expanding our meeting room availability and providing options for members looking for a safe space to work outside of home.

Through Gateways for Growth, we continued our work to make Grand Rapids a welcoming community for all. We partnered with Global Detroit to advance immigrant economic development and inclusion policies in Grand Rapids, Kent County and West Michigan. Through this continued partnership, we will work together to craft policies and programs to build a more inclusive economy and spark growth, revitalization, and sustained prosperity in the region and across our state.
CREATE GREAT CONNECTIONS
As we reflect upon 2021 and look ahead to the future, our team is energized by the 2022 work plan we have put together to help businesses thrive. This includes over 160 engaging events and programs, as well as initiatives and advocacy efforts to drive West Michigan forward and continue to serve you, our Chamber members. We're looking forward to a great 2022!
THANK YOU TO OUR PRESIDENT’S CIRCLE MEMBERS

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