

muskegon  
innovation hub

2023

annual report



GRAND VALLEY  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
MUSKEGON  
INNOVATION HUB

# team



**Thomas Hull,**  
Maintenance and  
Operations

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Business Incubator  
Manager

**Kevin Ricco,**  
Director

**Tom Hopper,**  
Associate Director

**Linda Ray,**  
Administrative  
Coordinator



MUSKEGON  
INNOVATION HUB

## who we are

A business innovation center bringing excellence to a diverse and everchanging entrepreneurial community.



## what we do

Coaching, funding, networking, and providing a synergistic work environment.



## how we do it

Business incubation, coworking space, funding assistance, events and programming, and meeting space rentals. We are a key partner in the region's innovation ecosystem, supporting startup businesses, entrepreneurs, and corporate innovation teams.



# from the associate director

2023 has been a year of remarkable growth and community engagement for The Muskegon Innovation Hub. Our commitment to nurturing innovation and fostering entrepreneurship has led to several significant milestones in our business innovation program.

This year, we launched "Innovation Corner," a weekly blog dedicated to promoting innovation, entrepreneurship and community collaboration. Through the blog we offer tips, insights, and links to resources for innovators and entrepreneurs. Our goal is to speed up innovators' learning so they can commercialize faster and at a lower cost. We share our experience, advice from other accomplished entrepreneurs, and recognized best practices. Topics include: building business plans, creating better financial forecasts, strategies for growing sales, how to understand your customers, why it's important to fail fast, building teams, how to successfully develop new products and services, and ways to keep ahead of the competition.

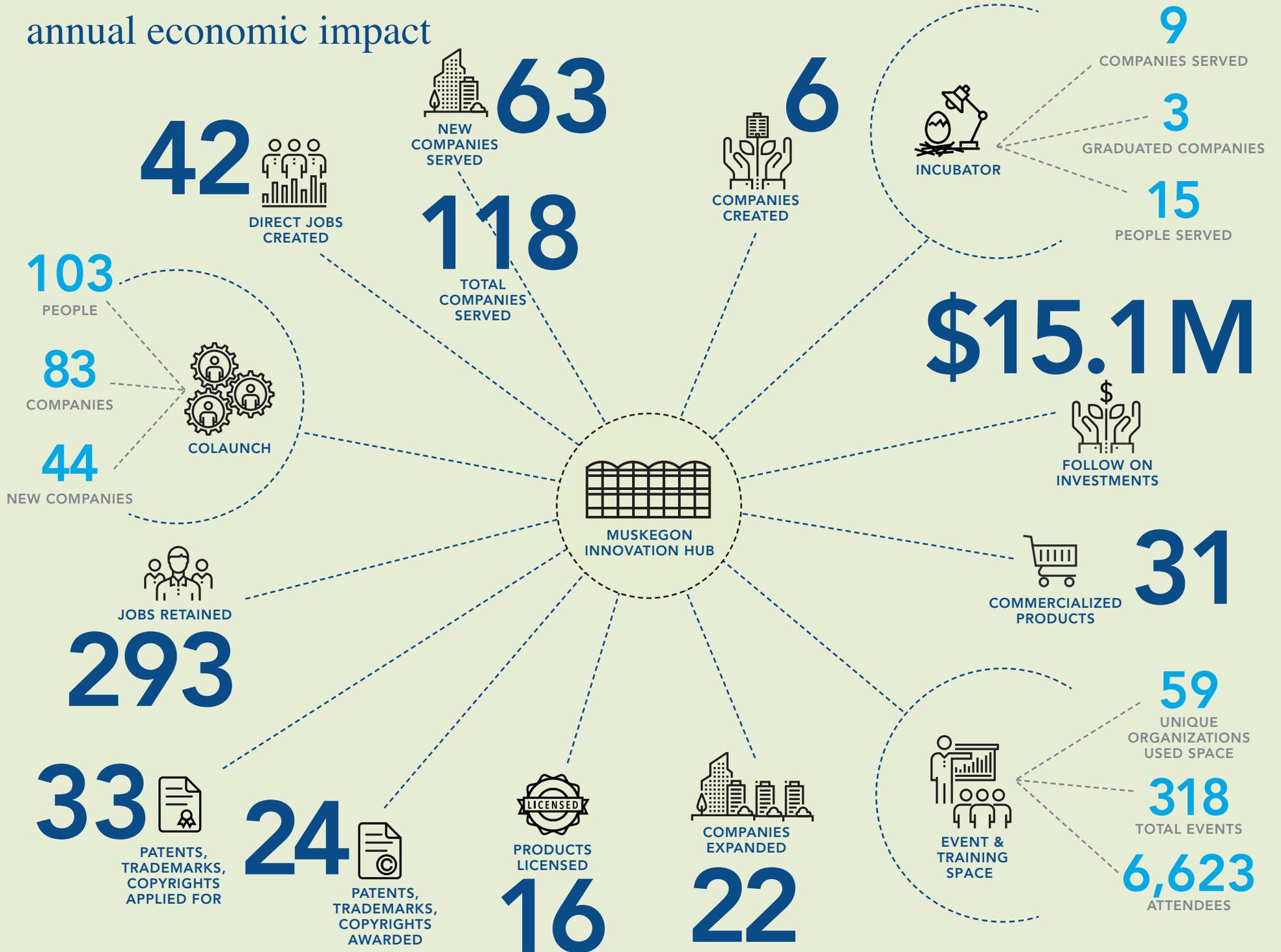


We also hosted the first Muskegon-based cohort of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation's (CEI) Michigan Veteran Entrepreneur-Lab accelerator. This initiative empowers veterans to become successful entrepreneurs, aligning with our mission to support and foster local talent. We look forward to supporting more engagement by the CEI in the Muskegon area.

As we reflect on this year's achievements, 2024 promises to be even more inspiring and collaborative. Together, we'll continue to drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and community engagement in Muskegon and beyond.

Tom Hopper,  
Associate Director

# annual economic impact



# programs and events

## Hub Programs/Events

### Marketing Mondays

Once-a-month seminars that provide valuable tools, techniques and knowledge to help small businesses effectively engage with customers and increase sales revenue.

### Lakeshore Innovator of the Year

An award program that recognizes and celebrates the most innovative ideas on the lakeshore.

### 5x5 Night

A pitch competition in partnership with Start Garden where 5 contestants get 5 minutes to pitch their business idea to 5 judges for a chance to walk away with \$5,000.

### Defining Passion

A new standalone event focused on getting creative people past the ideation process.

### Writers' Cohort

A three-week micro-cohort where editor and creative writer, Sarah Rexford guides attendees through the steps of writing and publishing a book.

### Bare Bones Business Series

A three-part workshop presented by Chantal Roeske for aspiring entrepreneurs looking to start a business with a modest budget.

## Members-Only Events

### Hub Happy Hour

A networking happy hour held once a month at The Hub to let members get to know each other in a fun, casual setting.

### Taco Tuesday

A community-building lunch held once a month in our CoLaunch space.

## Advisory Committee

### Stephanie Briggs

Muskegon Community College

### Jake Eckholm

City of Muskegon

### Joe Finkler

Michigan Inventors Coalition

### Ken Johnson

LPL Financial and Mayor,  
City of Muskegon

### Leandra Nisbet

Stingray Advisory Group

### Katherine Roskam

Retired from Varnum LLP

### Ben Scheerer

Red Hat

### Marisela Sierra

Navarro's Mexican Take-Out

### Laurie Supinski

Start Garden

### Tom Zant

Equity Group of Michigan

# member spotlights

**Essata:** Essata is making smart building more commonplace. Its products reduce energy consumption, save people money and reduce environmental impact. Essata's networked lighting controls and energy metering can be installed for the same cost as conventional branch wiring and local lighting controls, providing immediate and perpetual payback on energy savings, and access to device-level energy usage data. Essata's wiring is safe to the touch and reduces installation/retrofit time by approximately 30% when compared to conventional branch wiring. Essata's hardware system creates a hybrid wired and wireless power and data network. This system often replaces ceiling branch wiring, providing device power and data connection to create a seamlessly connected, intelligent environment.

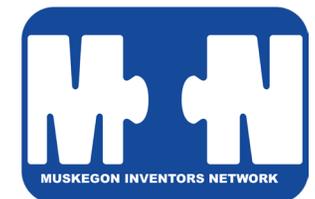


**Majestic Insurance Agency:** Majestic Insurance Agency is an independent lakeshore insurance agency with a presence in Indiana as well. The name and brand are new; however, the same foundation remains with owner and agent Lisa Walker. Lisa has more than ten years of industry-leading customer satisfaction ratings. She is driven with passion and fueled with a desire to meet all customer needs while serving the community-at-large.



**MAJESTIC**  
INSURANCE AGENCY, LLC

**Muskegon Inventors Network:** The Muskegon Inventors Network (MIN) is a non-profit support group where inventors and creative people find an opportunity to connect and network. Founded in 2008, MIN has been a member of The Hub for many years. Anyone with an idea, invention, or business is invited to stop in and connect with the MIN board, which has vast experience in the startup world. MIN members get a "product review" of their idea, access to all meetings/events, and resources to help them in their journey. There are plenty of resources available to support inventors. Combining MIN with the Hub community is a great way to jumpstart your business.





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## 2023 lakeshore innovator of the year



**Lisa Spaug**

This year's Lakeshore Innovator of the Year is "EZ Beach Steps" inventor Lisa Spaug.

She was motivated to find an innovative solution to maintain her beach access after watching her waterfront deck and stairs get swallowed by high water and shifting sands along Lake Michigan. "Waves and erosion kept taking property away and people were terrified to invest in their shoreline frontage" Spaug said. "I thought, 'What if we could create a set of stairs that changed as the dunes changed?'"

EZ Beach Steps is a portable system of stairs that can be easily transported and relocated by homeowners. Spaug's invention is gaining traction among lakeshore residents, and she recently shipped her first set of EZ Beach Steps outside of Michigan to a customer in Puget Sound, Washington.