

# muskegon innovation hub

annual report

# 2024



GRAND VALLEY  
STATE UNIVERSITY

MUSKEGON  
INNOVATION HUB

# team



(L-R) **Diane Fleser**, Grant Program Manager; **Tom Hopper**, Associate Director; **Kevin Ricco**, Director; **Linda Ray**, Administrator; **Cyndi Langlois**, Community Empowerment Manager; **Allison Dile**, Assistant Director of Community & Programming; **Thomas Hull**, Maintenance & Operations



**Sandra Briggs**  
Front Desk



**Martha Colburn**  
Front Desk



**MUSKEGON INNOVATION HUB**

## who we are

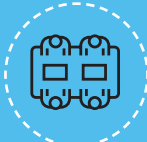
A business innovation center bringing excellence to a diverse and ever-changing community of entrepreneurs.

## 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 director

2024 has been a year of transformative change, due in large part to the Small Business Support Hub Grant, a generous gift from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. This year, we launched several new programs and welcomed two exceptional team members, all aimed at better serving our small business and entrepreneurial communities.

ElevateWest is our new business accelerator initiative, dedicated to fostering growth and offering tailored resources and mentorship to help local businesses scale and innovate. Our Trailblazer Talks series features successful entrepreneurs who share their journeys and insights, providing inspiration and practical advice to our community. In addition, we launched the Hub Direct Grant program, a new funding opportunity that offers direct financial support to early-stage businesses, helping them achieve critical growth milestones.

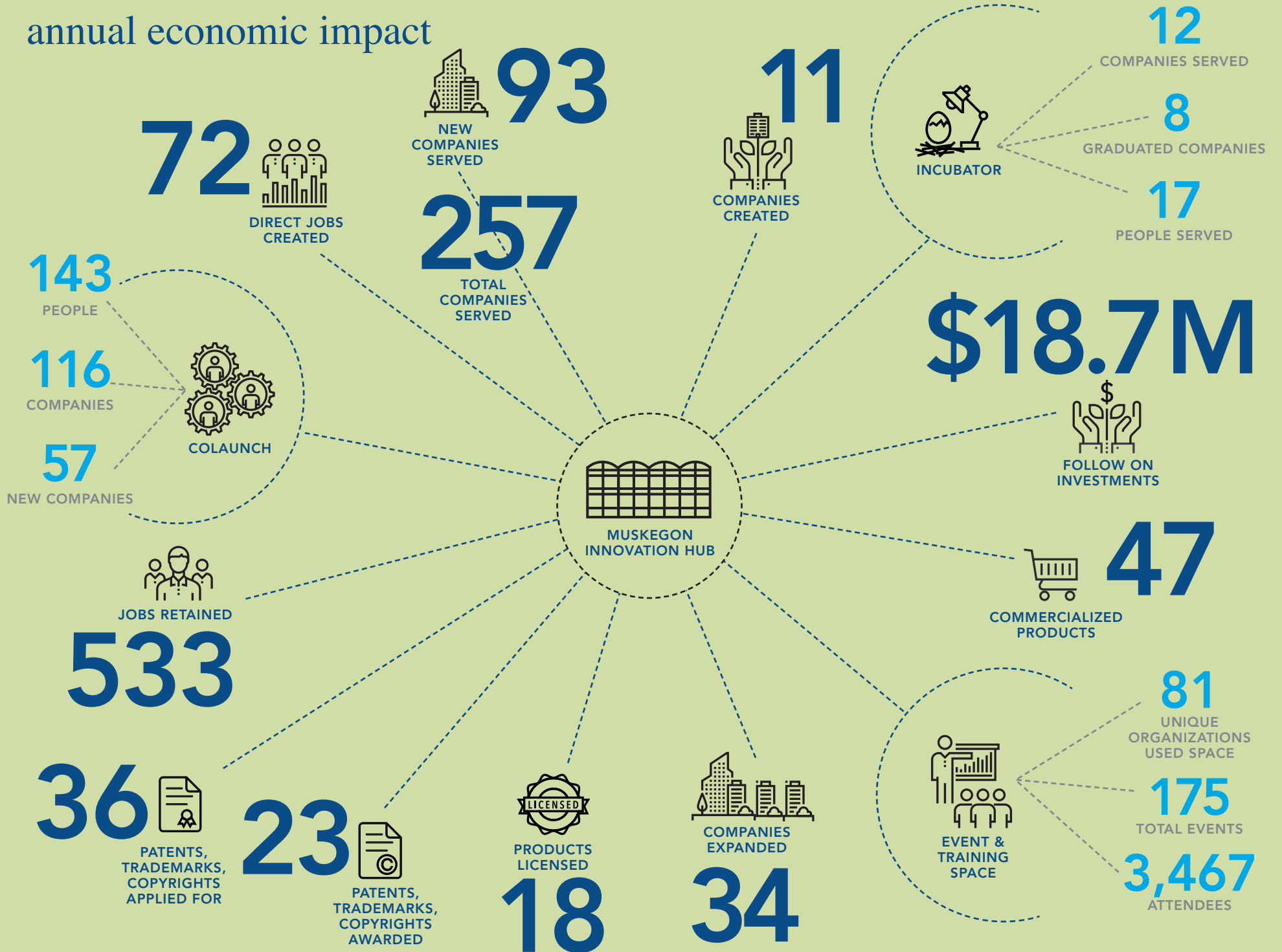
I am also pleased to welcome two new staff members to our team. Diane Fleser is our new Grant Program Manager. With extensive experience in grant management, Diane will oversee the implementation of our grant programs, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to drive business success. Cyndi Langlois is our new Community Empowerment Manager. Cyndi brings a strong background in community engagement and business strategy, and will focus on empowering our local entrepreneurs through tailored support and strategic partnerships.

These new programs and additions to our team mark a significant step forward in our mission to support the growth and success of small businesses in West Michigan.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to an exciting year ahead!

**Kevin Ricco**  
Director, Muskegon Innovation Hub  
Grand Valley State University

# annual economic impact



# programs and events

## Hub Programs/Events

### Social Media Mondays

Free monthly work sessions for community members and area marketers to collaborate, create and schedule their organizations' social media.

### Hub Open House

The community is invited to learn about our work, tour our facility, and hear about what we have planned for the year ahead.

### Lakeshore Innovator of the Year

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

### Get Started Workshops

3-hour workshops to equip attendees with insights, relationships, and tools needed to turn ideas into action.

### Grant Writing Basics

A two-part class that provides attendees with an overview of how to write a standard project proposal and draft a project budget with confidence.

### ElevateWest Pitch Night

A pitch competition for the participants of the 12-week ElevateWest accelerator program to share their business ideas and win cash prizes.

## 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

### Contessa Alexander:

City of Muskegon

### Stephanie Briggs:

Muskegon Community College

### Joe Finkler:

Michigan Inventors Coalition

### Ken Johnson:

LPL Financial and Mayor, City of Muskegon

### Leandra Nisbet:

Stingray Advisory Group

### Ben Scheerer:

Red Hat

### Marisela Sierra:

Navarro's Mexican Take-Out

### Laurie Supinski:

Start Garden

### Tom Zant:

Equity Group of Michigan

# new hub programs

## ElevateWest

ElevateWest enhances The Hub's business coaching program with a cohort-based workshop grounded in the CO.STARTERS curriculum, empowering entrepreneurs to plan and build their ventures. Designed for adult entrepreneurs, it reduces barriers to entry and offers flexible formats: single three-hour workshops, two-day bootcamps, or twelve-week classes. The program's first workshops received excellent feedback, and the inaugural twelve-week class will conclude in November, 2024 with an exciting pitch competition where participants will compete for cash prizes. ElevateWest is a dynamic opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs to gain practical skills and take their businesses to the next level.



## Trailblazer Talks

Trailblazer Talks is an annual keynote event aimed at bringing authentic, inspiring and noteworthy speakers to West Michigan. This event is focused on engaging area entrepreneurs and community members with the stories of trailblazers from all different backgrounds and industries who have persevered and carved their own unique path to success and notoriety within their field.



## Hub Direct Grants

The Hub Direct Grant Program is an opportunity to support disproportionately impacted small businesses and entrepreneurs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the passage of a one-time appropriation using American Rescue Plan Act dollars to create and operate programs, funds were administered by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Hub Direct Grants provide comprehensive resources to small businesses and support their unique needs. The grant program aims to cultivate a more inclusive, accessible, and integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem for underserved small business owners by providing grant funding to support business operations or growth needs.





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STATE UNIVERSITY  
MUSKEGON  
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200 Viridian Drive  
Muskegon, Michigan 49440  
(616) 331-6900  
mihubinfo@gvsu.edu  
www.gvsu.edu/mihub



colaunch

## 2024 lakeshore innovator of the year



**Michael Gerstweiler**

This year's Lakeshore Innovator of the Year is "Pribusin" founder Michael Gerstweiler.

Led by Gerstweiler, Pribusin produces essential, but often overlooked industrial control equipment for wastewater management systems. The company recently introduced a cellular-based telemetry system with two-way control to address a key issue in the industry. Unlike cloud-based systems, Pribusin's innovation allows utilities to maintain control over water towers and pump stations during storms or power outages. This advancement enhances monitoring and ease of deployment for clients.

Beyond technology, Gerstweiler is committed to fostering the next generation of engineers. He actively mentors high school students, particularly in robotics, involving them in real projects like programming tasks for Pribusin. He emphasizes the importance of practical education, which is often lacking in schools.