



Sault Tribe Thrive unveils new business center, grant programs serving the U.P.

ROSEMARY PARKER | WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2024



SAULT TRIBE
thrive

Small business proponents from across the U.P. were on hand this month to help Sault Tribe Thrive, a minority business development agency, kick off a new grant program at the grand opening of its new business center.

The agency provides business support to Sault Tribe citizen-owned businesses and business owners throughout seven counties in the Upper Peninsula. The Sault Tribe Business center is open to the general public and the office space is free to use for Sault Tribe Thrive members.

“The new business center is a brand-new space for us,” says Paul Guindon, director of business development for Sault Tribe Thrive. “We opened it across the hall from our current business offices to expand access.”

What’s happening: A ribbon cutting ceremony with the Sault Ste. Marie Area Chamber of Commerce celebrated the opening of the new Sault Tribe Business Center, 531 Ashmun St., Sault Ste. Marie.



Sault Tribe Thrive

A ribbon cutting opening Sault Tribe Thrive's new business center.

The new center was made possible by a grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, which partners on projects to ensure ongoing support for expanding economic success. Amenities and resources are available for those wanting to start a new business or expand an existing business. Those resources include access to more than \$400,000 in direct grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

The grants are designated for businesses in the Eastern U.P. and supplemented by additional funding opportunities in other entrepreneurial hubs across the region.

“The stage is set for small businesses to thrive,” Guindon says.

In partnership with the Chippewa County Economic Development Corporation, this initiative, spearheaded by Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, is set to catalyze local business.

The back story: As a commitment to economic diversification, the Sault Tribe EDC established the Sault Tribe Thrive program to manage its efforts in connecting with Sault Tribe member business owners. Sault Tribe Thrive has grown its business directory, connecting with more than 150 business owners. The program opened in

2021 and has been consistently providing services to citizen-owned businesses and business owners since that time.

The Small Business Support Hub Grant program is part of a larger effort in Michigan to distribute \$75 million of excess COVID funds to small businesses and non-tech companies. "In the Eastern end of the Upper Peninsula," Guindon says, "we are collaborating with the Chippewa County EDC and Headwaters North to facilitate the distribution of these funds. In the Central Upper Peninsula, we are partnering with the Lake Superior Community Partnership to connect prospective tribal businesses with these available funds."

The purpose of the funds is to provide training or coaching for local businesses as well as individual grants of up to \$20,000 for small businesses. The grants cover a variety of business needs, including equipment, inventory, software/hardware, specialized services, and certification and licensing fees.

Who should apply: The funds disbursed through the Small Business Hub grants are available to any small businesses with fewer than 500 employees that were disproportionately impacted by COVID. While the grants are not specific to Sault Tribe-owned businesses, there is a goal to allocate 20 percent of these funds to minority businesses. "Therefore, we are diligently working to ensure that our tribal members have the opportunity to apply," Guindon says. No funds have been awarded yet, but that will soon change as we are currently receiving applications.

About the grand opening: More than 55 people in attendance for the ribbon cuttings, and 35 people signed in for the grant portion of the program. Additionally, 8-10 Community Ambassadors joined the Chippewa County Chamber of Commerce for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Event speakers and partners supporting this initiative included Headwaters North, the Chippewa County Economic Development Corporation, and the Michigan Small Business Development Center. Several Tribal Board members were in attendance, along with the entire Sault Tribe Business Alliance Board.

"The synergy of the day perfectly embodied the mission of Sault Tribe Thrive," Guindon says. "Bringing together local small businesses, tribal leaders, and community representatives from across the region in a space designed to foster progress perfectly aligns with the vision of our new business center. We deeply appreciate our partners and their dedication to advancing economic success

throughout the region.”

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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