



NEWS / 2024 / 05 /

Commemorating 20 Years of Michigan Celebrates Small Business

Stefanie Pohl

Wednesday, May 22, 2024





MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

a supporting role in our lives – they're a main character.

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 Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) recognizes the role small businesses play in the success of our state and works each day to provide them with the support 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 the spirit of honoring small business owners and recognizing the important roles they play in the state, the MEDC is also a proud sponsor of [Michigan Celebrates Small Business](#).

Since its inception in 2004, Michigan Celebrates Small Business has championed small businesses and fostered the entrepreneurial spirit that can be found all across the state.

This year, Michigan Celebrates Small Business is commemorating its 20th anniversary, a milestone that marks two decades of recognizing and elevating the contributions of Michigan's small businesses. As we celebrate the 20th Annual Michigan Celebrates Small Business Awards Gala, this year's awardees reflect the diversity of industries, services, and passionate business owners located across Michigan's two peninsulas.

With a common goal of uplifting and encouraging small businesses – and sharing their powerful stories – we can make a significant impact on the lives of our fellow Michiganders and the places we call home.



Michigan Celebrates Small Business Success Stories

Elderly Instruments is being recognized as one of the 2024 Michigan 50 Companies to Watch awardees, but the family-owned music haven in Old Town Lansing has also captured national attention. In October 2023, Elderly Instruments was named America's Top Small Business by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, winning the designation over 15,000 other applicants. With the announcement, the Chamber said, "The music store embodies the innovation, resilience, and growth mindset of American entrepreneurship."

In operation since 1972, Elderly Instruments moved to Old Town Lansing in 1983, serving as a pioneering small business for a community that would become a thriving cultural and creative district of the capital city. In 2006, Old Town Lansing was named a Michigan Main Street community, a program committed to creating high-quality places and building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development.



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The guidance we received from SBDC wasn't just advice — it was a roadmap that enabled us to pinpoint and fortify key aspects of our business. They helped us weave our rich history with the latest tech, fine-tune how we operate, and sharpen our financial prowess. Their expertise was a guiding light through the maze of possibilities, making sure Elderly Instruments remained a cherished beacon for musicians everywhere while stepping confidently into tomorrow.”



Another small business looking to help others step confidently into the future is fellow 2024 Michigan 50 Companies to Watch awardee **[Apex Placement & Consulting](#)**, a staffing and placement agency based in Clawson. Founded by Jennifer Gavin in May 2021 and inspired by the changing work landscape brought on by the pandemic, Apex Placement & Consulting aims to provide flexible work opportunities and attract top talent for both the company and its clients.



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

“It was the first time I had to actually apply and interview for a job. It took about six months to acclimate but once I did, I knew I was never leaving the industry. In staffing, not only do you get to build an amazing career, but we also get to help people every day.”

Gavin utilized the MEDC’s business assistance services to help propel her company’s growth, and frequently refers relocation candidates to The Michigan Life website, part of the MEDC’s You Can in Michigan talent initiative.

From the office to the great outdoors – [Chicken Trampler Ultralight Gear](#) out of the Upper Peninsula is a pioneering force in the outdoor gear manufacturing industry and one of this year’s awardees for SmartZone Best Small Business.

Inspired by a 2018 hiking trip, Michigan Tech mechanical engineers Austin Gongos and Nathan Ackerman started Chicken Trampler Ultralight Gear with a mission to revolutionize outdoor gear by combining lightweight design with unparalleled durability.

The company offers products ranging from fully framed long-distance backpacks to a variety of accessories like smaller day packs, fanny packs, wallets, water bottle holders, and phone pockets. Their products cater to the diverse needs of outdoor enthusiasts, from seasoned hikers to weekend warriors.



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



Through working with the MEDC, Chicken Trampler Ultralight Gear was able to secure many grants and equipment loans, as well as connect with industry veterans and the Continuous Involvement Group, which helped them streamline their production operations and make their processes run smoother and more efficiently.

“There are a ton of resources available to small businesses in Michigan, and many of them are free,” said cofounder Ackerman. “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.”

Cerberus Security, a leading event-based security company founded by Army veteran Stephen Parent, is being celebrated as the 2024 Veteran-Owned Small Business of the Year. In 2017, Parent received multiple inquiries at his company, West Michigan K9, one of the leading canine providers in the state, about the potential of leasing dogs for security services. Parent recognized the limitations of these arrangements, so he partnered with Tony Laskowicz to establish Cerberus Security and close this gap in the security space.

As the company looked to grow and hire the right people, they turned to the SBDC to guide them with a leadership team and compensation planning. Parent calls the SBDC



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

company's success and has given Parent and his team the confidence in progressing forward when making difficult business decisions and facing challenges head-on. For aspiring entrepreneurs embarking on their own ventures, Parent says, "Utilize your resources wisely and recognize the value of seeking assistance. Entrepreneurial success is enabled by collaboration and resilience." The SBDC continues to invest in his team's success, extending the spirit of entrepreneurship all throughout.

Milestones are an opportunity to look back on how things have grown and changed, and for one small business, the 20th anniversary of Michigan Celebrates Small Business is a full-circle moment. [Black Star Farms](#), a winery founded in Suttons Bay, was recognized as one of the Michigan 50 Companies to Watch during the awards gala's inaugural year in 2005. Over the last two decades, Black Star Farms' flagship location in Suttons Bay has grown to include a vineyard, winery production facility, tasting room, boutique Inn, bistro, equestrian facility, and recreation trails; the winery also has a tasting room on Old Mission Peninsula in Traverse City.

Managing owner Sherri Campbell Fenton says the inaugural Michigan Celebrates Small Business awards gala provided the winery with statewide exposure and networking opportunities in its early years.

"We were relatively new onto the winery scene ourselves – five years old. It gave us an opportunity to network with fellow businesses and begin to grow our event reach. It also gave us recognition in the northern wine scene that was beginning to be noticed downstate. Our early growth was in part attributed to this award and recognition."



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



The 2024 MCSB Awards Gala honorees represent a range of passionate people in Michigan and the opportunities available to small business owners. With 20 years of dedication to uplifting small businesses across the state, Michigan Celebrates Small Business shows no signs of slowing down as it looks to the next 20 years and beyond.

At the MEDC, we understand the role we play within the state of Michigan in the support and success of small businesses, creating significant and powerful economic opportunities. As a member of Team Michigan, we will continue to ensure that our state is a place where Michiganders can build a life, a business, and a future.

Learn more about the [MEDC's small business assistance and resources](#).

Contact Us

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



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
