

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK LUNCHEON: State *of the* Community



October 3, 2023
Courtyard by Marriott at CMU

PRESENTED BY



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Panelists

Panel 1

Allison Arnold, Executive Director of Rural Health Equity Institute, Central Michigan University
Tim Hood, President, Mid Michigan College
Doug Ouellette, Chief Community Banking Officer, Mercantile Bank
Erin Strang, President & CEO, Central Michigan University Research Corporation (CMURC)

Panel 2

Aaron Desentz, City Manager, City of Mt. Pleasant
Nicole Frost, County Administrator, Isabella County
Brian Smith, Economic Development Director, Migizi Economic Development Company
Mark Stuhldreher, Township Manager, Charter Township of Union

Additional Booklet Contributors

Bob Davies, President, Central Michigan University
James McBryde, President & CEO, Middle Michigan Development Corporation
Alysha Pasquali, CEO/COO, Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation
Chris Rowley, Executive Director, Mt. Pleasant Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
Annie Sanders, President & CEO, United Way of Gratiot & Isabella Counties

Emcee

Judy Wagley, Midday Host and Reporter, WCMU Public Media



State *of the* Community 2023

AGENDA

11:00 AM

Buffett Lunch

11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Welcome

Panel 1:

Allison Arnold, Tim Hood, Doug Ouellete, and Erin Strang

Panel 2:

Aaron Desentz, Nicole Frost, Brian Smith, and Mark Stuhldreher

Questions and Answers

Closing Remarks



Alison Arnold, Executive Director Rural Health Equity Institute Central Michigan University



Alison Arnold serves as Executive Director for the Rural Health Equity Institute at Central Michigan University. By centering on unique aspects of rural health, the Institute allies closely with communities and pursues opportunities that improve access to services, expand telehealth capacity, advance data solutions and tools and deliver education and training that respond to local needs.

The overall aim for the Rural Health Equity Institute is to team up with community actions and create solutions that improve the health and wellbeing of rural residents. The Institute aligns an existing portfolio of collaborative projects within the College of Medicine and across Central Michigan University; applying a rural lens to understand and measure rural population health disparities and the positive health impacts of programs, community solutions, and prevention activities. Current projects include a Telehealth Suicide Prevention Toolkit as part of an MDHHS CDC-funded initiatives for Prevention of Suicide in Michigan Men; and several Telehealth initiatives funded through HRSA which are focused on expanding broadband capacity and equipping rural providers to support Telemental health.



The Institute has forged strong collaborations focused on prevention of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and capacity-building for trauma-informed communities of practice. Dr. Arnold serves on a leadership team for the Michigan Public Health Institute's Prevention of ACEs Data to Action project, a 3-year CDC-funded initiative which has developed a Michigan ACE Data Dashboard (miacedata.org) in a collaboration involving MDE, MDHHS, Michigan League for Public Policy and others. Dr. Arnold is a Master Trainer for the Michigan ACEs Initiative, Building Self-Healing Communities, providing training for teachers, allied health and medical professions, community health workers, parents, and others who support children and individuals experiencing trauma and adversity in their lives. Alongside her professional career, Alison volunteers as a board member of Utopia Foundation, where helps build cross-cultural partnership linkages in Africa, South/Central America, and other regions with a focus on literacy; child/youth development; parenting and teacher training; community development and sustainable life skills; physical/mental health; and girl child empowerment.

Aaron Desentz, City Manager City of Mt. Pleasant



Aaron Desentz has been serving as the City Manager in Mount Pleasant for two years. Before that, he served as a city manager in various other communities for the last decade. During that time in his career, Aaron has also served as a firefighter, a certified zoning administrator, and an assessor. Aaron serves on the Isabella County Restoration House Committee, CVB Board, and Chamber Board of Directors. Aaron graduated from Eastern Michigan University with a Master's in Public Administration in 2013.



Nicole Frost, County Administrator Isabella County



Nicole F. Frost became the Isabella County Administrator/Controller on January 1st of 2022, after serving as Deputy Administrator/Controller for over four years. Nicole's work in County government has spanned over 25 years. By formal education, she is an MSU Forester, and many of her County years were spent in Parks and Recreation before transitioning to Public Administration. Nicole is proud to assert there is over 100 years of public service in her immediate family, most of which took place in Isabella County.



Tim Hood, President Mid Michigan College



Tim previously served as the President of Highland Community College in Freeport, Illinois. He came to Highland as Vice President of Academics and Chief Academic Officer (CAO) in 2011, and was promoted to Executive Vice President in 2014 before becoming President in 2015. Prior to serving at Highland, Tim was the Vice President of Instruction/CAO at Kaskaskia College in Centralia, Illinois after being promoted from Dean of Corporate Training and Community Education. As CAO, he was elected to serve as President of the Illinois Community College Chief Academic Officers (ICCCAO) organization, representing all 48 community colleges in the state. After leading a corporate group of automotive companies for six years, Tim's career in higher education began as a faculty member and workforce development trainer for nine years at Madisonville Community College in Kentucky. He then accepted a faculty position at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC) for four years before moving into administration at Kaskaskia College.



President Hood holds a Bachelor of Science degree in communication with a public relations specialization from SIUC, and a Master of Science in organizational communication, also from SIUC. In Illinois, he served on the Workforce Connection Board, the Northwest Illinois Economic Development Board, and the Region 1 Planning Council. He was also a member of the Executive Committee for the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents (ICCCP). He now serves on the Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance (GLBRA) Board, the Central Michigan Manufacturers Association (CMMA), and on the Executive Committee for the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) Board.

Doug Ouellette, Chief Community Banking Officer Mercantile Bank



Mercantile Bank®

Doug Ouellette is a highly accomplished and dedicated banking professional, currently serving as the Chief Community Banking Officer at Mercantile Bank of Michigan. With an impressive career spanning 35 years within Mercantile Bank and Firstbank Corporation, Doug has consistently demonstrated his commitment to the banking industry and his community.

Beyond his contributions to Mercantile Bank, Doug Ouellette is the Chairperson for the McLaren Central Michigan Board of Trustees. Doug also serves as the Independent Community Bankers of America (ICBA) State Director where he championed the interests of Michigan's community banks and worked tirelessly to promote their growth and success.



Panel 2 Speaker

Brian Smith, Economic Development Director Migizi Economic Development Company



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Brian Smith achieved a Masters of Public Administration degree from Central Michigan University with an emphasis on Public Management. Along with this degree, Brian has over 16 years of casino experience with 10 of those years in upper management. Brian also has over 10 years managing local governments at the County and Township level. Following Brian's public service career, he returned to the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe as the Economic Development Director for the past 7 and ½ years.

Panel 1 Speaker

Erin Strang, President & CEO Central Michigan University Research Corporation (CMURC)



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Erin Strang is President + CEO of Central Michigan University Research Corporation. CMURC is a professional and diverse coworking space with accelerator programs focused on product and strategic development for entrepreneurs to positively impact the economy in the Great Lakes Bay Region. It brings together local, regional and statewide partners to accelerate the success of entrepreneurs, professionals, and corporations growing businesses and jobs by leveraging the resources of Central Michigan University, the Mount Pleasant SmartZone District and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

Strang's tenure with CMURC began over ten years ago in 2009. Under her leadership, CMURC has been recognized through the State of Michigan as one of the top performing business accelerators. In the past five years, CMURC demonstrated success by helping with the creation 508 new companies, nearly 2,000 new jobs and nearly 50 million dollars in investments. In addition, CMURC provided connections between companies for community partnerships, many of which led to significant results that led to a dramatic impact.

Erin Strang has worked diligently in her position as President + CEO of CMURC to promote regionalism across the Great Lakes Bay. Under her leadership, the organization has expanded from one location on the south end of CMU's campus to four coworking facilities located across the region in Bay City, Midland, Mount Pleasant and Saginaw.

Mark Stuhldreher, Township Manager Charter Township of Union



Mark Stuhldreher has worked for both rural and urban local governments (city, county, township) for over 30 years in Ohio and Michigan. Positions held have included Chief Investment Officer, Treasurer, Chief Financial Officer, and City and Township Manager. Mark is an experienced and goal-oriented public sector executive with proven expertise in driving efficiency and productivity through the evaluation of municipal operations with a particular focus on financial management systems and implementation of process improvements. Mark has accomplished this by developing highly skilled management teams to support and achieve community goals. Of particular note is negotiating and then executing a five (5) year Consent Agreement between the City of Inkster, MI and the Michigan Department of Treasury that avoided the imposition of an Emergency Manager in Inkster in 2011. The conditions of the Consent Agreement were met in 3 years at which time the City of Inkster was released from State oversight. Mark graduated from Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs with a B. S. in Public Affairs that includes majoring in Public Finance along with a minor in Economics.



Additional Contributors

Liz Conway, President & CEO

Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce



What is the state of your industry/organization in our community?

The state of the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce is strong. Further, we are actively working toward continuous improvement and impact. Since our inception well over a century ago, the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce has been committed to helping businesses prosper. As times change, the needs of our members vary, and the Chamber works to position itself to best provide programs and services to meet member needs.

We currently have 445 members, a slight increase from the same time last year. Our focus, however, has been on member engagement as it is crucial in providing value to our membership. The Chamber of Commerce team has identified metrics to help us measure a business's engagement – email open rate, email click-through rate, member portal usage, event attendance, sponsorship, volunteers, referrals, and so on. Not all our members want the same thing from our organization (community vs. enterprise and invested vs. involved), and we value that!

What are some of your greatest accomplishments? What are the barriers and how are you working to overcome them?

Early in 2023, the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors approved our new vision, mission statement, and strategic initiatives. Our VISION is to be the center of a diverse, vibrant, and economically prosperous business climate. Our MISSION is to foster economic vitality by supporting and strengthening our business community.

Our Strategic Initiatives are to focus on:

- MEMBER ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT- A growing and thriving membership engaged in supporting business success;
- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & ADVANCEMENT- A strong voice for business in the community;
- INFRASTRUCTURE- Capacity to manage current and future needs.

The team at the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce is working every day toward our strategic initiatives by seeking ways to promote and bolster membership benefits, creating new and engaging programs and refreshing existing programs, updating our marketing and communications, learning about our member's needs, enhancing our partnerships with organizations such as the Mt. Pleasant Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Middle Michigan Development, Great Lakes Bay Michigan Works, Mid Michigan College, and Central Michigan University. This summer, our Chamber was recognized as Middle Michigan Development Corporation's Collaborative Partner for 2023!

To help develop a more diversified funding stream and make positive change in our community, the Chamber is adding the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation and working toward accreditation with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Accreditation defines excellence in the chamber industry.

What does the future of your industry/organization look like?

As the Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce's vision is to be the center of a diverse, vibrant, and economically prosperous business climate, our future depends on our passion to carry it out. As we strive toward this ideal, the Chamber of Commerce will need to take a hard look at programs and initiatives to present our members with a strong value proposition and positive change. We must build varied funding streams, collaborate, and let our passion for the community drive us into the future.



What is the state of your industry/organization in our community?

How have you met those challenges and tackled them already? In what ways will you adapt and change to be stronger in the future? We've gotten much better at monitoring weather to prepare and stage crews in locations that allow for a quicker response to power outages We continue to strive toward being the premier place of employment in order to attract talent and have worked toward a good balance of in-office and remote work opportunities We have sought additional suppliers and have engaged in significant waste reduction efforts to help cut costs. In addition, we offer numerous customer programs to assist with their needs. In addition to seeking new suppliers, we have had to substitute materials that work in many cases when original supplies are unavailable, have become better at prioritizing projects, and have been refurbishing materials for use when new products are unavailable. We're eliminating coal generation and will save customers \$650million dollars in the next several years through our renewable energy investments. Significant investments to improve the quality of our grid will make the system smarter and much more reliable. Provide some key takeaways for event participants about what they should be more aware of and/or how they can be engaged in solutions that strengthen our community. Specifically, how can local individuals support your organization's sector in becoming more resilient and effective in the future? Be part of a solution in your community Give back to people and your community - Volunteer and support organizations like United Way etc. Support local buying efforts Reach out to Consumers Energy early in your construction process Adopt energy-savings programs Let Consumers Energy help you in difficult times Support our efforts to trim trees and maintain right-of-ways Consider opportunities to engage in solar energy efforts

What are some of your greatest accomplishments? What are the barriers and how are you working to overcome them?

I am proud that CMU has been successful in its efforts to reset a more than decade-long decline in first-year enrollment for two years in a row. This fall, we saw a 23% year-over-year increase in the number of students applying to CMU. This increase came in spite of a statewide decline in the number of traditional first-year college students, due – in part – to declining birth rates in Michigan that have resulted in fewer K-12 graduates. The shrinking pool of prospective students, along with rising costs due to inflation, presents an incredible challenge to CMU and all regional public universities in the Midwest. To meet the challenge, we are not lowering our academic standards. Instead, we are focused on personalized outreach, recruitment and marketing that emphasizes the things that make CMU great, like the success our students have getting hired after graduation.

What does the future of your industry/organization look like?

There is a sense of optimism at CMU as we complete a new strategic plan that will define and guide what success looks like for our university in the next five years. The plan was developed with input from groups representing all CMU stakeholders, including the greater Mt. Pleasant community. The plan details goals for student success, enhancing our culture and ensuring institutional sustainability, as well as increased community engagement. I am excited to unite our community in the pursuit of these transformative goals that will steer CMU in a positive direction for the future.

James McBryde, President & CEO Middle Michigan Development Corporation



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What is the state of your industry/organization in our community?

Excellent.

What are some of your greatest accomplishments? What are the barriers and how are you working to overcome them?

Managing a large number of state and federal grants on behalf of the counties we serve and working closely with our companies and municipalities to ensure economic growth in our area.

What does the future of your industry/organization look like?

Very good as continue to work closely with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and other partners on behalf of the counties we serve.



Alysha Pasquali, CEO/COO Mt. Pleasant Area Community Foundation

Mt. Pleasant Area
community foundationSM
For **good.** For **ever.**SM



What is the state of your industry/organization in our community?

The Foundation is thriving, and we continue to fulfill our mission to enhance the quality of life for all citizens of Isabella County, now and for generations to come, by attracting and holding permanent endowed funds from a wide range of donors, addressing needs through grant-making, and providing leadership on key community issues. We are largely able to do what we do because we have the support of the Mt. Pleasant community. We are thankful for every donor and volunteer who helps us achieve our goals year after year.

What are some of your greatest accomplishments? What are the barriers and how are you working to overcome them?

I believe one of the greatest accomplishments at the Community Foundation is the growth of our assets over the past 30+ years. Our goal is to be good stewards of funds when they are given to us and to invest and grow the funds so we can in turn give back to our community through various grant-making initiatives. Currently, our assets sit at approximately \$28 million. Not necessarily a barrier, but a challenge we often face is trying to figure out exactly what our small staff of four can handle. Meaning, what is our capacity? There are a ton of worthwhile causes and efforts in Isabella County. We'd love to be involved in them all, but the reality is we can't. One barrier, I think most of Mt. Pleasant faces is the lack of qualified applicants when hiring new employees. This has been true for us.

What does the future of your industry/organization look like?

My goal and hope for the Community Foundation is that we will continue to attract and grow permanently endowed funds and that we will be able to give back to our community for decades to come.

Chris Rowley, Executive Director Mt. Pleasant Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



What is the state of your industry/organization in our community?

Tourism has been up in Isabella County and the good news is that people still value travel, want to travel, and make memories while traveling. Being centrally located in Michigan's lower peninsula, we welcome visitors to help our community thrive and grow. The hospitality and tourism industry, like many industries, continues to struggle with workforce shortages and high costs. Hospitality workers are on the front lines and getting people to do the work is improving, but still a challenge. The Mt. Pleasant Area CVB helps promote Isabella County for leisure, golf, meetings, sports travel and also works on community relations and advocacy. The CVB's role in the Mt. Pleasant area includes having a seat at the table to move our community forward. We want to be a strong community partner, helping raise community pride, investing in the community, promoting the community, and drawing visitors to the area. The tourism estimated economic impact in Isabella County as of 2021 was \$263,700,000 and brought in \$29,500,000 in state and local tax revenue. If you build a place where people want to live, you'll build a place where people want to work. If you build a place where people want to visit, you'll build a place where people want to live. If you build a place where people want to live, you'll build a place where people need to work. If you build a place where people want to work, you build a place where business wants to be. And, if you build a place where business wants to be, we'll be back to building a place where people want to visit. It all starts with a visit.

What are some of your greatest accomplishments? What are the barriers and how are you working to overcome them?

The CVB increased resources in 2019 allowing us to sell, market, and invest in our community. The CVB has launched and promoted a community brand, rebranded itself, created a strategic plan for Isabella County's future growth, and developed a destination development scorecard to improve tourism. We have built strategic partnerships with CMU and the Soaring Eagle Casino allowing us to collaborate and showcase all our community has to offer. At the CVB, we continue to work on enhancing community pride, facilitating downtown revitalization, integrating CMU support, increasing positive community reporting, and investing in economic and destination development. We created a task force of community leaders to address these topics, focusing on Downtown to start. We hope to see Town Center become civic space and property standards get enforced soon.

What does the future of your industry/organization look like?

It's always changing. The CVB is the leading influence in our community for tourism and promoting the destination. I think AI will play a greater role in what we all do. From helping us plan a trip, deciding where to eat or outlining our marketing, it will be used in our daily lives.

Annie Sanders, President & CEO

United Way of Gratiot and Isabella Counties



What is the state of your industry/organization in our community?

United Way of Gratiot & Isabella Counties (UWGIC) is currently in a growth state. In the 22-23 fiscal year we saw growth both financially through our annual campaign and to the size of our team, with two roles being expanded or added. The past two years, our annual campaign has exceeded our set goal, with our most recent campaign raising over \$1,365,000 and engaging 3,301 donors across Gratiot & Isabella counties, our largest campaign in history. Because of this, we invested more than ever back into our communities. As an industry, the Center for Effective Philanthropy shared three top findings in their 2023 State of Nonprofits report, which summarized survey responses from 284 nonprofit leaders across the United States. These findings are summarized below, and the full report can be found at CEP.org. "FINDING 1 Many nonprofit leaders report an increase in trust from funders and are experiencing changed practices, such as streamlined applications and reporting, removal of restrictions, and receipt of multiyear funding from foundations. In addition, most nonprofits report an increase in dollar amounts given by at least some individual donors. FINDING 2 Issues related to staff—including burnout, filling staff positions, and retaining staff—are the top challenge facing nonprofit leaders. *UWGIC adds that this includes volunteer staffing for many of our partner organizations, especially operating post-Covid. FINDING 3 Despite a challenging economic context characterized by high inflation, most nonprofits experienced either a balanced budget or surplus in the most recently completed fiscal year, and the majority anticipate at least breaking even or having a surplus this fiscal year."

What are some of your greatest accomplishments? What are the barriers and how are you working to overcome them?

Two recent accomplishments to highlight are the development of UWGIC's ALICE Support Fund and a central volunteer platform for non-profit agencies across Gratiot and Isabella counties. ALICE, an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, is a way of defining and understanding the struggles of households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to afford a bare-bones household budget. For far too many families in Gratiot & Isabella Counties, the cost of living outpaces what they earn. These households struggle to manage even their most basic needs – housing, food, transportation, childcare, health care, and necessary technology. UWGIC established an ALICE Support Fund to provide one-time assistance, in areas such as housing and utilities, to working individuals and families facing hardship to help these households avoid negative long-term consequences. Barriers include education on the resource gap and need for support for households falling in the ALICE threshold. In 2022, UWGIC contracted with Golden, a volunteer management software that our organization is providing as a free resource to all non-profit and community partners in Gratiot and Isabella Counties. This investment will allow partner agencies to better share volunteer opportunities and connect them with the volunteers who are integral to their programs. To date, we have enrolled 47 partner agencies on our platform. A challenge in rolling out this software, is working with our partner agencies to adopt this new platform for volunteer management. Our team is providing education, no-cost administration, and support to overcome barriers related resistance to adapting this technology.

What does the future of your industry/organization look like?

The future of non-profit organizations relies on a continued focus to streamline efforts across networks. To succeed, we must be nimble in responding to issues that matter in our community by partnering to increase impact, and accepting rapid change, including utilizing technology to improve our everyday processes. United Way of Gratiot & Isabella Counties will continue lead efforts in uniting people and resources to improve the health, education, and financial stability of every person in our communities.

For additional information, please visit the following:

Mt. Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce - www.mt-pleasnat.net

Mt. Pleasant Area Convention & Visitors Bureau - www.meetmtp.com

Middle Michigan Development Corporation - www.mmdc.org



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