



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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Spotlight: Michigan's Small Business Support Empowers Entrepreneurs

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May is Small Business Month, but the Michigan Economic Development Corporation celebrates the contributions of small businesses all year long.



While the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) recognizes and supports Michigan's small businesses year-round, **Small Business Month** – celebrated annually during the month of May – is an opportunity to put a bigger spotlight on these important fixtures in our state.

As the connective thread of our communities, small businesses are also critical to Michigan's growing economy. In fact, the state is home to over 900,000 small businesses, with 1.9 million small business employees, and more than 99% of Michigan businesses are defined as small businesses with fewer than 500 employees.

The MEDC recognizes the role small businesses play in the success of our state and works each day to provide them with the [small business support and resources](#) they need to Make It in Michigan. In FY2023, the MEDC and its support partners assisted small businesses across Michigan more than 10,500 times, helping to facilitate \$1.9 billion in revenue for small businesses, and supporting the creation of over 400 new small businesses in the state.

In honor of Small Business Month, we invite you to read – and listen to – stories of small business success from across Michigan.

Read How Small Business Support Creates Success Stories

The MEDC's library of [Michigan Business Success Stories](#) highlights the diversity of small businesses across the state and range of small business support available from the [MEDC's Small Business team](#) and its partners.

Leaning into Industry 4.0

Founded by two mechanical engineers out of Michigan Tech, Hancock, Michigan-based [Chicken Tramper Ultralight Gear](#) has emerged as a pioneering force in the outdoor gear manufacturing industry with a mission to revolutionize outdoor gear by combining lightweight design with unparalleled durability.



As part of the [MEDC's Industry 4.0 Technology Implementation Grant program](#), Chicken Tramper Ultralight Gear was awarded \$10,000 to bring its business to the Industry 4.0 level; the company used the funding to help purchase two digital automated sewing machines, increasing its production.

Chicken Tramper Ultralight Gear has also been named a 2024 SmartZone Best Small Business by [Michigan Celebrates Small Business](#), the largest small business awards program in the state of Michigan.

“My biggest advice is to reach out to others for help, namely the MEDC and Industry 4.0,” said co-founder Nathan Ackerman. “There are a ton of resources available to small businesses in Michigan, and many of them are free. As two engineers with no real business background, we have learned so many things just from asking the right people. The more you work with the MEDC, the more people you get to know, and the more you learn.”

[Read the full story](#)

Utilizing International Trade Resources

From making percussion instruments in a garage to exporting its products across the globe, [Black Swamp Percussion](#) is reaching musicians worldwide thanks to the [MEDC's International Trade services](#).

Owner Eric Sooy manufactures high-end instruments out of Black Swamp Percussion's facility in Zeeland, Michigan. Through assistance from the Michigan Small Business Development Center and the MEDC, exports account for over a third of the business's sales.

“This program has been tremendously helpful for us, and we are now represented by dealers on 6/7 continents – not much going on in Antarctica at the moment,” said Sooy. “I could not have predicted 28 years ago that my instruments would have such a far-reaching impact on musicians around the world, and the MEDC has been instrumental in making that happen. I have often boasted about this program to business colleagues in other states, and they are insanely jealous. Michigan truly has a treasure in the MEDC and their focus on the international success of Michigan businesses.”

[Read the full story](#)

Making Business Connections

As a distillery in Beer City, [Long Road Distillers](#) stands out for its spirits and commitment to using local, Michigan-made ingredients.

When Long Road Distillers wanted to optimize the efficiency and quality of its ingredients supply chain for its distilling operations, its co-founders participated in the [Michigan Distilling Grain Summit](#), an event co-hosted by the MEDC, [Michigan Craft Beverage Council](#) and the [Michigan State University Extension](#). The event helped to connect Michigan craft distillers with Michigan farmers for supply chain sourcing opportunities.



At the event, Long Road Distillers was able to secure a new supply chain relationship, connecting with Todd Wright of Knappen Milling and leading to bulk sourcing of grain which improved cost, product quality and delivery.

“This Michigan Craft Beverage Council- and MEDC-supported event was a significant launching point to further expand opportunities for distillers and agricultural producers to connect, collaborate and learn where new markets and opportunities exist for our industries to work together,” said co-founder Jon O’Connor.

[Read the full story](#)

Listen to Stories of Small Business Success

Michigan sits at the crossroads of grit and passion, the perfect location for small businesses to pave their own way. Join [The Michigan Opportunity](#), with host Ed Clemente, to learn how Michiganders’ small businesses that thrive in the supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem return the favor by helping the state stand out in global industries, develop next-gen tech and build stronger communities.



Engaging Audiences Worldwide

Josh Freeney is a founding partner at YETi CGI, a company that began as an afterschool program to help engage students. The company still focuses on making content more accessible through technology, and their boundary-pushing work in interactivity is helping Michigan's reputation in tech.

"We kind of made a name for ourselves in this new immersive content field and started getting calls from all over the world," said Freeney. "And what we found out is right here in West Michigan, we really had some of the leaders in this field and had some talent that was highly sought after from a global standpoint."

[Listen to the episode](#)

Powering Community Engagement

Dunamis Clean Energy Partners founder and CEO Natalie King first entered the clean energy space after studying communities disproportionately impacted by carbon emissions and illegal dumping. This work inspired a career in renewable energy that has never lost focus on serving those affected communities.

"We make sure that we're always doing community engagement," said King. "It's even an effort to ensure that we have the job creation directly from the community, directly from low-income communities that have historic unemployment rates. We're making sure that in every element of our company that we're giving back to the community."

[Listen to the episode](#)

Reimagining Brownfield Redevelopment

From ground rods that end radioactivity to artificial tree roots that stabilize soil, hear Exlterra CEO Frank Muller describe the importance of his company's environmental tech in remediating brownfield sites worldwide. Muller also explains why Michigan's manufacturing capabilities make it the best base for a business changing the world.

“Our products and our machines to install our technology in the ground are manufactured here in Michigan in Hazel Park,” said Muller. “We are in an ecosystem here where manufacturing is the DNA of the area ... it's fascinating and it's absolutely exciting.”

[Listen to the episode](#)

We encourage you to celebrate the small businesses in your community during Small Business Month and throughout the year. If you're a small business owner or aspire to get started, learn more about the [Small Business Assistance and Resources](#) available from the MEDC.

Contact Us

To contact a business development specialist, [click here](#) or call 1.888.522.0103.