

# A helping hand for small businesses in the central U.P.

ROSEMARY PARKER | WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2024

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The central U.P. will soon be home to a new regional entrepreneurial hub, thanks to a \$3.4 million grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

The aim of the Small Business Support Hubs program is to provide comprehensive resources and support to small businesses. The central U.P. hub is one of 27 that are being designated across the state. The program is funded by a one-time appropriation using American Rescue Plan Act dollars to create and operate programs to support small businesses disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

"The Upper Peninsula is a great place to live, raise a family, and work," state Sen. Ed McBroom (R-Waucedah Township), said in a press release announcing the award. "These funds will help to make sure opportunities to work remain available. Our small businesses remain the foundation of our economy, and the MEDC support shows a commitment to fostering those opportunities. Ensuring future generations have the chance to remain here is great for the U.P. and the state of Michigan."

**What's happening:** A Small Business Support Hub will be created in the central U.P. The [Lake Superior Community Partnership](#) and several partners will share in the funding to create the Central Upper Peninsula Small Business Support Hub, boosting support for small businesses and entrepreneurship within Marquette County and six additional counties – Alger, Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Menominee, and Schoolcraft.

The hub will expand existing support for small businesses and entrepreneurship within those counties by placing additional staff on the ground to meet businesses in their own communities.

**What kind of help will the businesses get:** The new hub will offer one-on-one support to small businesses. Support may include access to technical assistance, networking, and education, and supporting the creation of the NMU Main Street Academy, a program which will connect teams of students to small businesses to help solve identified issues. "We are still waiting for a grant agreement from MEDC, so the hub is not yet up and running," says Christopher Germain, CEO of the Lake Superior Community Partnership. "Efforts are busy behind the scenes preparing for launch."

**Where will it be:** The new support hub will be housed at Lake Superior Community Partnership in Marquette. Its advisory council includes Accelerate UP, Innovate Marquette SmartZone, Northern Michigan University, Small Business Development Center Upper Peninsula, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, and Sault Tribe Inc. Central Upper Peninsula Small Business Support Hub (SBSH).

**What businesses qualify for help:** Organizers are awaiting details about how grants to businesses will be awarded but Germain says businesses will become eligible for them via one-on-one consultations with the hub. Funds from the grants can be used only for implementing actions recommended by the hub. The state defines a small business as any business with under 500 employees; "we will use the same definition," Germain says.

State law requires 20 percent of the businesses served by the Small Business Support Hub program be minority owned.

**The back story:** For more than 25 years, the Lake Superior Community Partnership has provided support to its business community in Marquette County, where 95 percent of businesses are classified as small businesses. The funding for the new hub program will ensure the organization can continue to support small businesses in the U.P. – both established operations and newcomers.

"The Lake Superior Community Partnership focuses on retaining and growing existing businesses," Germain says, "and supporting them is our primary goal."

"Business startup support will also be available and is a big part of why we have such a diverse coalition of strategic partners," he adds. "But what drew the LSCP to this grant and setting up the hub is the chance to provide more coordinated support to the entire small business community, existing and new."

**What's next:** Germain says it may be March before details about the grants and programs are available.

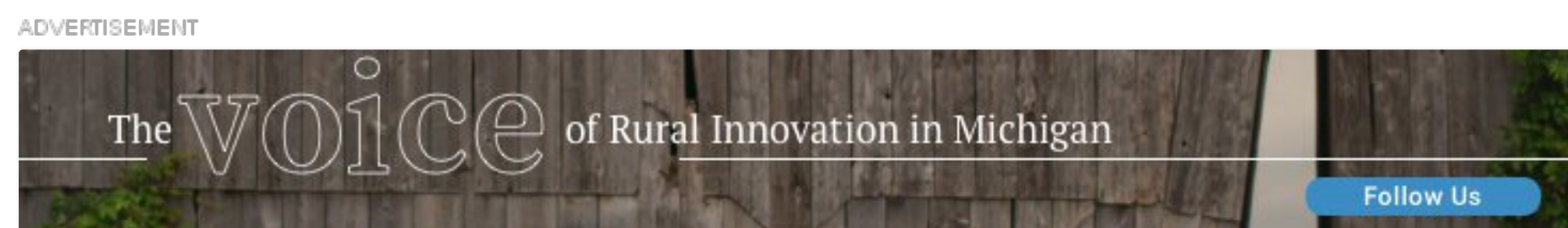
**What people are saying:** "We're honored to be awarded funds to expand those efforts by adding boots-on-the-ground support to reach small businesses in the entire central Upper Peninsula region, elevating our impact through more customized support and small business grants," Germain says. "With a wide range of partners, including Innovate Marquette, Accelerate UP, Northern Michigan University, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Sault Tribe Inc., and SDBC Upper Peninsula, the next three years will further cement the region as a great place to start and grow a small business."

*Rosemary Parker has worked as a writer and editor for more than 40 years. She is a regular contributor to Rural Innovation Exchange, UPword and other Issue Media Group publications.*

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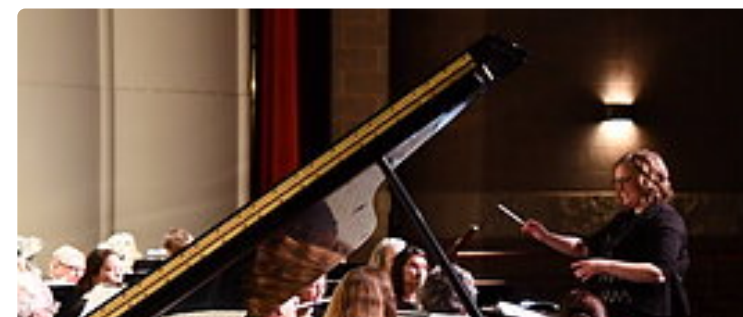
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