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November 2017



Feature:

Outdoor Discovery Center Macatawa Greenway



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Pictured: Travis Williams

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Letter from Jane Clark

President, Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce



Reflecting back on our Annual Meeting, a consistent theme comes to mind—the synergy of our West Michigan business community. We heard from both of our Business Leadership Award recipients that being located here is what makes their businesses unique and gives them an edge over their competitors. We heard our sponsors remark on how essential it is that their businesses work alongside other companies to act as stewards for this thriving community. We looked back on how this same pooling of efforts and resources helped us build an interactive new space for the Chamber staff and members to use for bolstering cooperation and connections between businesses.

It's this dedication to unite behind a cause that makes this issue of *Connect* so poignant. What cause is as essential to a community as ensuring the next generation is life and career ready? Our look at the ODC's world class facilities and the OAISD's "Doing More. Together" campaign shows the tip of the iceberg of the ways that this community looks far into the future to set curriculum for our youngest members, and I'm proud that our Chamber has the privilege to engage with a business community that values such a legacy.

Best Regards,
Jane Clark



Vision:

Building successful businesses that lead to a thriving community.

Mission:

Connecting businesses to each other and the resources they need to grow and succeed.

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Feature:

Outdoor Discovery Center Macatawa Greenway

By Chelsea Scott



Photo credit: deVries Photography

Outdoor Discovery Center Macatawa Greenway (ODCMG) is a 501(c)(3) outdoor education and conservation organization. The mission of the ODCMG is to connect people, land and nature through outdoor education, greenway development and habitat and wildlife conservation.

Work

Founded in 2000 on the belief that we are the caretakers of our natural world, ODCMG began as a partnership between conservation organization Wildlife Unlimited and the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District. “Both groups recognized the growing disconnection between children and nature, and they wanted to launch a partnership to address it,” explained Executive Director Travis Williams.

Since its formation, the organization has served over 500,000 children and adults through outdoor education and recreation programs and annual visitors exceed 75,000. “The Outdoor Discovery Center (ODC) nature preserve is open seven days a week, dawn until dusk, 365 days a year for visitors to explore and connect with the outdoors,” Travis said. “In addition, we offer hundreds of programs each year that people can participate in.” The 2009 merger of the Outdoor Discovery Center and Macatawa Greenway resulted in the organization protecting over 1,200 acres along the Macatawa River in Ottawa County and a 150-acre nature preserve in Fillmore Township.

Travis Williams

ODCMG Executive Director Travis Williams has been with the organization since the very beginning, and the work is his passion. “I always had a great interest in wildlife and conservation,” he said. “At a young age, I was convinced that my career would be working in a zoo or national park.” Travis pursued his dream through college, graduating from Hope College with degrees in biology and environmental science. He went on to earn an MBA in strategic management. “I was blessed

to be able to pursue the dream and passion of mine through college and eventually to my role at the Outdoor Discovery Center,” he said.

For Travis, the best part about running a small business is having the opportunity to address community issues and needs creatively and collaboratively. “We have built a business that thrives on being nimble and are positioned to address the changing landscape of needs in our community, while at the same time being true to our mission,” Travis said.

Services

The ODCMG has seven different business lines that they operate, which creates both very diverse day-to-day operations and a successful business model. “It also leads to us being involved in several significant regional education and conservation initiatives that are all aimed at making our community the best place to live, work, play and learn,” he said.

The following are services that fall under the ODCMG umbrella:

- Macatawa Greenway
- Outdoor Discovery Center
- Project Clarity
- ODC Conservation Services
- ODC Explorer Network
- EcoSystems Education Network

In addition to the above services, ODCMG offers nature-based preschool programs in partnership with the Hamilton Community Schools. **Little Hawks Discovery Preschool** is groundbreaking in many ways, as it builds on children’s natural curiosity and desire to learn and develop skills like teamwork and problem solving. Travis said the development of the preschool is one of the organization’s greatest accomplishments. “It started out of an old house and in year one we were able to fill it with 56 kids,” he said. “Today, five years later, we just opened a new preschool with 176 kids enrolled.”



Children help celebrate the Little Hawks Discovery Preschool expansion at the Patricia Eldean Education Center Ribbon Cutting in September. Photo courtesy of the West Coast Chamber

Travis said his inspiration comes from witnessing future generations learn to love and care for their natural environment. “Research is clearly showing us that one of the major barriers to student success, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is the lack of opportunities and connections those children have with the outdoors,” he explained. “If we want our children to grow up and have the soft skills needed for employment, appreciation for community and a sense of place, we have to start realizing that education needs to reach beyond the school building and should, in some way, connect children to nature and the world around them.”

Community Involvement

Travis said that without a doubt, his favorite part about working in this community are the people. “They make this all worth it,” he said. “Serving children and families, working with community leaders and being mentored by numerous board members and stakeholders has helped me grow as a person.” With that in mind, ODCMG makes a point to invest not only in the team members that work there, but the larger community as well. Here’s how:

- ODC staff serve as board members for the **Allegan County Tourist Council, Allegan County Economic Development Commission, Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance, Community Action House, and Holland Audubon Club.**
- **Michigan West Coast Chamber Leadership Curriculum and Public Policy Committee Members.**
- **Member Night:** An annual BBQ picnic held at the ODC nature preserve to recognize families and businesses that have contributed of their time and resources to the organization.

- **Macatawa Water Festival:** An annual community event held in July on Windmill Island.
- **Treats & Trails:** A community trick or treating event.
- ODC has adopted a stretch of US31 through MDOT’s **Adopt a Highway Program.**
- The ODC participates with a staff team as part of the **City of Holland’s Recreation Co-Ed Softball League** (and is the reigning division 2 champion!).

Awards & Accomplishments

ODCMG has been honored to receive the following awards:

- **Best Managed Non-Profit by MiBiz**
- **National Association of Interpretation Award of Distinction**
- **DEQ Neighborhood Environmental Partner**
- **Staff have also received numerous individual honors for outstanding achievement in their work**

Chamber Involvement

The ODCMG and its staff are active participants in the Chamber Early Bird Breakfasts, West Coast Leadership Program, the Public Policy Committee and other networking events.

The West Coast Chamber and its staff have benefited the work of the ODCMG by connecting our work to new contacts in the business community, raising awareness of the importance of outdoor education and conservation, challenging the community to take a more active role in caring for water quality issues through Project Clarity, advocating for legislative priorities that align with the ODCMG’s mission and supporting new initiatives at the ODCMG through ribbon cutting ceremonies.”

– Travis Williams

 Continued on page 9



Our Annual Celebration of a Thriving Business Community



The boat barn at Yacht Basin Marina was the picturesque setting for the West Coast Chamber's Annual Meeting on September 29. With the sun shining and a soft lake breeze filtering through the trees, it was a perfect fall afternoon to welcome our members to our celebration of a business community filled with companies that continuously strive to grow and innovate, and support each other.

The Chamber offered sincere thanks to outgoing Chamber Board Chair Doug Vos, noting especially his steady leadership throughout the Chamber office building renovation project, which yielded a beautiful and functional facility. In an interview about his experience as Board Chair, Doug commented, "I still get the wow factor when I come into the building!" We also officially welcomed incoming Board Chair Kurt Wassink of Gentex Corporation.

Each year at the Annual Meeting, the Chamber honors two companies with the Business Leadership Award, in recognition for being great employers who give back to the community, invest in their facilities and employees and have a positive history of job growth and retention. Selection of recipients is a responsibility of the Board of Directors, and this year's winners were Collective Idea and Elzinga & Volkers.

Founded by Daniel Morrison in 2005, Collective Idea is a 12-year-old software development company that creates custom web and mobile software applications for Fortune 500 multinational companies, tiny startups and everyone in between. In May, they were recognized as a 2017 "Michigan 50 Companies to Watch," an award given to companies that demonstrate exceptional entrepreneurial leadership, creation of innovation, and have sustainable competitive advantage.





Elzinga & Volkers Construction Professionals is a leading provider of construction management services, located in Holland and serving the entire U.S. since 1945. They were recently recognized as one of the “2016 Best and Brightest Companies to Work for in the Nation,” for the sixth consecutive year. The company’s safety program was also honored by Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) with the Diamond Level STEP Award for the third consecutive year.

Rounding out the event was a lively presentation by guest speaker, Dave Zilko. Dave has been an entrepreneur for 25 years and shared his amazing success story of how he took an unassuming startup, a

fresh salsa company founded in the back of a bankrupt restaurant from the unlikeliest of places—Detroit, and grew it into the largest brand of fresh salsa in the United States. By applying his unique and counterintuitive business style, he engineered its sale to a Fortune 500 company for almost a quarter billion dollars, and shared his story to inspire others to live the lives they have imagined for themselves.

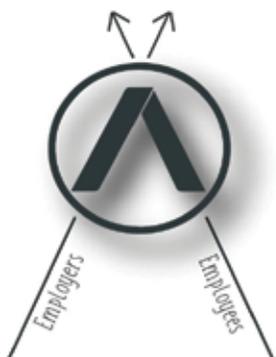
The event was generously supported by Chamber sponsors, and after a savory lunch of barbecue grilled chicken, and armed with a tasty dessert “to go,” every member headed out to enjoy the beauty of our Pure Michigan location.

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Cloud Computing 101

By Mark Kolean, Shoreline Technology Solutions

How can cloud services be beneficial to your company? These services are more efficient, user friendly and less expensive compared to traditional on-premise IT counterparts. Cloud computing provides an alternative way to access data; instead of purchasing equipment it is leased on an as-needed basis. Traditional IT requires expensive hardware and software internally and is cumbersome to replace. The process of adding a new server in the past required a complicated sequence of events to purchase new hardware and schedule a weekend when an upgrade could be performed. Deployment of cloud services is done in an easy-to-use web portal which can accelerate the time it takes to build a new solution from weeks or months down to hours. These services often can add value by allowing a business to not have to purchase new hardware, server licenses, software client access licenses, maintenance of those servers, electricity, cooling and space. As the computing needs change for a business, it is easy to add or remove services by changing subscriptions.

Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) – This is the first pillar of cloud services. In this method, servers are moved from an internal server room out to the public cloud. This method of service is best when older servers and software in the network cannot be moved to one of the other methods of cloud computing listed below, but reducing expense to maintain a legacy system is still important. The terms “lift and shift” can best describe IaaS because existing servers are moved from physical hardware and uploaded to run as new virtual machines.

Platform as a Service (PaaS) – In this cloud service, a premade application is purchased to add customizations on top. The software solution comes complete without the need to build virtual servers and overhead. Basically, all that is needed is to hit a button and the application software



solution is ready to be developed. Some examples of PaaS include Microsoft Azure SQL Server, WordPress web services and SharePoint.

Software as a Service (SaaS) – This is the complete software solution that most groups are searching for. In SaaS, the licensing and data management are included and all that needs to be done is to purchase the solution and turn it on. Most SaaS offerings are licensed on a subscription either monthly or annually. Examples of SaaS include Microsoft Office 365 and OneDrive, Google Docs and Carbonite backup service. Traditional network services are being replaced with SaaS cloud solutions such as OneDrive and Dropbox as a replacement for fileservers and QuickBooks Online for accounting solutions instead of Traditional QuickBooks Desktop. SaaS solutions are almost always developed to work anywhere at any time so users can update accounting at home or access a document from any location. Traditional IT server solutions required complicated VPN solutions to work from home with limited speed and greater expense.

So, when is the right time to move to cloud computing?

Email & Calendar Services – If your business is not using Gmail or Office 365, it is probably time to switch now. These services back up data and provide filtering of spam. Access to data from multiple laptops, phones and tablets is simple and requires only an internet connection.

File Servers – OneDrive and Google Docs are a great place to share internal spreadsheets and word processing documents. Organizations that have multiple locations or staff that are spread out will find the collaboration of cloud file systems much less complicated than multiple servers and file synchronization. Try out some of these services next time a computer or server needs to be upgraded.

Accounting Solutions – Moving from that old accounting system that has been in place since 1989 is hard to do, but new cloud accounting solutions allow the transition to be seamless while keeping the old software in place for a safety net and access to customer history.

Shoreline Technology Solutions is located at 828 Lincoln Avenue in Holland. Reach them by calling 616-394-1303 or visiting www.shorelinepc.com.

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Future

Investing in the future is part of ODCMG's mission, so it makes sense that they have a long list of optimistic goals for the coming years. The following are just a few new programs or initiatives ODCMG plans to develop.

- Nature-based education engagement and program establishment beyond Little Hawks Discovery Preschool.
- EcoSystem Education Network business line development for outdoor education consulting services.
- Community education and engagement about watershed protection and conservation services.
- Engagement with the agricultural community around water quality protections.
- Technology improvements for the internal and external operations of ODCMG.
- Land acquisition that can help improve delivery of existing program services.
- Defining and branding the Outdoor Discovery Network as a nature-rich community asset.
- Development of green and open space, trail systems and required infrastructure on the Macatawa, Rabbit and Kalamazoo River Greenways.
- Focus on the long-term management plan and improvements to existing facilities.

Travis, who has been with ODCMG since the beginning, reflected on what the organization has built over the last 17 years. "The

first day I came to work in 2000, I drove into the gravel parking lot and sat in my truck wondering, "What do I do now?" he said. "I didn't have a desk, phone, or even a chair. In fact, I didn't even have an office or a pencil. The ODCMG property was largely corn field and mowed lawn. From there we have grown into an organization with 38 employees that serves nearly 100,000 people a year in programs," he said. "In the end, it is all about making the community the best place to live, work, play and learn."

ODCMG's nature preserve is located at 4214 56th Street in Holland, with other locations along the Macatawa Greenway and the Rabbit River. For more information, please visit www.outdoordiscovery.org.

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Some of the Financial Advantages of Life Insurance

By Andy Spears, Farm Bureau Insurance

We all work and go about our daily lives with the best of intentions. No one plans to leave home and never return. When one of the breadwinners of a family passes away unexpectedly, it can dramatically impact plans for the future or a family's financial trajectory. Life insurance policies provide peace of mind, protect the future, and offer unique financial advantages. How can you underestimate the value of that? Life insurance can protect the future of those you care about, pay off debt, provide education for students, or act as an effective vehicle for charitable giving.

Paying off Debt

When family breadwinners pass away, families can suddenly face a massive amount of debt. Life insurance policies can be used as a means for paying off these debts. This may include payment of the decedent's final expenses, funeral costs and any unpaid bills (For example, paying off the mortgage on the family home for your survivors).

Tax/Probate Advantages

Along with protecting the family from debt and securing their future, life insurance offers some unique financial advantages in terms of financial planning. For example, monies left to beneficiaries of a life insurance policy are tax exempt and can also bypass the probate process. It's a way to protect resources from taxes and direct money to your beneficiaries that they can receive almost immediately. There are other tax-related advantages. Individuals expecting to be hit with estate taxes upon their death could purchase a life insurance policy to pay these estate taxes. Unfortunately, often, an individual's loved ones are left responsible for estate tax funds. As a result, they may be forced to liquidate assets to pay tax bills. Having cash on hand to pay these taxes or other expenses, can leave family heirlooms and other important assets intact.

Financing Education

Life insurance proceeds can fund future education expenses for the insured's children or grandchildren. With the rising cost of college tuition, life insurance allows policyholders to maintain any plan or commitment to assist children or loved ones with completing their college education.

Equalizer

Life insurance proceeds can be used to equalize inheritances. For example, if an individual has two children and wishes to leave his home to one, she/he could purchase a policy equal to the amount of the home's value and list the other child as the beneficiary—equalizing the value of each child's inheritance.

Charitable Giving

For those without family or who are committed to causes or charitable organizations, you can list a charitable organization as beneficiary and provide tax free proceeds to a cause that they care about. Like the previous examples, a life insurance policy allows you to control what happens to your assets once you're gone.

Every family is different in terms of their goals and financial needs. Likewise, their insurance needs are also different. There are several insurance products available that provide a range of coverage to meet your specific needs. Take time and consider your options carefully. It's important to have insurance—but it's more important to have the right insurance that fits your needs.

Get Help

Having the proper life insurance can be critical to your family's future. As you are planning, you should reach out someone you trust to carefully discuss details, options, and ensure appropriate coverages are customized to your unique situation.

Andy Spears owns a local insurance agency in the Holland area. His passion is to serve, and provide protection and peace of mind to his clients. Andy can be reached at 616-396-3333, aspears@fbinsmi.com, or through his website, www.InsureWestMichigan.com.

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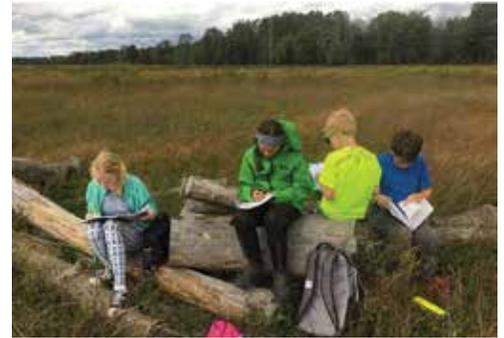
Mercy Health serves patients across West Michigan, providing access to cardiovascular services, cardiac surgery and electrophysiology services through the same health care system for continuity of quality care. In collaboration with University of Michigan Health, the Mercy Health cardiac surgery program is led by distinguished cardiac surgeons Dr. Richard Downey and Dr. Nabeel El-amir, who together bring 50 years of surgical experience and perform more than 350 cardiac surgeries annually.

All physicians and staff participating in this program provide services in a manner consistent with Mercy Health's Catholic mission and the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services.

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Ottawa Area Intermediate School District: Doing More. Together.

Content provided by Ottawa Area Intermediate School District



High-quality schools are at the heart of every vibrant community. A significant amount of credible research exists that details how investing in education has a strong positive impact on national economic growth and global competitiveness, leading to higher wage and productivity levels. Schools influence local economic growth and help attract new business by educating the local future labor force and improving an area's quality of life, which can attract more skilled workers.

A strong economy in our area directly depends on strong education options for our families – and our ability to make those options known. That is the premise behind **Doing More. Together.**, a unique partnership program that promotes all avenues of education, including traditional public schools, faith-based schools and public school academies. Schools in our region share a mutual commitment to providing students with the resources and skills they need to be successful in the future and working together to do it.

Through this program, extraordinary stories are being shared with our communities about the many innovative, collaborative and character-building programs and experiences that Ottawa Area ISD member schools and their partners are creating

together—stories that highlight the region's dedication to go beyond basic expectations and requirements to provide the best education possible for students.

Students have the opportunity to experiment and apply modern skills such as collaboration, communication, critical and creative thinking and the use of social media and technology. They experience first-hand the importance of applying these skills every day.

Ottawa Area ISD Superintendent Pete Haines describes this program in the simplest terms, "**Doing More. Together.** reminds us that we have so much more potential to make a difference when our efforts are coordinated and our partnerships extend beyond traditional roles and boundaries."

Over the course of the last few years, local businesses have increasingly become part of this partnership effort because they uniformly support high-quality educational options and realize investing in education positively affects local workforce development. Currently, over 40 companies and organizations across West Michigan support the **Doing More. Together.** initiative and are united in the belief that high-quality education is what makes good communities great.

"For years, Herman Miller has recognized the importance of educational partnerships and pioneered efforts to forge these connections within the community," said Brian Walker, Chief Executive Officer for Herman Miller. "Through our partnership with OAISD and local schools, we're strengthening the future of our regional economy by providing students with valuable work experience that helps prepare them for the workforce."

As a partner of the **Doing More. Together.** initiative, Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce President Jane Clark sees great value in more businesses partnering with this program.

"The Ottawa area is fortunate to have such supportive business and community agencies supporting this partnership. Becoming a part of **Doing More. Together.** helps spread the word about innovative education programs and partnerships in our area and helps to strengthen our economies and communities," said Clark.

Visit www.doingmoretogether.org to learn how to get involved.



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November Calendar of Events

Thursday, November 2

Professional Lakeshore Latinas Meeting

@West Coast Chamber of Commerce - Learning Lab, 272 E 8th Street, Holland

The Professional Lakeshore Latinas mission is fostering relationships and empowering Latinas through advocacy, service, and professional development. Please join us at our next meeting for networking and the opportunity to hear from a guest speaker. Beverages and light hors d'oeuvres will be provided. Parking is available in lot 61 of the DeVos Fieldhouse across 9th Street behind the Chamber building.

Time: 5:30-7:30pm

Cost: Free, but registration is required

Tuesday, November 7

Leading Edge: Workplace Inclusion & Diversity on a Tight Budget

@West Coast Chamber of Commerce - Learning Lab, 272 E 8th Street, Holland

This program will identify how to scale some I&D Best Practices to better meet the needs of the attendees. It will provide tools for leaders to better understand the impact of I&D and tips to create more inclusive workplaces. Parking is available in lot 61 of the DeVos Fieldhouse across 9th Street behind the Chamber building.

Time: 8-11:30am

Cost: \$55 per member (\$35 for each additional attendee from the same company), \$75 per non-member

Friday, November 10

Public Policy Committee Meeting

@ West Coast Chamber of Commerce -

Learning Lab, 272 E 8th Street, Holland
Interested in governmental and political issues? The Public Policy Committee reviews issues of local and regional concern and makes position recommendations to the Board of Directors. Join us monthly for interesting and sometimes lively discussion about the issues that affect you and your business. If interested in more information please email Jane Clark.

Time: 8-9:30am

Cost: Free

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

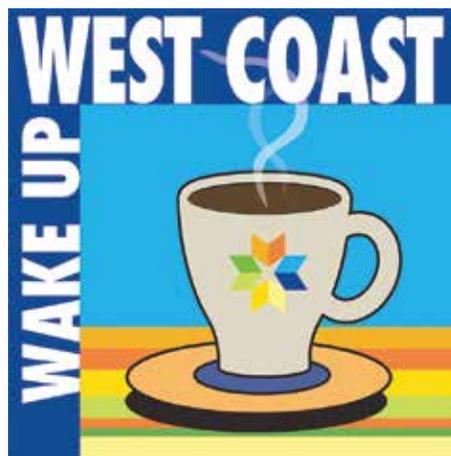
Network @ Lunch

@BAM!, 478 E. 16th Street, Holland

You have to eat, right? Get to know other business representatives by spending an hour with them over a relaxing business lunch. You will also be assigned with dining partners from other businesses at the event, giving you the opportunity to make new contacts and share about yourself and your business. What could be easier? Arrive early at 11:45am to extend your networking time.

Time: 12-1pm

Cost: \$20 per member / \$30 per non-member



Tuesday, November 14

Wake Up West Coast (Formerly EBB)

@Haworth Inn & Conference Center, 225 College Ave, Holland

Join us for our popular monthly breakfast and networking event. Don't miss the announcement of this year's Small Business Person of the Year. This award is presented annually in recognition of a small business person's success, efforts to provide employment in the greater community, response to adversity, and contribution to the general betterment of the community.

Time: 7:30-8:30am

Cost: \$20 per Chamber member (\$25 if registered after November 12) / \$35 per non-member

Monday, November 20, 2017

Governmental Affairs Breakfast

@Alpenrose Restaurant, 4 E 8th St, Holland

Join us for breakfast with our elected state and federal legislators. Ample time is provided for questions and answers. Arrive at 7:15am for a brief networking session before the breakfast begins.

Time: 7:30-8:30am

Cost: \$20 per Chamber member (\$25 if registered after November 17) / \$35 per non-member

Thursday, November 30, 2017

ZAG: Off the Clock

@Tripelroot, 146 E Main Avenue, Zeeland

Step out of your office and into Tripelroot, and get to know other Zeeland area business representatives. It's a great way to unwind and make connections, all while trying to out some great drinks and complimentary snacks in a cool new venue.

Time: 4-5pm

Cost: Free. Registration is suggested, but not necessary



For a full listing of events, visit www.westcoastchamber.org/events.

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Muller Design Group

By Kristy Muller | Edited by Chelsea Scott

mullerdes!gn

Growth Through Strategic Marketing and Creative Design

For over 20 years, Jeff Muller has combined his love of design with a business owner's mindset to help companies in the areas of marketing and design. Jeff is the owner and Creative Director of Muller Design Group, a West Michigan based marketing and design firm. Prior to starting Muller Design in 2002, Jeff worked in senior design roles at Crowe Chizek, Digital Commerce and Watermark Software. Jeff graduated from Western Michigan University with a BFA in graphic design. He also studied art history and painting at Scuola Di Lorenzo di Medici in Florence, Italy.

Jeff is married to Kristy Muller who serves as Project Manager at Muller Design and together they have two boys, Matt (15) and Grant (13), students at Calvin Christian Schools in Grandville, Michigan. Jeff serves as a deacon, member of the Global Mission Council and Worship Council at First Reformed Church. He is also a volunteer with "More-self-less" in Grand Rapids. He has mentored for several years in the Big Brothers program and Guiding Light Ministries. When he isn't working or serving his community, Jeff might be found outdoors. "I enjoy running, biking, skiing, fishing and hiking," he said.

One might say that Jeff was destined to become a graphic designer. "I used to draw a lot as a kid, and when I got to college, for some reason I found myself in engineering and accounting classes instead of art classes,"

he recalled. "One day I discovered that I could actually get paid to do what I love—graphic design—so I switched my major that day." While working as an art director at a consulting firm, Jeff started working with the marketing team and saw an opportunity to differentiate himself by adding marketing capabilities to his design skill-set, and Muller Design Group was born.

Jeff, who is self-employed, appreciates many aspects of his career but the autonomy is at the top of the list. "I love the freedom and flexibility of my schedule," he said. "However, as a business owner, I can never get away from it. It's always there, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, which brings a lot of pressure. At the same time, it has afforded me more time with family and friends."

Jeff described himself as an entrepreneur at heart, meaning he truly loves running and growing the business. "I also enjoy the variety of my work," he said. "Every day is different." Along with running your own business comes a fair amount of education and opportunities to learn and adapt. "I've learned several things over the years. 1) Do what you love, not what will pay you the most. 2) Life is hard, so pursue activities and be around people that give you joy. 3) Surround yourself with talented people and wise counsel."

With those three lessons comes renewed fervor and hope for the coming years. "Future goals include continuing to grow our capabilities in the areas of web

design, inbound marketing and supporting sales teams which will help us grow and differentiate us from our competition," Jeff said. And although work and clients keep his creative juices flowing and the lights on, Jeff said there's one annual project that is particularly close to his heart. "My favorite project is designing our annual family Christmas card," he said. "You can see them here: www.blog.mullerdesign.net/blog/fun-christmas-card-design-ideas."

Muller Design Group is located at 130 North State Street in Zeeland. For more information, visit www.mullerdesign.net, email Jeff at jeff@mullerdesign.net or call 616-889-5187.

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Members Making a Difference: Making Friends with Fruits and Veggies

By Sue Thoms

Kids squirm and chatter excitedly as Jodie Reimink wheels a cart filled with fruit and vegetable “friends” into the pre-kindergarten classroom.

She holds up a green cloth creature with eyes, a jolly-looking bunch of broccoli.

“Who remembers my friend broccoli?” she asks.

Nearly every child raises a hand.

“Who liked broccoli?”

Almost all the hands go back up.

Making friends with fruits and veggies is all part of Learning About Nutrition through Activities, a school health program run by Spectrum Health Zeeland Community Hospital.

With hands-on lessons and snacks, instructors concoct tasty nutrition lessons for 700 preschoolers in 10 schools in the Hudsonville and Zeeland districts. They visit the schools once a month, from October to April.

At Jamestown Lower Elementary School, Reimink addresses a group of children gathered on a rug at the front of the room. She conducts a mini review of the friends she has already introduced: kiwis, broccoli, sugar-snap peas, tomatoes, apricots and sweet

red peppers. And in celebration of a year of good food, this lesson features a kid-friendly favorite: the strawberry.

As Reimink holds up the stuffed strawberry, the kids rock on their heels. Some clap. A chorus of “I love strawberries!” rings out.

Today’s activity: Make a mouse with a graham cracker, cream cheese, a half-strawberry and a string-cheese tail.

“I don’t like cream cheese,” a boy says as Reimink distributes ingredients.

“We would like everyone to try a little bit of everything,” she says.

Reaching Kids Early

Reimink, a community program specialist, and three dietitians bring the program to pre-kindergarten and preschool classrooms in hopes of teaching kids about nutrition at a young age.

“We like to expose them to different fruits and vegetables and provide a healthy environment for them to explore, using all their senses—taste, smell and touch,” she says.

Kids learn a bit about gardens and how foods grow—what grows on a vine, a tree or a plant. They learn to classify items as fruits or vegetables. And everyone is encouraged to try at least a “no, thank you” bite of each item introduced.



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The instructor leads the class with an assistant, a puppet iguana—named LANA the iguana. And each lesson includes an activity and a snack.

The kids respond enthusiastically to the hands-on lessons, teachers say.

“It’s been a highlight of the day, each day they come in,” says Katey Balkema. “The parents love it, too.”

After the students assemble their strawberry mice, some gobble up the treat quickly while others take tentative nibbles. Reimink passes out “I tried it” stickers for everyone.

One boy, after taking a tiny bite of his strawberry declares it’s “pretty good” and that it tastes “like strawberry.”

“It was my first time eating a real strawberry,” he adds. Before today, he says he has only eaten the dried fruit that comes with his cereal.

“Strawberries are awesome,” says the girl next to him.

The nutritional program was created by the Minnesota Department of Public Health and adapted by Spectrum Health staff for local use.

Instructors send home information for parents, so they know about the day’s lesson. Teachers have heard positive responses back. A little girl who never liked apricots, for example, changed her mind after trying them in class.

Teacher Anne Johnson enjoys watching kids overcome their reluctance to try new foods—especially ones they are certain they don’t like.

“It’s fun to see that spark when they say, ‘I do like this,’” she says.



Jodie Reimink, a community program specialist, Learning About Nutrition through Activities (LANA) class. LANA is a school health program run by Spectrum Health Zeeland Community Hospital.



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