

Industry | Innovation | Technology | Opportunity | Community | Diversity

MOMENTUM

Uniquely Macomb County, Michigan
Volume 7, Issue 1

Downtown revival

Entrepreneurial spirit thrives
in Mount Clemens

Page 26

PLUGGED IN:

Prosper-Tech doubles
its business through
Industry 4.0

Page 35

PICKING UP STEAM:

STEM zone rebrands
with big plans
for 2022

Page 32



MICHELLE DAVIDSON always knew her medical assistant career wasn't the right fit. Then she discovered her career calling in social work. Her pursuit to finish her degree drove her to OU. The mother of two accomplished her goal at 38 in 2018. She now enjoys a rewarding and fulfilling career working for We the People Michigan — collaborating with community leaders on initiatives to empower Michigan residents.



IGNITE YOUR PROFESSIONAL AMBITION

Accelerated programs offered in Macomb County for working adults.

As a working adult returning to finish your degree, OU provides resources to empower you along the way by:

- offering degree programs at our convenient locations in Clinton Township and Mount Clemens.
- developing a degree-completion plan with our time-saving and flexible course options to work around your schedule.
- making your education affordable through \$250 million in annual scholarships.
- connecting you with nearly 750 Macomb County employers who eagerly hire OU graduates.

We'll maximize your previous college credit to turn it into your degree. To achieve that long-overdue promotion. To land a better job. To earn more money. To be an example for your kids. Or to do it just for you.

GET GOING

Request a transcript evaluation. You may be closer to finishing your degree than you think.



**FIND
YOUR
CAREER**

(855) 222-6909 | oumacomb@oakland.edu
oakland.edu/macomb

 @oumacomb1

**OAKLAND
UNIVERSITY™**

muc23443/7.21

Be ready for what's ahead



Relevant
education
and training
that connect
individuals to
opportunity.

Comprehensive
workforce
development
programs and
support that
position business
and industry
for success.



**Macomb
Community College**

Education • Enrichment • Economic Development

Discover. Connect. *Advance.*

www.macomb.edu | 866.Macomb1 (866.622.6621)

You Don't Have to Navigate Unemployment Alone

Macomb/St. Clair Michigan Works! (M/SC MW!) is here to help. M/SC MW! is a state and federally funded non-profit organization created to connect you to local employers, no-cost services, and programs. M/SC MW! assistance is available to everyone in the local community, not just the unemployed, even those who are currently employed or underemployed and want to progress their education or career. With M/SC MW! it's never been simpler to find the help you need in order to ease your future career transition.

Our five local service centers are always available to assist you and the community, and can help provide you with the latest local featured job openings, exciting training opportunities, and set a new path to success with innovative career exploration.

**Your Future is Just a Call,
Click, or Email Away**



(586) 434-0558
info@macomb-stclairworks.org
www.macomb-stclairworks.org



Michigan Works! Macomb/St. Clair is an equal opportunity employer/program. Supported in part by state and/or federal funds. A proud partner of the American Job Center network. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. TTY #711.

24 HOUR EMERGENCY SERVICE



We Want to be YOUR PLUMBER!

RESIDENTIAL - COMMERCIAL - INDUSTRIAL

**YOUR COMPLETE PLUMBING
& DRAIN CLEANING
SPECIALIST**

STATE LICENCED PLUMBING CONTRACTOR

NOW HIRING

- Sewer & Water Lines Installed, Repaired & Replaced
- Frozen Water Lines Thawed & Repaired • Toilets
- Sump Pump Repairs & Installation • Faucets
- Mobile Home Repairs • Leak Detection • Sinks
- Hot Water Heaters • Tubs • Install Clean-outs
- Repairs & Installs • Garbage Disposals • Back Flow Testing
- Sewer Jet Service • Camera Inspection
- Basement Waterproofing

LICENSE #81-07094 • INSURED



FREE PHONE ESTIMATES

586.293.3000

586.979.8555

586.468.2400

800.882.0067

www.aeanytimeplumbing.com



Macomb County students involved in the Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone participated in a FIRST Robotics competition this past winter.

PHOTO COURTESY MACOMB AUTOMATION AND ROBOTICS ZONE

INSIDE

- 6 WELCOME BACK:** Introduction from Mark A. Hackel
- 8 IT TAKES A VILLAGE:** Remote workers, freelancers are thriving in coworking environment
- 11 KEEPING IT BLUE:** Massive water infrastructure projects forming beneath your feet
- 14 A SWEET, AND BUBBLY, SYNERGY:** Blake's acquires second largest hard cider producer in Oregon
- 16 CLASS BY ITSELF:** MCC's largest construction project ever prepares students for future
- 18 STAYING POWER:** I.F. Metalworks celebrates 20 years of growth with eye to future
- 20 ART AT THE HEART:** Public art program breathes fresh life into Mount Clemens revival
- 26 MACOMB'S DOWNTOWN:** Entrepreneurial spirit thrives in Mount Clemens
- 30 GROUND SUPPORT:** Local defense contractor keeps business and soldiers alive

- 32 PICKING UP STEAM:** MARZ STEM zone rebrands with big plans for students in 2022
- 35 PLUGGED IN:** Prosper-Tech doubles its business through Industry 4.0
- 37 HOME STAKE:** DCS Corporation opens new \$4.3 million facility in Sterling Heights
- 39 A WALK IN THE PARK:** Recreational tourism, rooted in greenspaces, on the rise
- 44 HEALING TOUCH:** Medical sector a growing source of high-paying, professional jobs
- 46 MOMENTUM MAKERS**
April Boyle, senior advisor for entrepreneurship and innovation at the Velocity Center
Jack Johns, project manager for the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development
Marjie Jenkins, coordinator of the Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone

CONTRIBUTORS

Natalie Broda is a lifelong storyteller and award-winning journalist specializing in the coverage of southeast Michigan. From economic development to the arts, social justice and science, her work has been featured in publications from The Oakland Press to The Associated Press. She is the current community relations director for the Pontiac Housing Commission and an active freelance writer.

Jane Peterson has been a journalist for more than 20 years, working at newspapers such as The Oakland Press, The Holly Herald and The Berrien County Record. Today, she is an active freelance writer who contributes to write articles and other materials for newspapers, online publications and private clients.

On the cover: Melissa Lavender, owner of Clementine's Pastries, is an example of the entrepreneurial revitalization of downtown Mount Clemens. With 30 years of culinary experience, she opened her business after the coronavirus pandemic left her unemployed.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP

MOMENTUM

**Uniquely
Macomb County, Michigan**
Volume 7, Issue 1

Momentum is a publication of the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development

**Macomb County Executive
Mark A. Hackel**

Phone: (586) 469-7001
Email: Executive@MacombGov.org
Twitter: @markhackel

**Macomb County Department of
Planning & Economic Development
Vicki Rowinski, director**

Phone: (586) 469-5285
Email: info@macombbusiness.com

Macomb County Administrative Building

1 South Main St.
Mount Clemens, Mich. 48043
Phone: (586) 469-5285
Fax: (586) 469-6487

Websites:

MacombBusiness.com;
MakeMacombYourHome.org

Email:

planning@macombgov.org

Follow us:



For more information, comments or to obtain additional copies of this publication, please contact info@macombbusiness.com

Publishing Partner

MediaNews Group / Michigan Group
6250 Metropolitan Parkway, Dock D
Sterling Heights, Mich. 48312

**President
Greg Mazanec**

mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com

**General Manager, Advertising
Dave Swantek**

mipublisher@medianewsgroup.com

**Vice President / Content
Don Wyatt**

dwyatt@medianewsgroup.com

**Advertising Manager
Jason Uhlenhake**

Advertising Executives

Aj Doppke, Carol Clancy, Dawn Emke, Mary Ellen Zander, Monica LiCavoli

Contributors

Natalie Broda and Jane Peterson

Design, Editing and Production

Joe Pas and Jenny Sherman

Momentum is published for the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development by MediaNews Group. Copyright 2022. All rights reserved. No portion can be copied or published without expressed written permission of the publisher. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of Macomb County or MediaNews Group. Products or services mentioned in this publication may be trademarks of their respective companies or organizations.



MediaNews Group



THE CITY OF CENTER LINE IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS!!



Welcome to the City of Center Line!

Center Line's Small-Town Lifestyle in the Heart of Metro-Detroit maintains a strong business base, which serves as the launching pad for future economic development activity. Built upon a foundation of "Mom and Pop" small businesses, Center Line has evolved into a balanced, stable, and diverse economy with high profile businesses and industries, such as Stellantis/Mopar, Binson's Medical Equipment and Rinke Chevrolet, Buick, GMC. In Center Line, we work together as a team to help our businesses become as successful as they can be.

As Mayor of Center Line, my goals include enhancing the quality of life, keeping our city at the forefront of economic and business development, and maintaining our clean and safe neighborhoods. Working together, we can continue to make this City a great place to raise families live, work, and enjoy all the festivities that Center Line has to offer like the Independence Festival, BeerFest and Halloweenfest, to name a few.

As a business owner myself, I understand the importance of city administration working closely with the business community to help your business be successful. Growing your business here in Center Line provides you the opportunity to market your business to over 500,000 people within a few miles of the City!

Center Line is a great place for business growth and the future is bright as we expand and rehabilitate our Downtown Development District, residential and industrial properties, increasing values by as much as 60% over the past six years. As part of my effort toward Center Line's continued success, I encourage our residents and businesses to be strong ambassadors for the Center Line community. The safety and well-being of our citizens is always on our mind. We want to ensure that Center Line continues to be a great place to live, work, and grow a business, whether big or small!

If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact City Hall at (586) 757-6800.

Robert Binson
Mayor



Welcome back

Expanding industries, education and business opportunities make Macomb County all the more attractive now, and into the future

By Mark A. Hackel



Greetings Readers!
I am pleased to present the 13th edition of Momentum, a bi-annual magazine published by the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development and MediaNews Group/The Macomb Daily.

Every six months, we use this publication to celebrate positive stories about the people, places and businesses that make Macomb County a great place to call home. In this issue, you'll learn about a \$40 million renovation project that will expand training opportunities in high-demand careers like advanced manufacturing, technology and the skilled trades; how our futuristic defense corridor continues to attract new investment; and more about how the Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone (MARZ) is helping ignite interest in robotics for students K-12.

As always, please visit our website and follow us on social media to stay informed about the latest developments in Macomb County.

Be Well,

Mark A. Hackel
Macomb County Executive



Macomb County communities flourish with an abundance of business and education opportunities.

PHOTOS (COUNTERCLOCKWISE) COURTESY OF PROSPER-TECH; MACOMB AUTOMATION AND ROBOTICS ZONE; AND BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP



DINKA DENTAL

Proudly Serving The Community Since 1989

John D. Dinka, D.D.S.
Catherine M. Osinski Dinka, D.D.S
& Associates

A Healthy Mouth is A
**Healthy
Body**



Don't Put Yourself At
Risk For Heart Attack Or
Stroke Because Of Gum Disease

Welcoming
New Patients
Of All
Ages.



Come Visit Our State Of The Art Dental Office
With All Of The Latest In Technology.

WE ♥ CHILDREN

Mon - Thurs 8:30 - 7:00

Fri & Sat 8:30 - 1:00

By Appointment Also

FREE **INITIAL
CONSULTATION**
With This Ad

FREE **DIGITAL X-RAYS**
70% LESS RADIATION EXPOSURE
With This Ad

Michigan Dental Association Members

**ALWAYS ACCEPTING
NEW PATIENTS!**

ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED



35100 Tiffany, Suite 101 Sterling Heights
On The 15 Mile Rd Entrance To MJR Cinema 20

Comprehensive Dental Care For Your Family

- Same Day Emergencies
- Senior Discounts
- Dentures & Repairs
- Most Insurances Accepted
- Nitrous Oxide (Gas) Sedation
- Teeth Whitening/Bleaching
- Cosmetic Dentistry/Veneers
- Financing Available

- LED Lighting • Digital X-Rays
Intra Oral Cameras
Updated Computer
Information Systems

- Our Patients Will Enjoy A
Relaxing **GREEN** Environment
For All Of Their Dental Needs

- Always using premium
MADE IN AMERICA
Crowns, Bridges,
Dentures & Partial



586-939-5800 www.dinkadental.com





At the CoLABorative, three floors of coworking space in downtown Mount Clemens, members can rent communal space, dedicated desks or private offices. The CoLABorative, also known as the CoLAB, houses more than 55 companies/individuals within its 11,000 square-foot space.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE COLABORATIVE

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Macomb County offers numerous diverse workspaces for big corporations, small businesses, “mom and pop” shops, remote workers and others. To learn more about coworking spaces or to take a tour, call The CoLABorative at (586) 244-8719 or fill out the contact form at colab.hunchfree.com.



It takes a village

Remote workers, freelancers are thriving in coworking environment

By Jane Peterson

No longer chained to their desktop computer and landline, today's workers are tapping into their creativity and boosting their productivity in diverse workspaces. They are finding what they need right here in Macomb County.

Most experts agree that the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way Americans work. Businesses discovered that they no longer needed such a huge real estate footprint when some workers were able to work from home and communicate using technology. Likewise, many employees enjoyed the benefits of working from home, which include no stressful commutes and spending less money on a work wardrobe and lunches out.

However, remote employees, freelancers and others quickly discovered that there are also distinctive drawbacks from working at home – barking dogs, loud garbage trucks, constant distractions by pets and other family members. This led some independent workers to seek out alternative spaces for checking off their to-do lists.

Unfortunately, this is often a move that Goldilocks is most familiar with: Libraries that are too quiet, coffee shops that are too loud. Coworking spaces seem to be just right.

When asked what a coworking space is, Jimmy Gwizdala doesn't hesitate to share his answer: It's a neutral place where people from all different types of industries gather together to work both independently and collaborate together.

Gwizdala owns the CoLABorative, three floors of coworking space in downtown Mount Clemens where members can rent communal space, dedicated desks or private offices. The options allow members to only pay for what they need and adapt as those needs change.

He chose Mount Clemens over other locations in southeast Michigan like Royal Oak, Ferndale and Detroit because he grew up in Harrison Township and liked the energy in Macomb County and the historic vibe of Mount Clemens. Today, the CoLABorative, also known as the CoLAB, now houses more than 55 companies within its 11,000 square-foot space.

“It's made to be very casual,” said Gwizdala. “It has a coffee shop feel with an office overlay.”

Member Cyndee Sparre is at the CoLABorative four to five times a week. As a financial advisor who lives in Chesterfield Township and works for Lifetime Financial Growth in Southfield, she works remotely and utilizes the coworking space at the CoLAB.

She appreciates being able to work among others independently and still have access to a private office to discuss

Shelby Township tabbed No. 1 place to live in county

For the fifth consecutive year, Shelby Township was selected as the No. 1 place to live in Macomb County by Niche.com. The distinction factors in a number of details such as quality of life, public safety, economic potential and schools.

In addition to being named the best place to live in Macomb County, Shelby Township was also tabbed as the “Best Place for families in Macomb County” and the “Place with the Best Public Schools in Macomb County.”

“With facilities like our new library and the amenities in our parks and at the Shelby Township Activities Center supported by great people working with a tremendous elected Board of Trustees it’s not hard to see why Shelby Township is, again, the No. 1 place to live in Macomb County,” Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis said.

Shelby Township’s overall grade was an A- with A marks in “public schools,” an A- in “good for families,” and “nightlife.” The township received a B+ for “housing,” a B for “diversity,” and a B- in “crime and safety.”

According to Niche.com, the rankings come from an analysis of “dozens of public datasets and millions of reviews to produce comprehensive rankings, report cards, and profiles.”

“By the end of June 2022, Shelby Township will have a



Shelby Township’s new 26,000-square-foot library opened to the public June 25.

new 26,000-square-foot Shelby Township Library and a new 3.5 million-gallon water reservoir.” Stathakis said.

“Add those to two new fire stations, a new 25,000-square-foot police station, a new district courthouse and the renovated Shelby Township Activities Center, and we’ve added a lot the last five years, and our rankings will be on the rise.”

Along with being the county’s “best” place to live, recent rankings placed Shelby Township as one of the county’s safest places.

“Among the critical services we provide, the gold standard is public safety,” Stathakis said.

In the safewise.com “Michigan’s 50 Safest Cities of 2022” report, Shelby Township was one of two municipalities from Macomb County on the list. Shelby Township was the only community in the state with more than 75,000 residents to make the list.

In addition, Shelby Township was the National Council for Home



Shelby Township was the only community with more than 75,000 residents among “Michigan’s 50 Safest Cities of 2022.”

Safety and Security’s No. 21 safest community in the state and the safest community of more than 50,000 residents in Macomb County for the fifth consecutive year. In its 2021 reports, the NCHSS placed the township’s rates for violent crimes and property crimes per 1,000 residents at 1.49 and 6.26 for a total crime rate of 7.75, well below the state of Michigan’s total crime rate of 23.09.



sensitive financial issues with her clients as well as event space to host after-hours networking activities.

All members have access to open workspace, wireless networks and conference room usage in addition to having a mailing address, access to building events and the availability of coffee, tea and beer. An app lets members check the event calendar and reserve one of the five conference rooms as needed.

“It’s really a community where people can collaborate and network,” said Gwizdala, “but then it starts to feel like a family.”

Most users live in Macomb County, traveling around 20 minutes to work at the CoLAB, said Community Manager Jessie Black. However, others travel longer distances since coworking spaces, although growing in popularity, aren’t as prevalent in the United States as they are in Europe and other countries.

When Black was hired three years ago, she immediately went to work spreading the word about the CoLAB. She has spent countless hours at networking events, chamber of commerce coffee connections and on social media introducing people to the concept of coworking spaces.

“It really can be whatever you want it to be,” she said. “We provide spaces where workers can be productive and get their work completed. They can network with others or choose to do their work and go home. There are endless possibilities.” **M**



Coworking spaces are a neutral place where people from all different types of industries gather together to work both independently and collaborate together. Members appreciate being able to work among others independently or collaboratively and still have access to a private workspace.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE COLABORATIVE

Keeping it blue

Massive water infrastructure projects forming beneath your feet

By Natalie Broda

Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller (left) stands with State Sen. Michael MacDonald and State Rep. Pamela Hornberger at the Chapaton Canal in St. Clair Shores. Below, a canal runs from the Chapaton Retention Basin to Lake St. Clair.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
MACOMB COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
WORKS

Less than a week before Candice Miller walked into her first day in office as the Macomb County Public Works Commissioner in 2016, a massive sinkhole on 15 Mile Road cracked open causing \$70 million in damage. Now, Macomb County is set to receive \$72 million from the State of Michigan to help clean-up waterways and prevent similar infrastructure catastrophes from occurring again.

The projects that those funds will go towards may not always be visible to the public eye above ground, but will mean a great deal to an area that relies on its blue economy for business and recreation. Through several sewage capacity and storage expansions, the county will be able to cut down the amount of combined sewage overflow created when two or more sewer systems are unable to handle a heavy rain event.

Reducing or eliminating combined sewage overflows would not only improve local water quality, it would also decrease flooding incidents, sewer collapses and the risk of a sinkhole forming.



“These projects impact anyone who uses water,” Miller said. “If you drink it, if you recreate it, our problems with combined sewage overflow are bad for everyone. We live on the water here, from the shores of Lake St. Clair to the water flowing through the county. We are extremely focused on our water quality and clean water because, first and foremost, it’s our fresh water drinking supply.”

Two of the larger planned system expansions are an in-storage expansion at the Chapaton Retention Basin and an in-system wastewater storage project in the underground infrastructure near the Martin Retention Basin. Both also received additional federal funding as a part of a \$348 million bipartisan federal budget appropriation to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The Chapaton project received \$4.5 million while the Martin Retention Basin will see an additional \$1 million in funding.

Both the city of Eastpointe and St. Clair Shores utilize the Chapaton Retention Basin. Plans for the facility include the strategic installation of what’s essentially a rubber bladder, according to Miller, that will inflate to capture sanitary sewage and storm water from both cities in an 11-foot-diameter pipe. The rubber bladder would inflate during rain events, storing excess flow behind itself, and slowly release as the rain stops.

County officials estimate that the improvements could reduce the amount of combined sewage discharges at the Chapaton Pump Station, and therefore excess discharge into Lake St. Clair, by 30%. It’s also estimated that the Martin Retention Basin storage project will reduce combined sewage overflows from the city of Rosville by 20%. That project is slated to begin this fall with construction running for about a year.

Sen. Peters and other lawmakers hailed the projects as crucial regional improvements for residents and businesses alike.

“It’s critical that we take steps to strengthen our water infrastructure to better withstand heavy rain and extreme weather events,” Peters said. “I’m pleased this significant federal investment will help the Martin Sanitary Diversion Drainage District in Macomb County fund projects that can both improve drinking water quality and reduce sewage overflow that can cause flooding that damages the basements of people’s homes and businesses.”

Construction at the Chapaton project will begin soon according to the county and be completed by fall of 2023. Design phases are also underway for a brand new pump station to be constructed at Nine Mile Road and Jefferson Avenue in St. Clair Shores. It will be the first new pump built in the county since 1968 and will increase sewer capacity to help protect against flooding. Officials estimate the station will be up and running by spring of 2025.

Lastly, rehabilitation of the Macomb Interceptor sewer along 15 Mile road is continuing into its second year. The enormous pipe shuttles the sewage of almost 600,000 residents and businesses throughout the county. Work kicked off in 2020 on the south side of 15 Mile Road, west of Schoener Road, creating a 70-foot-deep shaft for crews to line the interceptor with impervious pipe and build a new pump station underground. Last fall, work also began 40-feet below surface on 15 Mile Road east of Garfield Road to line the pipe. Both projects will continue this year.

“These are transformational projects. Water quality is our mission because water quality equals quality of life,” Miller said. **M**



Top: The Chapaton Pump Station stands in the foreground with the underground retention basin beneath its parking lot behind the building. The pump station, and the underground retention basin that holds up to 28 million gallons of “combined” stormwater runoff/snow melt and the sanitary sewage from St. Clair Shores and Eastpointe, is located on Nine Mile Road at Jefferson Avenue in St. Clair Shores.

Above: Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller (center) poses with State Sen. Michael MacDonald and State Rep. Pamela Hornberger at a Macomb Interceptor Drain sewer construction site.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS



CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

By reducing sewage overflows into Lake St. Clair, these projects will help clean up waterways across the county and southeast

Michigan. The \$72 million in state funding won't solve every water infrastructure woe in Macomb, but it will: Build a new pump station in St. Clair Shores; continue the repair of the Macomb Interceptor sewer along 15 Mile Road on the border of Clinton Township and the city of Fraser this year; and help pay in part for the two following larger projects.

With an additional \$4.5 million in federal funding, the cities of Eastpointe and St. Clair Shores will see their combined sewage discharges into the lake reduced by 30% thanks to the planned sewage overflow storage expansion at the Chapaton Retention Basin. The city of Roseville is expected to see a 20% decrease in combined sewage overflow with another in-system wastewater storage project. Work will take place on underground infrastructure near the Martin Retention Basin likely starting this fall. It's also being funded in part with \$1 million in federally appropriated dollars.

Construction updates, county drain maps and more information on Macomb County's waterways can be found at publicworks. macombgov.org/publicworks-home.



Office of
Public Works

Take your
business
to the
next level.



Planning &
Economic
Development

Macomb County's Business Development Team provides free and confidential services to all sizes and types of businesses.



GET IN TOUCH, **WE CAN HELP.**

586-469-5285 | MacombBusiness.com





A sweet, and bubbly, synergy

Blake's acquires second largest hard cider producer in Oregon

By Natalie Broda

Blake's Hard Cider is no stranger to rapid growth. As the popularity of hard cider drinks has skyrocketed in recent years, so has the Macomb County-based business expanded to selling its products in 22 states since 2013.

The family-owned farm and beverage producer isn't stopping there however with the recent announcement that Blake's Hard Cider has acquired the operational assets of Oregon-based Avid Hard Cider Co. in a deal that will see both brands expand in their respective markets.

Part of a five-year national growth plan that kicked off in 2019, the deal includes the purchase of Avid's existing production facilities, leases for tap rooms, recipes, inventory, distribution agreements and brand properties. Under the agreement, a new entity for Oregon's second largest hard cider producer was created called Avid Cider Co. LLC.

It's a sweet synergy for both companies, said Andrew Blake, founder and president of Blake's. Both hard cider producers are family owned and operated with similar long-term strategic goals.

"Avid was in a position where they knew they could link up with another company and we have been looking for someone who we can guide through long-term growth," Blake said. "We felt aligned in our business standpoints and our goal to

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Blake's Orchard and Cider Mill, open year-round, is located at 17985 Armada Center Road, Armada. The 120-acre farm is also home to Blake's Tasting Room and

Restaurant, Lovey's Lavender Farm & Artisan Market, a Funland area for kids and several festivals and events held throughout the year. For more information, call (586) 784-5343 or visit blakefarms.com.



be the number one hard cider company in the nation. It really all worked out very serendipitously that we were both in the right place."

The Blake's apple orchard and farm has been based in Armada since 1946. The 1,500-acre farm attracts guests from far and wide to not only visit the Blake's Tasting Room, but also take home fresh produce. Seasonally the company employs about 900 people with just under 200 employees full-time. Blake's exponential growth as a national hard cider producer is based on its



rich heritage as a non-alcoholic cider producer, alongside other fresh pressed juices.

“Our growth is definitely not industry standard, I think we’re one of the fastest growing alcohol companies in the country, and for sure in the Midwest. We’ve been very fortunate to surround ourselves with teammates who are experienced in the alcohol space,” Blake said. “And I think that people resonate with the authenticity of our story and our products. All of those things have formulated into a really great experience. There’s a bright future ahead for us.”

Both Blake’s and Avid plan to use the acquisition as a way to gain momentum among their respective brands, said Sam Roberts, CEO of Avid. Roberts founded the company with a former co-owner in 2013 under the name Atlas Cider Co. It was her English heritage on her mother’s side that inspired the business, she said, after studying abroad across the pond.

“My former co-owner, Dan McCoy, and I knew even before the pandemic that in order to scale up the business and be able to compete on a higher level we would need some help. We had grown organically up until that point but would need investment to take it to the next level. Blake’s at the time was also looking to expand their footprint into the Pacific Northwest,” Roberts said. “We started talking a few years ago and it was a natural fit. We had the same goals, priorities and love for quality cider that focuses on the fruit. The pandemic taught us that joining forces would be to everyone’s benefit. We are stronger together.”

Next on the horizon for Blake’s Hard Cider will be an expansion of consumer facing experiences, according to Blake, with plans to amp up events and reasons for individuals to visit the farm and taprooms. The Chasing El Chavo 5k was held there in May, with festivals, camps and comedy nights already on the summer schedule.

“Blake’s is something special in Macomb County and we want to continue to make it something special for our entire community,” Blake said. **M**



Inside and outside its facilities, Blake’s Hard Cider Co. is expanding and planning more events in the near future at its orchard and cider mill in Armada.

PHOTOS COURTESY BLAKE’S HARD CIDER CO.

Class by itself

MCC's largest construction project ever prepares students for future

By Jane Peterson

A \$40 million renovation of Macomb Community College's Skilled Trades and Technology Center will make the transition from the classroom to highly skilled jobs go more smoothly for the region's residents thanks to updated facilities that mimic today's workplace conditions.

"The environment is designed to foster educational and training experiences that replicate the synergies of the modern world of work so that our students are immediately ready to contribute when they join the workforce," said Don Hutchison, dean, Engineering and Advanced Technology, Macomb Community College. "This is one of the largest projects in the college's history."

Since the center was originally constructed in 1968, the way advanced manufacturing, technology and skilled trades in-

CONNECT

ABOUT MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Macomb Community College is one of the nation's leading community colleges. It nationally ranks in the top 2% in the number of associate degrees awarded by community colleges and is one of the largest grantors of associate degrees in Michigan. The college's comprehensive educational programming includes pre-collegiate experiences, university transfer and career preparation programs, bachelor-degree completion and graduate degree programs, workforce training, professional education and certification and continuing education and enrichment opportunities. For more information, visit macomb.edu.



**Macomb
Community College**

Education • Enrichment • Economic Development

Discover. Connect. Advance.

EXPLORE

EXPERIENCE

ENJOY

MACOMB COUNTY



MakeMacombYourHome.com





A rendering of Macomb Community College's Skilled Trades and Technology Center.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COMMUNITY COLLEGE

industries operate has dramatically changed. Employees no longer work in a vacuum without input from other departments. Modern workplace strategies rely on effective communication between disciplines and technology-driven work processes to make operations flow efficiently.

The Skilled Trades and Technology Center houses the following programs: CNC machining, drafting/ computer-aided design, electronics, fluid power technology, land surveying, media and communication arts, mechatronics, product development (including digital sculptor/clay modeling), robotics and welding.

The college's construction project invests funds in reimagining classroom, lab, faculty and student spaces, adapting to current best practices and future technological needs. Located on Macomb's South Campus in Warren, the 110,000-square-foot building will gain 20,000 square feet of educational and lab space from a 12,000-square-foot addition and a repurposing of currently underutilized space.

Classroom and lab spaces for interconnected disciplines, such as robotics and mechatronics as well as clay modeling/digital sculpting and product design, will be strategically situated near each other to emulate modern industry operations. In addition, vibrant shared spaces have been incorporated into the design to encourage students to relax, gather and engage with one another. This will assist in the development of soft skills like communication, collaboration and problem-solving, which are essential to today's employers.

Technology is also playing a much larger role than it has in the past.

"Technology is changing, and we are changing right along with it," said Hutchison. "Our faculty understands the need to move forward. They have their finger on the pulse of the industry and they are aware of what needs to be done."

Students will be welcomed with bright, inviting spaces fea-

turing windows and natural light that also

replicate modern industrial settings and additional restroom facilities reflect the fact that more women are studying these disciplines today than they were when the building opened in the late 1960s.

The facility's infrastructure is designed to handle not only current equipment and IT networking needs, but also to accommodate future advances in cyberphysical systems that bridge the digital and physical worlds.

While funds are going directly into the renovation of the building, the project is really an investment in its students and Macomb County communities.

"Macomb Community College is committed to connecting residents to jobs with futures that can sustain families, and to expanding the talent pipeline to local business and industry," said James O. Sawyer IV, president, Macomb Community College, in a statement.

The structure's shell was determined to be in good shape and with its footprint in a key part of campus, the decision was made to renovate the facility instead of tearing it down and building a new center. This is part of Macomb Community College's commitment to taking advantage of the most cost-effective solutions while providing students with a quality education, said Hutchison.

Nearly \$15 million of the total project cost is being funded through a capital outlay appropriation from the State of Michigan, with the remaining \$25 million coming from the college's capital projects fund. The project's architects are Hobbs + Black Architects and Barton Marlow is the construction manager.

The Skilled Trades and Technology Center is scheduled to reopen in time for the fall 2023 semester.

During the renovation, programs normally housed in the Skilled Trades and Technology Center are being held in other Macomb Community College buildings and in leased space in Clinton Township. **M**

QUOTABLE

"This is one of the largest projects in the college's history."

— Don Hutchison, dean, Engineering and Advanced Technology, Macomb Community College

Staying power

I.F. Metalworks celebrates 20 years of growth with eye to future

By Natalie Broda

Over the past two decades, Karen Arondoski often had to answer the question of why her metalworks company didn't have a sign on its building, despite making them for others. Her answer was always the same.

"We didn't need one. Our work speaks for us," Arondoski, president and owner of I.F. Metalworks, said.

The small, women-owned business of 25 employees has manufactured metal projects seen in the architecture of some of Michigan's most iconic structures, from Ford Field to Little Caesars Arena, the Ann Arbor Veterans Administration Hospital, the Kresge Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts and most recently, the rebuilding of the Michigan Central Train Station.

Sitting in a 40,000-square-foot facility on Groesbeck Highway in Roseville, I.F. Metalworks just celebrated its 20th anniversary of operation. What began as an automotive tooling business in 2002 has become a multifaceted, fast-growing company working on everything from ornamental metals to military components and aerospace tooling fabrication.

The inception of the business was rooted in the same can-do attitude that drives it today. Arondoski, who was working for

CONNECT

AT A GLANCE

- I.F. Metalworks began as an automotive tooling business in 2002, and has since developed into a multifaceted, fast-growing company working on everything from ornamental metals to military components and aerospace tooling fabrication.
- The women-owned company moved into architectural work in 2004 and by 2009, the company was winning a Women In Defense award for its work in the defense corridor in Macomb County.
- Their presence across southeast Michigan grew again in 2013 with the completion of the metalwork for the Kresge Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts. That, among other projects, started a snow-ball effect of high-profile contracts that has been rolling ever since.
- I.F. Metalworks became certified to work with aerospace companies in 2016 and along the way also started a signage division, eventually creating one for their current facility.
- Sitting in a 40,000-square-foot facility on Groesbeck Highway in Roseville, I.F. Metalworks just celebrated its 20th anniversary of operation.



The I.F. Metalworks team stands in front of the company's shop on Groesbeck Highway in Roseville.

PHOTO COURTESY OF I.F. METALWORKS

a local school district at the time, was approached by a friend looking for an investor to create paint tool parts that would cure the roofs of General Motors' Chevrolet SSR, set to release the following year. Arondoski approached Jeff Maxwell, a welder and current vice president of the company, about making a part that could do the job.

"We made six samples of the tool paint parts in a pole barn and GM not only accepted them, they loved them," Arondoski said. "And then all of a sudden, I needed a building to make thousands of them."

The pair found an 8,000-square-foot building in Macomb County and got to work. As the business began to thrive, they made plans to expand into other industries. I.F. Metalworks moved into architectural work in 2004 and by 2009, the company was winning a Women In Defense award for its work in the defense corridor in the county. Their presence across south-east Michigan again started to grow in 2013 with the completion of the metalwork for the Kresge Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts. That, among other projects, started a snow-ball effect of high-profile contracts that has been rolling ever since. The more people saw their work, Arondoski said, the more job offers that would come their way.

"I used to not deal with change very well," Arondoski said. "But that is absolutely one thing the business has taught me, to not be afraid to go after anything."

I.F. Metalworks became certified to work with aerospace companies in 2016 and along the way also started a signage division, eventually creating one for their current facility. Through that time the pair have focused on hiring and training new talent, working with Fraser Public Schools to hire two students from the career and technical education program each year. One such employee has been with the company for 12 years.

"I've really enjoyed watching my employees grow. We hired a lot of them who knew nothing about the business. It's always incredible to see their faces when they see or walk past a finished project and know it was them who did that work," Arondoski said.

I.F. Metalworks has expanded three separate times over the past 20 years and now, the company is looking to grow once more into a new 60,000 to 80,000-square-foot space somewhere in Macomb County. During the pandemic, the company more than doubled its business from 30 jobs to over 66 jobs in less than two months with no signs of slowing down.

"I love Macomb County and we plan to stay. The county has always stepped up to the plate to work with companies to get them where they need to be, including us. Every time I've needed a new building, they've helped us to assess our business, give us ideas to save even more money beyond the grants and other programs they help with," Arondoski said.

One such program is Macomb Next, which assists businesses with planning and entering the Industry 4.0 space of automation and robotics. Over the past several years, I.F. Metalworks has invested in machinery such as a 3D printer, a flatbed laser



All the metalwork guests of the Kresge Court at the Detroit Institute of Arts see is made by I.F. Metalworks, one of the first jobs to launch a snowball of Detroit-based work for the Macomb County company.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF I.F. METALWORKS

and more advanced CNC machines.

It's those investments into both talent and technology that led Arondoski's two nephews, son and son-in-law to work for the company as new types of jobs across the manufacturing world emerged.

I.F. Metalworks is one of the many examples of a small business in Macomb County that has a huge impact, according to James Ahee, program director of economic and business development for the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development.

"We have so many companies in Macomb County that have skills that don't exist at other companies around the state, or the country, or the world. I.F. Metalworks is a perfect example of that, everything they do is custom designed, and those skills would be lost without people like Jeff who teach welding, how to do it with quality," Ahee said. "They're a niche player and the niche they fill is really invaluable."

Looking forward, I.F. Metalworks hopes to hire about 15 people as it adds a new powder coating process to its operations.

"I could hire those people today and keep them all busy at 40 hours. Some companies are cutting back on investing in their employees these days, but we pay 100% of our employees health insurance. We want to add profit sharing, that's always been the goal. I'm excited about hiring more people and I'm excited about the future," Arondoski said. **M**

Art at the heart

Public art program breathes fresh life into Mount Clemens revival

By Natalie Broda

Depending who you ask, most industry leaders would say that behind every great downtown revival is a thriving arts scene. That was the case for Detroit and here in Macomb County, downtown Mount Clemens is finding out just how important public art can be.

The Macomb Cultural & Economic Partnership is back with its fifth year of sculpture installations in the city, bringing 23 beautiful pieces from across Michigan to brighten corners, line sidewalks and turn heads across town. Each and every sculpture has a story and is chosen from hundreds of options annually from the Michigan Sculpture Initiative.

New this year will be the addition of micro-gardens surrounding some of the sculptures as the nonprofit seeks to find new ways to beautify the city and attract visitors. A special butterfly garden is planned near the post office that will be planted around a permanent sculpture installation, something the community has been asking for, according to Ed Bruley, secretary and treasurer for the MCEP.

“We hear every year that residents want more permanent art installations, so we’re working on that. It’s always so great to see the reactions every year, especially the shock and surprise from

Those who pass by Mount Clemens’ Main Street will see “Oak Leaves” by Brian Feriby.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA —
MEDIANEWS GROUP





MAKE APPOINTMENTS ONLINE, ANYTIME.

It's time to get back to the care you need.

Find a McLaren Macomb provider and schedule an appointment today.
Virtual visit and mammogram screening appointments are also available.

mclaren.org/macombappointments



DOING WHAT'S BEST.®

those who aren't aware of the sculptures," Bruley said. "We love seeing people walking around, pointing things out, we always receive strong community support."

Which is evident by the organization's ability to fundraise enough money to install the sculptures each year, as well as find businesses interested in sponsoring. What began with eight sculptures in 2018 has more than doubled in size and scope to include tours and conference calls with artists as the program helps to make Mount Clemens a signature place to be.

The MCEP is seeking support to run the microgardens from volunteers who wouldn't mind a little dirt under their fingernails. Businesses and individuals can offer to host a garden on their property, either by planting their own perennial and native plants or through a donation of plants from the organization. Volunteers need only sign up for a few hours of care each week and are free to pass the garden onto the MCEP at any time.

"One of the things that makes a strong neighborhood and city is just that it looks nice, from clean streets to art. This is our contribution to making the neighborhood a good place to be, and we frankly do have larger projects in the works coming soon," Julie Matuzak, president of the MCEP, said. "We want to continue making an impact while working with other organizations on complementary projects."

The sculpture program runs from October to October. Those who take a stroll in downtown Mount Clemens will also find reproductions of masterpiece paintings hanging in shop windows. The MCEP teamed up with the DIA in 2020 to launch Art City, creating a walkable gallery of fine art through the downtown's four square blocks. The program continued through 2021 into this year.

Created by Kirk Seese, "Purple Blue Feather" (left) sits just outside the Post Office on Main Street in downtown Mount Clemens. The site will also be home to a microgarden soon. "Above & Below" (right) by Michael Magnotta, is located at 148 S. Main Street.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA —
MEDIANEWS GROUP





Ed Bruley (left), secretary and treasurer for the Macomb Cultural & Economic Partnership, stands with Julie Matuzak, president of the organization, next to "Area 51" created by Todd Kime on Main Street in downtown Mount Clemens.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA —
MEDIANEWS GROUP

There's a few permanent sculptures already scattered through the city, installed at the hands of Gabe Anton in the '90s. Anton was one of the most influential developers and business leaders through the 20th century in Mount Clemens, founding the Anton Art Center among those accomplishments in 1972. Phil Gilchrist, executive director of the Anton Art Center, said that what's happening today in the city with public art is something to take pride in.

"Public art can serve a lot of purposes. Artwork creates a sense of community and identity, it's something to have pride in. It drives economic development and tourism, and we're seeing that every day here becoming more and more prevalent," he said.

If you'd like to take a tour of this year's sculptures yourself, a full map is available on the MCEP website at mcepmacomb.com. **M**

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

This year's sculptures will be on display in the south end of Mount Clemens through September 2022. The Sculpture Project is sponsored by the Macomb Cultural & Economic Partnership in cooperation with the Midwest Sculpture Initiative and funded through the support of individuals, businesses and community supporters throughout the region. To learn more about the project or to see a map of the sculptures on display this year, visit mcepmacomb.com/sculpture.



Macomb Schools Wish You A

Safe Summer

Full of Fun and Learning!



Join Enrichment Opportunities



Play



Have An Adventure



Join Summer Learning Opportunities

Make
Macomb
Schools
your home

Anchor Bay Schools, Armada Area Schools, Center Line Public Schools, Chippewa Valley Schools, Clintondale Community Schools, Eastpointe Community Schools, Fitzgerald Public Schools, Fraser Public Schools, Lake Shore Public Schools, Lakeview Public Schools, L'Anse Creuse Public Schools, Mount Clemens Community Schools, New Haven Community Schools, Richmond Community Schools, Romeo Community Schools, Roseville Community Schools, South Lake Schools, Utica Community Schools, Van Dyke Public Schools, Warren Consolidated Schools, Warren Woods Public Schools

For more information about Macomb Schools, go to **www.misd.net**

Parents/Caregivers –

If Your Child Turns

5

years old by September 1, 2022,*
please contact your local school district ASAP
to complete Kindergarten Registration forms.
This is an IMPORTANT time for your child's learning.

*According to Michigan law, if a child residing in a district is not five years of age on or before September 1, 2022, but will turn five years of age not later than December 1, 2022, the parent may contact the school district to obtain a possible Waiver for their child to enter Kindergarten this year.



- Anchor Bay Schools
www.anchorbay.misd.net
- Armada Area Schools
www.armadaschools.org
- Center Line Public Schools
www.clps.org
- Chippewa Valley Schools
www.chippewavalleyschools.org
- Clintondale Community Schools
www.clintondaleschools.net
- Eastpointe Community Schools
www.eastpointeschools.org
- Fitzgerald Public Schools
www.fitz.k12.mi.us
- Fraser Public Schools
www.fraser.k12.mi.us/
- Lake Shore Public Schools
www.lakeshoreschools.org
- Lakeview Public Schools
www.lakeviewpublicschools.org
- L'Anse Creuse Public Schools
www.lc-ps.org
- Mount Clemens Community Schools
www.mtcps.org
- New Haven Community Schools
<https://newhaven.misd.net>
- Richmond Community Schools
www.richmond.k12.mi.us
- Romeo Community Schools
www.romeok12.org
- Roseville Community Schools
www.rosevillepride.org
- South Lake Schools
www.solake.org
- Utica Community Schools
www.uticak12.org
- Van Dyke Public Schools
www.vdps.net
- Warren Consolidated Schools
www.wcskids.net
- Warren Woods Public Schools
www.warrenwoods.misd.net

Make
Macomb Schools
your home

For more information about Macomb Schools, go to **www.misd.net**



mount
clemens



Planning &
Economic
Development

REVITALIZING Macomb's downtown

Entrepreneurial spirit thrives
in Mount Clemens

By Natalie Broda

While many downtown areas struggled during the lockdowns of the coronavirus pandemic, downtown Mount Clemens wasn't one of them.

Not a single business closed in that time as a result of the virus. In fact, the downtown gained new businesses as local leaders and entrepreneurs continue to conceptualize and revitalize the four square blocks that make up the downtown of the county seat. From beautification projects to a redesign of the old Cherry Street Mall, there's a lot planned for the future of what's referred to as Macomb County's urban center.

When the pandemic began, the Mount Clemens Downtown Development Authority knew its restaurant businesses would be hard hit, according to Michelle Weiss, marketing



Residents and visitors pack into downtown Mount Clemens on a sunny spring day as business continues to grow in the community. Not a single business closed during the lockdowns of the coronavirus pandemic.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP



Top: Melissa Lavender, owner and founder of Clementine's Pastries, mixes up a batch of frosting on a spring Saturday morning in downtown Mount Clemens.

Above: Black Cat Coffee, downtown Mount Clemens' first new coffee house in over a decade, is one of several new businesses attracting visitors downtown.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP

coordinator for the authority. The DDA spent over \$15,000 to purchase cafe tables and chairs to help keep many businesses afloat. Soon, Weiss said they were finding that their restaurants were seeing more orders than before the virus began.

"We had to get creative, and that's what we're all about right now, thinking outside the box," Weiss said. "We want to try anything and everything to get this downtown where it should be. We're looking forward just like our businesses are looking forward, believing in themselves and knowing they can do it because failure isn't an option."

Weiss is a longtime business owner in the area, taking after her father and grandfather who also owned companies and shops in Mount Clemens. When asked why she believes the downtown was able to gain new businesses at a time others were closing, Weiss credited the entrepreneurial spirit of the people who chose to live and work here.

"The pandemic gave people the chance to look at what they're doing and perhaps realize they weren't happy. It gave them the chance to try something they've always dreamed about," she said.

Melissa Lavender, owner of Clementine's Pastries, is one such example of that taking place. With 30 years of culinary experience and training, Lavender found herself unemployed as the pandemic took hold. Her and her husband live just down the street from downtown, and as Lavender contemplated her next move, she was encouraged by her family to follow her lifelong dream of opening her own pastry shop. Less than a year and \$100,000 later, Lavender opened the shop named after her grandmother in the same space that Weiss' father once ran his business.

"I'm very committed to this city and I can say that after these first few years in business, I'm so glad to be here. I didn't know how people would respond, I didn't know what I was doing, but everyone made me feel so comfortable to the point that any business that comes after me, I want to do that for them," Lavender said.

From five employees to 12 today, a slow day for Clementine's Bakery is never really slow at all with between 60 to 70 people coming through the door. On a busy day, like the Saturday before Easter, more than 300 people usually visit the shop.

Beyond new businesses, there's plenty else that's attracting new visitors to downtown Mount Clemens. The city's farmer's market has also moved back downtown in recent years, bringing about 3,000 people to Mount Clemens each week it operates. The DDA alongside private donations also invested \$30,000 last year to add holiday street lighting to the trees that line the streets. New murals and a sculpture installation program are also drawing eyes to the city.

There's another big project on the horizon that will significantly change the face of the downtown, according to Brian Tingley, executive director of the DDA. The old Cherry Street Mall building, constructed some 30 years ago, is slated for a partial demolition and redevelopment.

"This would be one of the biggest physical projects in the

downtown area in the last 25 years, it's a huge step for us to take," Tingley said.

The project will not only beautify the area, it will also signify the downtown's departure from pedestrian mall structures. Historically, it was the expansion of pedestrian malls and sprawling retail that affected downtown Mount Clemens' retail structure the most as businesses moved away. Now that they're returning, along with residents who want to visit their downtown, the DDA and city leaders will seek to redesign portions of the downtown to suit the trend.

John Hanna, a local developer who revitalized the Emerald Theater and recently opened the downtown's first new coffee shop, Black Cat Coffee, said the interest in Mount Clemens is growing more visible throughout the region.

"In terms of places, Mount Clemens has something special. We have the tools to create a real downtown core here. The entire city is imbued with this sense of history and hope for the future," Hanna said. "We're receiving this positive attention that is helping to continue the trend of forced motion in the direction that businesses here want to go. We're creating a city where we all want to live and work, and we know now more than ever that it's truly possible." **M**

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- Clementine's Pastries is located at 57 Macomb Place, Mount Clemens. For more information visit clementinespastries.com or call (586) 477-0359.
- Black Cat Coffee is located at 55 Macomb Place, Mount Clemens. For more information, visit coffeeatblackcat.com or call (586) 477-1903.



EVALUATE

Find partners who can help assess your organization's readiness



SEEK

Find qualified employees and training programs



INVEST

Engage with the next generation of our workforce



INNOVATE

Connect with others who can help bring your new idea to life



Learn how your business can improve its processes with a FREE assessment.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!
VISIT MACOMBNEXT.COM
586-469-5285



Planning & Economic Development

Ground support

Local defense contractor keeps business and soldiers alive

By Natalie Broda

At the heart of Macomb County's defense corridor, you'll find companies like General Dynamics Land Systems that keep the lifeblood of industry flowing, even in tough times.

For 40 years the national defense company has operated out of its headquarters in Sterling Heights, leading the way in designing, developing and producing ground combat systems and specialized capabilities.

Founded in 1982 through the sale of Chrysler Defense, General Dynamics Land Systems is part of its umbrella company General Dynamics. With five business groups – Aerospace, combat systems, marine systems, information technology and mission systems – General Dynamics is based in Virginia and was founded in New York in 1952. The company produces and provides services for everything from tracked, wheeled and autonomous military equipment to nuclear submarines and Gulfstream jets, weapons systems, ships and more.

The business's storied history is intertwined with the history of our country, manufacturing combat vehicles like the Abrams Main Battle Tank that can and have turned the tide on the battlefield for our nation's soldiers. It also holds patents for dozens of military innovations associated with vehicle protection, propulsion systems, suspensions, drivelines, welding processes and more.

"As a global leader in providing innovative ground combat systems and capabilities, our Center of Engineering Excellence is inventing the next generation of equipment," Kevin Bonner, chief technology officer of General Dynamics Land Systems said. "From robots that carry loads and move barriers for brigades to working side-by-side with Army warfighters to innovate the most capable and best-supported armored vehicles in the world – Our workforce in Macomb County ensures the defense of our nation and our allies' homelands."

Approximately 1,780 people work out of the Sterling Heights headquarters, with 773 of those employees choosing also to live in Macomb County. As a significant and longstanding defense company, it's not only General Dynamics Land Systems customers who benefit from their innovative engineering work, but also local suppliers. In 2008, when the recession hit Michigan harder than anywhere else in the country, it was companies like General Dynamics Land Systems who kept business alive in southeast Michigan.

The business worked to form stronger relationships with its suppliers at the time, according to a company official. Instead



General Dynamics Land Systems headquarters, based in Sterling Heights since 1982. Approximately 1,780 people work out of the Sterling Heights headquarters, with 773 of those employees choosing also to live in Macomb County.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GENERAL DYNAMICS LAND SYSTEMS

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

General Dynamics Land Systems is a global leader in the design, development, production, support and sustainment of tracked and wheeled military equipment. For more information, visit gdls.com.



of finding unemployment, suppliers and workers who once made cars soon found themselves building tanks instead. General Dynamics Land Systems was able to offer a form of stability not found in other sectors of the manufacturing industry by nature of its business with the U.S. Department of Defense. A similar story can be found today happening amongst the local manufacturing industry.

To help support Macomb County's expanding defense corridor, General Dynamics Land Systems opened in 2010 its Maneuver Collaboration Center inside the Center of Engineering Excellence and Innovation laboratory in Sterling Heights.

"We bring together a community of defense professionals, engineers, customers, suppliers, academia and, most important, product users, to collaborate in real-time to test the applicability of various high technology concepts," Bonner said. "In the past 10 years alone, General Dynamics Land Systems has dedicated nearly 50 million hours to product design and

logistics development. Our independent research is bolstered by years of collaboration with leading research-and-development institutions worldwide."

By supporting both the research and manufacturing workforce, General Dynamics Land Systems has helped to multiply local jobs, according to Vicky Rowinski, director of Macomb County's Department of Planning & Economic Development.

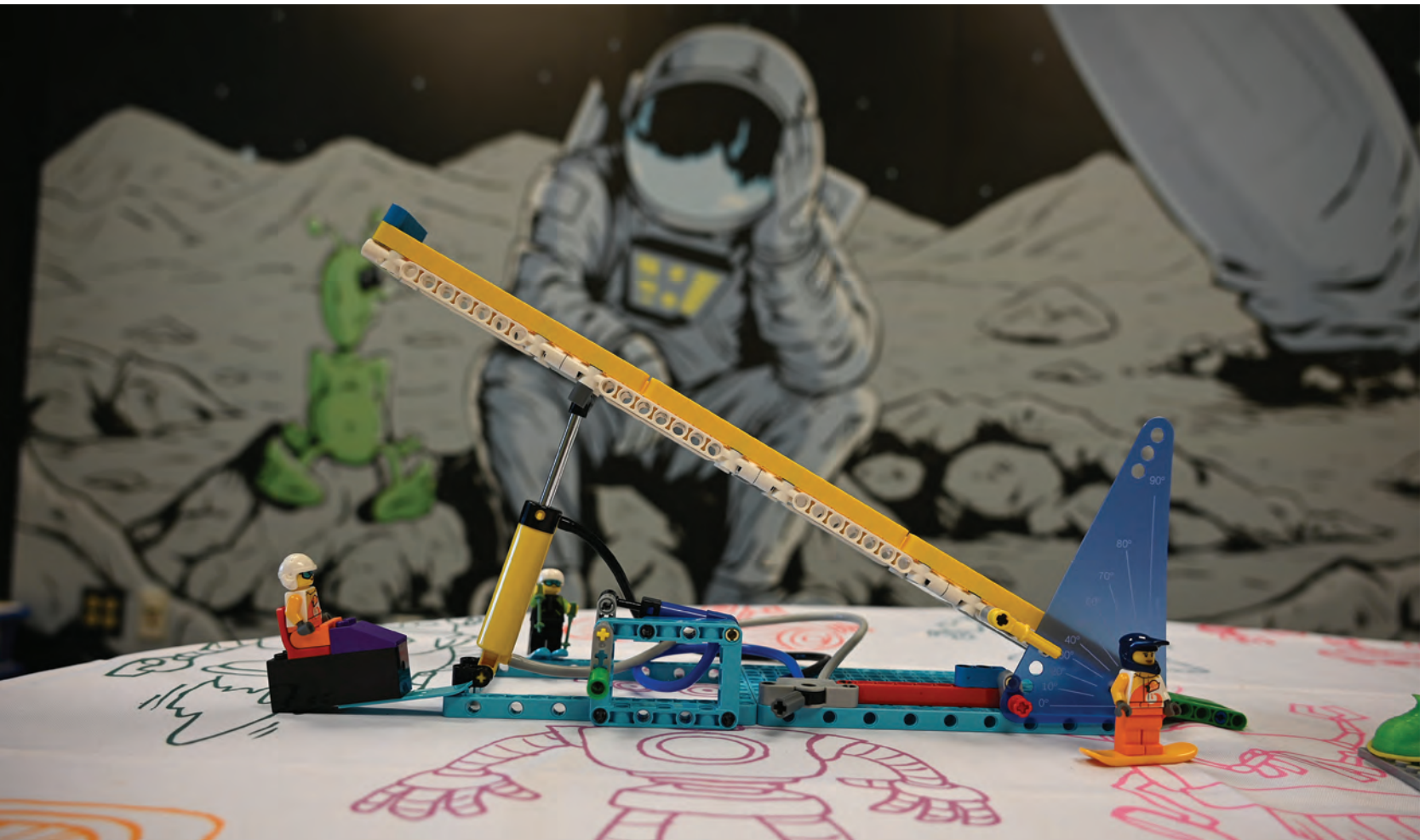
"Every one defense job creates two additional spin-off jobs, and with General Dynamics Land Systems, we see this synergy between the auto industry and the defense industry. Whereas the automotive industry is cyclical depending on the economy, the defense industry is predictable," Rowinski said. "Just like in during the recession, we're seeing again how engineers and others are seeking out new jobs in defense while being upskilled in the process."

On top of sponsoring local robotics teams, the company holds special STEM programs and career fairs across the county. Many of its current employees were also recruited locally from engineering schools at Lawrence Technological University, Michigan Technological University, Wayne, Michigan and Michigan State University.

"Through research and development in survivability, lethality, ground mobility and more, General Dynamics Land Systems has cultivated a wealth of knowledge in defense and security technology," Bonner said. "We believe that when our customers succeed in their goals, we succeed in ours." **M**



General Dynamics Land Systems employees pose for a photo after volunteering with southeast Michigan nonprofit Focus: HOPE.



Picking up steam

MARZ STEM zone rebrands with big plans for students in 2022

By Natalie Broda

The Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone, better known as MARZ, is picking up steam this year following a rebranding campaign for the science, technology, engineering and mathematics center.

Housed at the business incubator hub the Velocity Center in Sterling Heights, MARZ was officially launched in 2019 under the name Macomb County Robotics Collaboration and Innovation Center, or RCIC. It's a program that's been in the works at the county since 2014 with big dreams of inspiring youth while bolstering the area's talent pipeline. It serves kids from kindergarten to third grade, middle school and high school students, in a variety of ways.

"It's so important to engage our local students in a hands-on

way," Vicky Rowinski, director of the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development said. "They want to physically build things, they don't want to just sit there and read a book all day. And we want to find ways to show those creative kids that there is a job here for them in Macomb County."

At MARZ, students not only get the opportunity to work with robotics and technology like 3D printers or CNC routers, they also get access to some of the area's top industry leaders. Mentorship is a pillar of the programming at the center. It's a two-way street for both the center and the business leaders who speak with the students, giving the industry first access to Macomb's up-and-coming talent.

"The mentorship piece is truly magical to see. It was very

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

The Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone is located inside the Velocity Center, 6633 18 Mile Rd., Sterling Heights. The center, nicknamed MARZ, is a partnership between Macomb County, the city of Sterling Heights, Macomb Community College and the Macomb Intermediate School District. Its mission is to create and involve local kids in STEM programming while fueling the county's talent pipeline for the future.

Those interested in joining the Macomb MARZ program or would like to learn more should visit macombmarz.org.



important to us that we bring industry straight to the students or vice versa, taking the kids right to the shop floor to see and learn what a business is about," Rowinski said. "And our businesses love it, they want access to these students for internships or summer co-op programs, or to hire them right out of school."

All 21 school districts in Macomb work with MARZ through their career and technical education programs and Macomb Intermediate School District, one of the main partners supporting the center. Alongside the county, leaders from Macomb Community College and Sterling Heights also sit on the board that oversees MARZ. It receives funding from fundraising campaigns and from major donors such as the General Motors Foundation, Verizon and AT&T.

Even though a global pandemic struck just a year after MARZ launched, the center never slowed down on its mission. Throughout 2020 it hosted a Master of Mobility Challenge that would see robotics kits mailed straight to students homes. The kids were instructed to build robots that could complete certain tasks and send in videos of their progress. Last year, various build sessions and other events were held in-person as society and schools got back in session with a continuation of the mobile programs into spring. In 2022, there's much more on the horizon in terms of new events, mentorship ses-

Opposite page: A lego robotics set sits on the table inside the MARZ office's new home at the Velocity Center in Sterling Heights.

PHOTO BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP

*God be in my head,
and in my understanding.
God be in my eyes and in my looking,
God be in my mouth and in my speaking.
God be in my heart and in my thinking,
God be at my end and at my departing.*

WUJEK-CALCATERRA
& SONS, INC.

STERLING HEIGHTS
SHELBY TOWNSHIP
www.WujekCalcaterra.com



sions and in-person programs.

Another component of MARZ is the support of FIRST Robotics teams across the county, a topic that Marjie Jenkins, coordinator of the center and its first employee, is intimately familiar with. Jenkins has spent 22 years as first a competitor in high school and then a mentor for FIRST Robotics teams. She brings an essential skill set to MARZ through her deep understanding of how to engage students and get them interested in STEM, opening their mind to the possibilities of careers based right in their backyard.

“In robotics, unlike sports, everyone can go pro. Anyone can get a job,” Jenkins said. “You don’t have to want to only be an engineer and that’s what we want to show these kids. There’s opportunities for artists, kids who like public speaking, all sorts of career paths that lead straight to really cool jobs right here in Macomb.”

Two new rookie robotics teams were created at local schools over the past two years as a result of the efforts at MARZ. The center is also launching a new website this year to coincide with its rebranding. On average MARZ is currently serving between 50 to 100 kids each month depending on the programming with plans to grow that number significantly this year. **M**

Top left: Marjie Jenkins, coordinator of the Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone, sets out robotic lego kits built by students at the Velocity Center.

Top right: Inside and outside the Velocity Center in Sterling Heights, where MARZ has built its new home.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Right: Macomb County students involved in the Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone participated in a FIRST Robotics competition this past winter.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACOMB AUTOMATION AND ROBOTICS ZONE



Plugged in

Prosper-Tech doubles its business through Industry 4.0

By Natalie Broda

Part of what makes Macomb County so special is the business community's willingness to always break the mold and go beyond what others think is possible – And it's businesses like Prosper-Tech Machine & Tool that exemplify that in spades.

Heidi Devroy, CEO, and Bob Devroy, President, married for 33 years, started their company in 2008 at the height of the Great Recession. Like many others, Bob Devroy found himself unemployed after spending decades in the skilled trades. It was sink or swim for the couple who had four kids to support. Without hesitation, the pair took Bob Devroy's lifelong dream of running his own business and ran with it, straight to their garage. In just one year, they outgrew the space.

That story of continued growth has marked the company ever since as the Devroys operated out of a 3,600-square-foot facility in 2009. They amped up their production abilities with new investments into technology and by 2013, renovated and moved into their current 10,000-square-foot facility in their hometown of Richmond. They currently have 12 employees.

Prosper-Tech Machine & Tool is leading the charge when it comes to small business in automation, a prime focus of Ma-

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Prosper-Tech Machine & Tool was named 2021 Manufacturer of the Year at the ninth annual Macomb Business Awards hosted by the Macomb County Department of Planning & Economic Development. Founded in 2007, Prosper-Tech offers services for build-to-print precision machining and plastic injection tooling, serving the medical, defense, aerospace/space, and automotive industries in the greater United States.

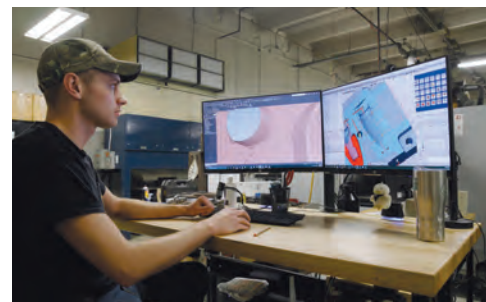
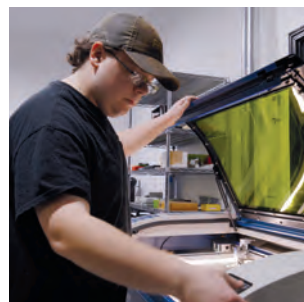
They are located at 69160 Skinner Drive, Richmond. For more information, visit prosper-tech.net or call (586) 727-8800.



comb County's Department of Planning and Economic Development. It was in 2018 that the couple attended a Goldman Sachs small business program that switched the company into high gear, veering away from working exclusively with the auto industry into other markets.

"On the very first day, they asked us what our exit plan was. We always thought it would be retirement, we didn't have any concept of building something sustainable like that for the future," Heidi Devroy said. "As we learned, we realized at that point that automation and intentionally diversifying into different sectors would mitigate any upcoming recessions. It all just made sense for us."

The company worked to attain certifications to create parts for the medical, defense and aerospace industries. Some of their products include parts for prosthetics, ground equipment for tanks and parts used by aerospace companies that will eventually end up in orbit. To make all that work possible, Prosper-Tech Machine & Tooling invested in what's known as 'lights-out' manufacturing in 2019. At the end of the day when everyone else goes home, an Erowa ERC80 Machine Tending Robot switches on to operate throughout the night. The invest-





Previous page: Bob Devroy, co-founder of Prosper-Tech, chats with an employee, while other employees are pictured working at the Richmond facility. **Above:** The entire Prosper-Tech team poses for a photo.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PROSPER-TECH

ment has doubled the company's production capabilities with the same amount of staff.

"The first time we saw one of these machines in 2018, we knew this was the future. We've seen an amazing return on investment that's also helped us to mitigate the ongoing worker shortage," Heidi Devroy said. "Plus, now we can train our young workers and upscale their skills."

The Devroys currently have three apprentices working at the shop, part of their overall mission to train the next generation of the workforce. In addition to lights out manufacturing, the company also added a quality testing lab in recent years. In 2021, they invested into a Grob G350 horizontal 5-axis CNC mill to work with exotic metals meant for space. Prosper-Tech Machine & Tooling was named the county's 2021 Manufacturer of the Year.

The cost of many of these purchases has been partially offset by grants from the state and from Macomb County. To better assist businesses with implementing Industry 4.0 technologies, the county launched a program called Macomb Next about a year ago. Its goal is to enhance the digitalization of the county's workforce through upskilling residents, bolstering the talent pipeline and helping companies acquire the next generation of technology. It's supported by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.



Heidi Devroy



Bob Devroy

"We're seeing something that's called the 'new collar' phenomenon where workers in skilled trades aren't losing their jobs because of robotics, they're being upskilled to coincide with the change in technology," Vicky Rowinski, director of Macomb County's Department of Planning and Economic Development said. "Following and enhancing that trend is our greatest priority right now at the county level."

Macomb Next will be offering a new 50/50 matching-grant program for Industry 4.0 implementation to all county businesses. The grant will cover half the cost of equipment like CNC machines or 3D printers as well as software needs.

"We love supporting businesses like Prosper-Tech, they have such a phenomenal story and put their hearts into everything they do at their business," Rowinski said. "They took a leap of faith and to see what they've been able to do with their employee attraction, retention and training is pretty awesome."

As for the Devroy's exit plan, they won't have to look too far for someone who might want to take over the business. On top of receiving buyout offers every month, which they firmly reject, one of the couple's children is soon entering their shop to be trained in the business and climb the ladder of Industry 4.0 and all that's next to come. **M**

Home stake

DCS Corporation opens new \$4.3M facility in Sterling Heights

By Natalie Broda

When national companies are seeking a new area to expand near the defense industry, they don't have to look much farther than Macomb County, its robust defense corridor and chain of suppliers. Such was the case for DCS Corporation and its brand new \$4.3 million research and development facility that opened in Sterling Heights in October.

Working directly for the U.S. Department of Defense, DCS Corp. has been in business for 45 years providing programmatic, engineering and technical support services for our nation's military forces. The company boasts a wide range of capabilities from artificial intelligence and machine learning, to rapid prototyping, modeling and simulation, mission planning, weapons systems development and more.

The new 63,000-square-foot facility in Sterling Heights was renovated from an existing building to serve the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command and the U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command Ground Vehicle Systems Center at the Detroit Arsenal in Warren. Approximately half of the facility was built for offices, conference areas and engineering laboratories. The remainder of the space will see employees working in machining, fabrication and vehicle integration facilities, together forming a new Ground Vehicle R&D Center of Excellence.

The investment created 92 new, high-paying jobs on top of the roughly 200 workers DCS Corp. already employs in Michigan. The company also has a presence in Massachusetts.

John Johnson, vice president of ground vehicle integration and the support division, said the company's main priority was to find a facility that would not only meet their current needs, but also have room for future growth.

"Macomb County met all of our goals and so we decided to expand our Michigan office. We found that Sterling Heights met all our business and technology needs," Johnson said. "Macomb County and Sterling Heights offer several advantages including being situated in an area with a long history of being in the vanguard of autonomous vehicle manufacturing and research and development. DCS is excited to build upon our more than three decades of support to Army TACOM and GVSC, leveraging the technologies, resources and engineering talent the Sterling Heights business and technology community has to offer."

DCS was awarded a \$500,000 Michigan Business Development Program performance-based grant, an economic tool used by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to attract new business or expansions to the state. Macomb County, the



Inside the shop floor of the DCS Corporation's new 63,000-square-foot research and development facility in Sterling Heights.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DCS CORPORATION



CLINTON TOWNSHIP
CIVIC CENTER



WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP
WATER STORAGE FACILITY



NEW BALTIMORE
MASTER PLAN UPDATE



ARMADA
SKATEPARK

DEDICATED TO MAKING COMMUNITIES BETTER.

**giffels
webster**
giffelswebster.com

Civil Engineers
Landscape Architects
Planners
Surveyors
GIS Specialists



DCS Corporation opened its brand new \$4.3 million research and development facility in October in Sterling Heights.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DCS CORPORATION

state and the city of Sterling Heights all worked closely to pave the way for DCS Corp. It was that spirit of corporation that Johnson said helped the company ultimately choose the current site over a competing site in Massachusetts.

Michael Taylor, mayor of Sterling Heights, stated it was a proud moment for the business community.

“The fact that DCS has chosen Sterling Heights for the creation of this state-of-the-art research and design facility focused on the growing need for autonomous vehicle technology is a testament to our spirit of innovation coupled with our experienced talent who possess the perfect knowledge, skills and abilities for this type of work,” Taylor said. “The fact that Sterling Heights was chosen over a competing site in Massachusetts makes me incredibly proud of this community and what we have to offer advanced tech companies like DCS.”

CONNECT

FUELING THE TALENT PIPELINE

DCS Corp. has been in business for 45 years providing programmatic, engineering and technical support services for our nation's military forces. The company boasts a wide range of capabilities from artificial intelligence and machine learning, to rapid prototyping, modeling and simulation, mission planning, weapons systems development and more. To learn more, visit dscorp.com.



Talent is especially important these days as the nation continues to see a worker shortage in nearly every industry sector. That's why companies like DCS often seek out the ever-lesser space in Macomb County to operate, according to James Ahee, program director of economic and business development for the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development.

“Having an important defense company like DCS choose to operate here is indicative of what's actually happening in Macomb County. Our technology and innovation in the manufacturing sector is unique,” Ahee said. “It's hard to duplicate the kind of knowledge and experience that these companies have. It just doesn't exist anywhere else in the world.”

Ahee went on to state that talent is at the forefront of the county's current business development efforts, something that can be seen in programs like the Macomb Next Industry 4.0 Initiative. Where once there were about 10 applicants for every job in Macomb County, Ahee estimates that number is now closer to two. In order to keep the cycle of new business and growth afloat over the next few decades, feeding the talent pipeline will be an essential mindset from local governments all the way to the state level.

Which is a good thing for companies like DCS Corp. Johnson said that while there's currently no short-term plans for expansion, that likely won't be the case in five to 10 years. And when DCS Corp. does look to expand again, Johnson believes that once more, they won't have to look far.

“When future growth requires added capabilities and facilities, DCS fully anticipates to perform that expansion within the Macomb County region,” he said. **M**

A walk in the park

Recreational tourism, rooted in greenspaces, on the rise

By Natalie Broda

In an ever-changing and digitalized world, more and more people are finding reprieve in the great outdoors, particularly in Macomb County.

On a sunny weekday afternoon at the Sterling Heights Nature Center, a group of school kids play in the grass under a flowering tree. Down the path into the woods, couples hold hands and walk with their dogs. A gentleman fishes on the bridge over the Clinton River while a pair of bird-watchers with binoculars stroll by – all of these sights are increasing in regularity as recreational tourism in the county reaches new heights.

“We’re seeing major increases in the usage and access of our parks and waterways. In many ways, the outdoors has taken center stage ever since the pandemic began,” Gerard Santoro,

program director of parks and natural resources for the Macomb County Planning and Economic Development Department, said. “As people began enjoying the freedom of the outdoors, I think there was a psyche shift throughout the region. We’re seeing newfound appreciation for our parks as residents make these locations a part of their daily routines, or choose to move to Macomb to have access to quality green spaces and water.”

The Huron-Clinton Metroparks system, which houses Wolcott Mill Metropark, Stony Creek Metropark and Lake St. Clair Metropark in Macomb County, saw an overall 11% increase in attendance over the past three years. There was a small year-over-year dip of 8% from 2020 to 2021 as Michigan went back to work, but the number of people using the parks is still con-



A new off-leash dog park is in the works at Stony Creek Metropark, seen here prior to construction over the summer.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HURON-CLINTON METROPARKS

siderably higher than it was in 2019.

“Much like other park systems, we’ve seen large increases in usage as more people have discovered the parks,” Danielle Mauter, chief of marketing and communications for the metropark system said. “We’re seeing more people buy annual passes and use those passes more often. Last summer, the average pass holder visited one of our parks 5.8 times. That means more people on the trails, more people we can draw input from for what they want to see in their parks and more revenue to make improvements.”

Wolcott Mill saw a 12% increase from its previous three-year average attendance in 2021, with 43,597 clocked vehicle entries into the park. At Stony Creek, 693,364 vehicles were tallied last year, a 10% increase from the three-year average. Along the shores of Lake St. Clair, there was a massive 18% increase at Lake St. Clair Metropark, with 531,513 visitors in 2021 compared to 452,942 on the three-year average.

There’s a direct correlation between that dramatic improvement in attendance and the connecting of Clinton River waterways for paddlesports. Cleaning up and opening up portions of the Clinton River has been a major priority at the county level for the past five years according to Santoro. Paddlesports are the fastest growing type of recreation



in the U.S. with birding coming right behind in second.

Which is why Macomb joined up with St. Clair County this year to open a new birding trail in partnership with local audubon societies.

“We’re lucky to have a convergence of two major flyrights right along the coast here, it’s one of the only places in the world that takes place,” Santoro said. “We just opened the birding trails this spring and the response has been big. We worked with our partners over one year to compile enough data to create a birding map and we’ve received lots of good feedback even in this early stage about the innovation of having that map in your hands on your smartphone.”

That’s not the only way that the county is using technology to increase visitors. In recent years, Macomb teamed up with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments to add greenspaces to its ParkFinder app. There’s also big updates coming to the Tour Lake St. Clair website, originally launched in 2010. New additions to the map this summer will include cultural and historical sites along the lake, as well as where to find supplies for fishing and paddlesports.

Mountain biking is another popular sport gaining momentum in Macomb with the

Below: A group of bird-watchers stop along the trail at Stony Creek Metropark. Birdwatching is the second fastest growing type of recreation in the U.S.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
JOAN BONIN



recent completion of a \$700,000 renovation of the 17-mile biking trail system at Stony Creek Metropark. Usage of the trail has tripled since construction began in 2019 according to the county. The trail redesign added obstacles and jump lines, smoothed out user-generated portions of the trails and added hand-cycle accessible trails to the system. On Lake St. Clair, a new all-abilities accessible kayak launch is in the works this year with a planned 18 by 50-foot dock and ADA accessible parking.

“A big piece of the bike trail project was making sure it was accessible and, moving forward, accessibility is on the top of our minds. We want to be able to create experiences for people of all abilities,” Mauter said.

Those who find themselves visiting one of the county’s many parks and greenspaces can expect to see more construction over the summer as Huron-Clinton Metroparks and Macomb continue to roll-out more attractions for visitors and residents. From a new three-acre dog park at Stony Creek, to new boardwalks along the lake, expanded trails and more, the roots of Macomb County’s recreational tourism are growing stronger than ever. **M**

CONNECT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Macomb County is home to more than 3,800 acres of municipal parks, 34 miles of coastline along Lake St. Clair, as well as home to three Huron-Clinton Metroparks: Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township, Wolcott Mill Metropark in Ray Township, and Stony Creek Metropark in Shelby Township.

The Southeast Michigan ParkFinder application includes information about park amenities throughout the region, allowing users to see local, county, regional, and state parks, along with private recreation and conservation land, all on one streamlined map. It is integrated with Trail Explorer to provide virtual tours on more than 1,000 miles of greenways and paddling trails, and with TOTAGO to help plan outdoor experiences around walking, biking, and transit access.

For more information or to view the ParkFinder map, visit semcog.org.



Hiking, biking and birding are all fueling tourism in Macomb County through its many parks and recreation areas like the Sterling Heights Nature Center.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE BRODA — MEDIANEWS GROUP

Choose **EPIC** Rehabilitation After Surgery or Hospitalization



"This is by far the best facility I've ever been in!"



"The staff provides loving care always."



"The care couldn't get any better!"



EPIC

Excellence • Passion • Innovation • Care

375 South Main Street, Romeo, MI 48065 • Phone: 586.589.3800



Fresh
WBs Bistro

WELLBRIDGE OF ROMEO

YOUR BRIDGE TO RECOVERY AND WELLNESS

www.thewellbridgegroup.com

Healing touch

Medical sector a growing source of high-paying, professional jobs

By Jane Peterson

Macomb County is home to several well-known industries that are considered drivers of the local economy. Manufacturing, defense and automotive – and increasingly healthcare – are among leading sectors that are major employers, pumping millions into the economic pipeline.

From 2010-21, healthcare jobs have grown by 8.2%. This is just behind defense at 140.9%; automotive at 22%; and manufacturing at 18.6% growth.

One reason for the significant increase in jobs is the expansion of medical facilities and services around the county. In the past two years, construction projects such as Beaumont Outpatient Campus – Lenox, McLaren Macomb Harrington Medical Center and Ambulatory Surgery Center, McLaren Macomb's inpatient rehabilitation unit, McLaren Macomb Senior Behavioral Health Center in Shelby Township and Henry Ford Macomb Hospital's hospital renovation and construction of a new North Tower have come online or are currently under construction.

These multi-million dollar projects have sparked additional investments throughout local communities, making Macomb County a desirable place for healthcare workers.



Hali Lenney

"There is a positive ripple effect," said Business Developer Hali Lenney, who oversees the healthcare industry for Macomb County Planning and Economic Development. "These projects don't just affect the hospital, but every business around the hospital."

Ascension St. John Hospital Health Center in Chesterfield Township, for example, is expected to open in early 2023. The new center, located at I-94 and 26 Mile Road, will service the growing populations of northern Macomb and southern St. Clair counties.

"Our facility will be part of the ongoing growth and expansion of the 26 Mile Corridor. We expect ongoing success and expansion of the 26 Mile Road facility that will bring forward other clinical services and employment opportunities," said Kevin J. Grady, MD, Regional President & CEO, Ascension Michigan, who leads Ascension St. John Hospital, Ascension Macomb-Oakland Hospital and Ascension River District Hospital.

The 38,700-square-foot center will offer primary care, emer-



gency care, specialty and diagnostic services in a multi-level naturally contemporary clinical space. It is a \$32.5 million investment that is expected to create more than 50 new jobs. Services that will need support include increasing registered nursing needs, emergency department technology, registration for multiple modalities, physical therapists, primary and sub-specialty care staff support, facilities and laboratory support, he said.

At the beginning of 2022, there were nearly 3,000 full time equivalent Ascension Michigan associates working in Macomb County.

Macomb County officials understand that healthcare sector growth equals healthy communities. Ascension Michigan received support from Macomb County's leadership on the new health center, which will make access to care more convenient for residents.

Healthcare employment is projected to continue to grow through 2029. To fill this expanding need, MCPED is working with several organizations to tackle the issue from all angles.

They are communicating with local school districts about a Talent Pipeline Initiative that will add more healthcare options to Career and Technical Education (CTE) classrooms in high schools. Schools like The Academies at Romeo High School have several CTE options for students. Lenney said introducing students to medical careers, informing them about the vast variety of jobs available in the field and allowing them to explore potential careers to find a good fit for them will help fill projected future job gaps.

Macomb Community College has also expanded its portfolio to include additional healthcare career pathways, working with local employers to identify needs and find collaborative solutions. The college engages frequently with healthcare employers and works with its faculty on curriculum development in response to their needs.



CONNECT

AT A GLANCE

The medical community continues to expand throughout Macomb County. The numbers speak for themselves. According to Macomb County Planning and Economic Development (MCPED), 41,127 healthcare jobs existed in Macomb County as of last year in occupations like registered nursing, home health and personal care, nursing assistants and medical assistants.

The average healthcare salary in Macomb County? A healthy \$64,639.



Many healthcare employers need to hire now and are discovering that as the labor market gets tighter, traditional hiring methods are not as effective, said Karen Helfrick, talent specialist and apprenticeship coordinator for Macomb/St. Clair Michigan Works! She said a registered apprenticeship can help companies successfully find, train and retain employees using their current training and human resource development strategy.

Macomb/St. Clair Michigan Works! has developed the Healthcare Registered Apprenticeship Program, designed to provide healthcare employers with skilled employees right away, without waiting for students to graduate from training programs before hiring them. Candidates can be trained as they work in a healthcare setting, drawing wages while they attend classes.

Macomb/St. Clair Michigan Works! Offers a wide array of programs to assist those looking for their first job, seeking to advance their career and switch careers with training education. Staff can assist with intensive career development, resume building, interviewing skills and more. **M**



Opposite page and top: From 2010–21, healthcare jobs have grown by 8.2%. Medical employers like Ascension St. John Hospital are expanding in kind to meet the demand for health care. The Ascension St. John Hospital Health Center in Chesterfield Township, shown in a rendering, is expected to open in early 2023.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ASCENSION ST. JOHN HOSPITAL

Above, left and right: To fill this expanding need, Macomb County Planning and Economic Development is communicating with local school districts about a Talent Pipeline Initiative that will add more healthcare options to Career and Technical Education (CTE) classrooms in high schools, like this class at The Academies at Romeo High School.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ACADEMIES AT ROMEO HIGH SCHOOL

April Boyle

Cultivating an ecosystem of entrepreneurship from the ground up

By Natalie Broda



April Boyle

April Boyle knows what it takes to build a thriving community of entrepreneurs — She's done it before in Detroit and now is bringing those skills to Macomb County as the new senior advisor for entrepreneurship and innovation at the Velocity Center in Sterling Heights.

Boyle was one of a handful of individuals to open a business incubator in Detroit before the city's revitalization renaissance was truly underway. In 2011, she co-founded the D:hive Welcome Center which offered tours and connections to small businesses in the downtown

for the next three years. She was also the co-owner of Gold Cash Gold, one of the city's first new fine dining experiences at the time, until 2020. It was in 2014 that she took those experiences and launched the Build Institute, a small business accelerator that saw over 1,000 individuals graduate from its programs. More than 300 businesses got their start at the institute, which she ran as executive director until the end of 2020.

"Like everyone else, I was doing some rethinking during the pandemic. I left the Build Institute as we brought on a new CEO. I'm an entrepreneur. I like the start-up aspect of things and I was ready to do something new," Boyle said. "I learned about this job from the Sterling Heights economic development team and thought wow, what an interesting opportunity given that the Velocity Center is in the middle of a reinvention. This gives me the opportunity to use the skills I have and still be challenged."

Challenges such as working to build businesses in the manufacturing and defense industry for the first time, Boyle said.

Q What is the purpose of the Velocity Center and how do the center's programs fulfill that purpose?

A The ultimate goal is economic impact and improving quality of life. The research tells us that net new jobs happen from more new businesses. Net new jobs happen from new companies. So, how do we get more companies starting in Macomb County, and not only starting, but thriving and growing? We're looking to bring in more investment dollars, angel investors, capital and grant money from places like the Michigan Economic Develop-

ment Corporation. There's also talent, which is our biggest challenge right now is finding great talent. Having an entrepreneurship culture and mindset will help bring more of the people we need to the talent pipeline. Right now, Velocity is honing in on our target market and we want to be super focused on the programs we offer.

Q What is the state of entrepreneurship in Macomb County today?

A There is a lot of opportunity and some challenges. It's a little disconnected. Detroit has been really focused on building the entrepreneurial ecosystem with Tech Town and others and to be transparent, Macomb County is behind. We can learn from some of the best practices in other communities and I think the opportunity is ripe right now, and the will is there to have a systematic approach where we collaborate more and have more transparency. It's a unique time with tons of entrepreneurial activity happening behind the scenes and underground. We want to create robust and interesting programs to support that, from help with financing to taking on Industry 4.0. I know Macomb County has a strong reputation for 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' and 'do it alone' rugged individualism, and you do need that, but no one can do it alone. You need a community to amplify that amazing work ethic.

Q What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

A Our staff is pretty bare bones at this point so we're working to build up the team. I'm on a listening and learning tour right now, discovering and meeting with as many stakeholders as possible to make sure what we do is coming from a community driven approach. We want to be open source and transparent and have a low barrier to entry to access the resources at Velocity. This work is so important because the world is changing fast with technology, world wars, pandemics — We have to equip the community with an entrepreneurial mindset.

Q What's on the horizon for the center?

A We are drilling down deep into our vision and mission and designing initiatives that will lead us to some big, hairy, audacious goals. We want Sterling Heights and Macomb County on the map nationally and internationally for our innovation, our programs, our companies. I want everyone in Macomb County to know that if you have an idea, you have a place to come and get connected, to try it out and have the opportunity to learn and upscale.

PHOTO COURTESY OF APRIL BOYLE

Jack Johns

Connecting people,
building the economy

By Natalie Broda



Jack Johns

For those looking to start or expand a business in Macomb County, Jack Johns is likely a familiar face.

As project manager for the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development, Johns is one of the main public-facing individuals who attract business leads to the area. Whether it's traveling across the country to find new companies interested in joining the county's defense corridor or meeting with existing OEM suppliers to expand their footprint here, Johns and his work are thoroughly people-focused.

"I've always thought of myself as an entrepreneur. Before I found my career, I used to open little businesses all the time, read about how to set them up, fill out all the forms, get them started and then realize I'm bored out of my mind," Johns said. "I realized that clearly the kind of job I want is to work with businesses morning, noon and night."

A lifelong Macomb resident, Johns received his bachelor's degree from Oakland University and his master's degree in Human Resource Administration from Central Michigan University in 2006. Prior to starting with the county in 2013 as a senior economic development specialist, Johns spent 12-years supervising the unemployment division of Michigan Works!

"I helped people with resume writing and skills and it felt good to see people go back to work, to get gainful employment," Johns said. "A big part of my job was going out and meeting businesses to make those connections directly, I really liked that aspect of helping the businesses grow. Our employers are key, without them and new employers, there's no tax base, so by working with them in this way I'm helping more people have access to gainful employment than in my previous work."

Johns has traveled to places like Arizona, Texas, South Carolina and Ohio seeking to attract companies to move or expand in Macomb County. It's part of a strategy to bolster economic development in the region without competing directly with surrounding municipalities. Johns said his goal isn't to take businesses out of Oakland or Wayne County, but rather, to add to the pool of employers big and small while supporting those already here.

Q What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

A I go out into the businesses that are in Macomb County and make sure that if there's anything they need, we're there for them. Sometimes they reach out to us. We ask them if they need help finding space, or want to expand, or if there's a connection we need to make for them with the local colleges for training needs. Or maybe there's a training bottleneck they need help with. One of our big focuses right now is Industry 4.0 and helping our businesses automate their operations among this shortage of employees. Sometimes they help with signage. Whatever it may be, we keep track of all of them and try to reach out at least once a year for a face-to-face. But I'm constantly in contact with our business community, every day.

Q Why is Macomb County a good place to invest or start a business?

A Macomb County has always been a good place to do business. We know that 63% of every dollar in the state of Michigan is spent in Macomb County's defense corridor. We have everything from OEMs to companies like General Motors and Ford and we have the infrastructure to support them with I-94 going all the way east and west and the I-75 connection all the way to Florida if they want to move their goods across the country. All of our municipalities countywide are doing well, there's no tough situations or bankruptcies, no problems with our electricity or water. It's not like places in California that deal with power outages or huge fires. But we do have cold weather, which is great for automatic vehicle makers to test their products in bad weather conditions.

Q How does the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development affect the future of the county for its residents?

A Each time we help a business get placed in Macomb County, you can really see it when you drive by, like Amazon or Grupo Antolin in Shelby Township. When companies like that come here they hire 1,000 people and after those good jobs come to the area, that's when you see houses being built, because the jobs are right in your backyard. And these are good paying jobs, it's rare we see companies coming in offering under \$15 an hour these days. This is an employee market and we're helping businesses with that as well by showing them what sort of pay they need to offer, or benefits, or what they're lacking. We want to make sure our businesses are doing at least what everyone else is doing, if not more.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MACOMB COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Marjie Jenkins

Inspiring youth with
past experiences and passion

By Natalie Broda



Marjie Jenkins

In the FIRST in Michigan robotics space, you'd be hard pressed to find a person who doesn't know Marjie Jenkins, a 22-year veteran of the field who now spends her days running the Macomb Automation and Robotics Zone.

She's the zone's only employee as of yet, opening at the Velocity Center in Sterling Heights in 2019. It's a serendipitous fit for a person whose passion for engaging youth in science, technology, engineering and math spans their teenage and adult life. The center, nicknamed MARZ,

is a partnership between Macomb County, the city of Sterling Heights, Macomb Community College and the Macomb Intermediate School District. Its mission is both complex and simple — create and involve local kids in STEM programming while fueling the county's talent pipeline for the future.

Jenkins, a native of Pontiac, is the coordinator for MARZ working to build out the center's operations alongside its board of directors. She began her journey with FIRST Robotics in high school, participating as a student from 2000 to 2003. After graduation, she mentored the local Pontiac team until 2009 and the following year began working with students at the International Academy in Bloomfield Hills, where she's been a mentor ever since. Before taking the position with MARZ, she worked at a small engineering firm in Farmington on reverse engineering and quality control.

"We want to get kids involved early when it comes to STEM, because it's just like learning a foreign language," Jenkins said. "When they're young, they can pick it up really quickly. The word 'robotics' sometimes scares people off as they get older, but kids aren't scared of anything. We want to show them that there's more to robotics than just engineering, from graphic design for banners, to public speaking."

Jenkins started at MARZ last spring, picking up the ongoing mobile STEM programs the center offered through the pandemic such as building and programming lego ferris wheels. Over the past year, she's worked to build new relationships and strengthen existing ones between MARZ and the local schools. The center also recently purchased a 3D printer and CNC Router for kids to practice with and learn from.

Depending on the program schedule, the center is currently

serving between 50 to 100 kids each month with more events planned for the summer, such as robotics skirmishes for local teams.

Q What do you do on a day-to-day basis with MARZ?

A Right now, we're working on getting more STEM programming into Macomb in general. I'm coordinating with teachers at different schools to build more FIRST Robotics teams, and organizing meetings to get sponsors together for those teams. Historically, Oakland County has been way more competitive in that space than Macomb County, and we want to change that. We're also still working on our mobile STEM program where we bring Lego kits to different locations. Right now we're holding about one event a month at the center but soon we'll be doing much more, including bringing in more industry experts to talk with the kids about their careers.

Q Why choose to work for MARZ and with Macomb County specifically?

A I first heard about this job from the president of FIRST of Michigan and I knew it would be a really good fit. I've spent all of my life doing this as a volunteer, and now, I get to do it in an official capacity after 22 years of mentoring kids in STEM. There really aren't too many other places that have realized how important encouraging STEM is, and it makes me really excited to see a city and a county trying to make something like this happen. It's both fun, and scary, being on the ground floor. Everything I've wished for and wanted to do in my career, I can make happen now and I have a great board that's supportive of all my ideas.

Q How does MARZ impact the future of the county and the future of Macomb County's children overall?

A The business community now has access to these kids, these future employees they wouldn't otherwise know about, some of which we're seeing being hired right out of high school. And the kids get to find out about all the cool jobs in Macomb County, like the trades and aerospace. Truthfully, not all kids will or want to go to a four year college, so we're introducing them to the cool classes at Macomb Community College, or internships, all while showing the companies in Macomb that these kids are awesome. They're great at public speaking, they can work with CAD, sometimes they're even better at the programs than those in the industry. It's all about shifting perspectives both for the kids and for the industry. **M**

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARJIE JENKINS



At Henry Ford Macomb Hospital,
we are changing healthcare.

WE ARE HENRY

With Macomb County's largest healthcare investment underway,
we are redefining what's possible.

We are building on a commitment that spans more than a century. Our latest surgical services expansion is ensuring the most advanced treatments available for heart, cancer and orthopedic care. Our new patient tower opening in 2023 will create an improved healing environment that matches the advanced care now available.

HENRY FORD HEALTH

henryford.com/macomb

WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THE VILLAGE OF EAST HARBOR-HARBOR INN HOT NEW APARTMENT HOMES

Interest in these homes are heating up,
so we're celebrating with flame throwers and hula dancers!

THURSDAY JULY 21ST

1:30 pm RIBBON CUTTING

with performance, tours and refreshments to follow

Rsvp by July 19th

Grand **OPENING** & *Ribbon* **CUTTING**

Brand New Ranch Apartments



- 2 bedrooms, 2 bath
- Washer and Dryer
- One and two car attached garages
- Stainless steel appliances and kitchen island
- Walk in closet
- French doors to private patio
- Includes maintenance inside and out
- Activity, wellness, and Spiritual programming
- Emergency call system
- Full calendar of events
- Month to month leases



Ranch Home Apartments

Month to Month Rentals
Starting at

\$2,750
& UP

Brand New Mid-Rise Apartments



- 60: one and two bedroom apartments, with one or two bathroom (units vary)
- Smart technology such as: thermostat, outlet in the living room, front door lock, light switch
- Some units have balconies or patio*
- Carports available*
- Community room with full kitchen
- Open floor plan, fully equipped kitchen, pantry, 8' ceilings with coves, high - grade finishes, oversized windows, stackable washer/dryer.



Mid-Rise Apartments

Month to Month Rentals
Starting at

\$1,900
& UP

Visit our beautiful 44 acre life plan campus:

- Lifeplan campus which provides independent living, assisted living, memory care support, short term rehab, long term care. Future outpatient rehab center onsite
- Transportation is available
- Fitness, spiritual, and enrichment programming
- Housekeeping and home health care available at additional fees
- Multiple food venues available on campus

All buildings are designed and built with LEED for Homes Certification



The Village of East Harbor - Harbor Inn

33875 Kiely Drive
Chesterfield, MI 48047
Call: 586.725.6030
www.villageofeastharbor.com



**additional fees may apply*