

IN THE NEWS



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by **Shawn Johnson**

Mid Michigan Businesses Don't Have to Grow Alone No Cost Advice Available

Tony Fox's path to the Michigan Small Business Development Center at Mid Michigan College was "a little unexpected," he says. As a youth growing up in Beale City, he learned firsthand the construction business while working in his father's business. His formal education from CMU earned him a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Entrepreneurship and a Master of Science in Administration. He became the owner and operator of a local residential construction company. That's where the "unexpected" came in: The consequences of lower back issues affected his ability to operate his construction business. What came next for Fox? Michigan SBDC.

"When I got hired in college, I figured I'd be here for about two to three years before I moved on," Fox said. "After 17 years I am still here and enjoy tackling new projects and challenges every day."

Fox joined the Michigan SBDC at Mid Michigan College in January 2006 as Regional Director. For nearly 20 years, the Mount Pleasant resident has shared her entrepreneurial background by assisting businesses throughout the region with mentorship, training and resources. Learn more about Fox and the SBDC in this Q&A.

Epicenter: For someone unfamiliar with SBDC, how would you describe the no-cost consulting services they provide to small businesses in Michigan, especially considering the Central Michigan area of which you are the director?

fox: Our consulting, training and resources help established and emerging businesses that seek to grow by reducing uncertainty and increasing access to relevant information and insights. More specifically, we help clients who are working on everything from buying or selling a business to business concepts, accessing capital, increasing sales and improving cash flow.

SBDC services are available at no charge to area businesses due to support from the US Small Business Administration, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Mid Michigan College.

Epicenter: You have been an expert in helping so many people with your expertise over the years. What is most gratifying about your job?

fox: It's exciting to help people who are creating opportunities not only for themselves, but for their employees and the entire community.

Epicenter: What is your favorite success story from an Isabella County-based business that you have been able to help?

fox: This year the Mid Michigan SBDC is proud to share that Woodshop Social will be recognized as our Regional Best Small Business at the Michigan Celebrates Small Business Awards Gala on May 3rd in Lansing. In the past, some additional Isabella businesses recognized by the SBDC have included: MTW Industries; Dog Central; Prism Analytical Technologies; red repair; Rose's Diner; Summit Smokehouse; Mountain Town Brewing Company; Mr. Tools; and Sleepy Dog Books.

Subcenter: Outside of the Michigan SBDC, you are also very involved in the Mount Pleasant community and surrounding central Michigan areas. Can you tell us what you are involved in?

fox: There are a lot of great people in our area working on important initiatives. Over the years I have been involved in many efforts. I think it's best for me to focus on only a few at a time to make sure I can really contribute. Currently, my volunteer efforts are focused on the Craft Beer Festival of Mount Pleasant JC, Mount Pleasant Little League, and Junior Achievement of Mid Michigan.

Epicenter: What's next for you and your efforts with the SBDC and/or the local community? We would love to hear what you are looking forward to being a part of in the future.

fox: We are seeing an increase in the number of small business owners looking to make some form of retirement transition. In a sense this presents an economic vulnerability, but it also creates tremendous opportunities for the people who own and operate the business. Often these businesses have a proven track record and when combined with fresh attitude and energy not only do they keep those jobs locally, but can often result in new growth and expansion.

I'm also excited about the Michigan SBDC's new Uplift initiative. The effort aims to ensure equal access for entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout Michigan. Many new customers found our SBDC services during the pandemic, and many of them have continued to find ongoing value since, but there are still entrepreneurs and business owners looking to grow who are unaware that what is available to them. Our tendency has been to serve the next customer who may, leaving little time to raise awareness of our program.

Epicenter: What else would you like the community to know about the Michigan SBDC at Mid Michigan College?

fox: We have a tremendous ecosystem of partners and service providers in Isabella County that work really well with the common goal of helping businesses succeed.

If you have a business idea of your own, or if you are running a business and would like to improve or develop some capability we would be happy to discuss how/if our assistance is suitable for your specific situation. Can If we are not the best fit, we can usually help you identify someone who can help.

To schedule with an SBDC advisor, please register here <http://bit.ly/SBDCrhc>, General inquiries may be directed to sbdc@midmich.edu or by phone at 989-317-4623. General information can be obtained at www.MichiganSBDC.org,

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