

GREATER NILES

Chamber of Commerce

June 11, 2021

Buchanan City Commission

Sean Denison, Mayor

Mark Weedon, Mayor Pro Tem

Cameron Downey, Commissioner

Larry Money, Commissioner

Patrick Swem, Commissioner

Heather Grace, City Manager

Re: Partnership with the Greater Niles Chamber,

Dear Commissioners and Ms. Grace,

First, we want to thank you for the opportunity to share additional information with you about the partnership between the City of Buchanan and the Greater Niles Chamber. That partnership dates back to our days as the Southwest Michigan Economic Growth Alliance (SMEGA). Our principal role is to provide economic development related services on behalf of the city, as well as Bertrand Township, Niles Charter Township, and the City of Niles.

Generally, that means we are working on attracting new businesses, growing existing businesses, helping businesses start, marketing and promoting the area, improving the business climate, and connecting business with the resources they need to help them grow. We are often the first place a prospective business connects with, and we work hard to develop relationships with site selectors, real estate professionals, and company decision makers as they are thinking about where the best place is to grow! We believe southwest Michigan has a lot to offer, and we are excited to help sell it.

I understand that you plan to discuss this partnership more at your June 14, 2021. I am sorry I am unable to be there that evening, I will be out of town and unavailable. Should you want to have additional conversation at a future date, please let me know, I would love to come discuss the partnership further.

Just prior to the pandemic, we met with the Commission to discuss additional ways that the Chamber could assist with the marketing and promotion of the community. Because of COVID, we like everyone had to pivot and many plans were put on hold as the chief focus had to shift to helping existing businesses survive the economic crisis that accompanied the global health crisis. We are excited to have Ms. Grace as part of our Board leadership and we're hopeful that as the pandemic winds down we're again to meet regularly.

We are proud of the many things we were able to accomplish and I am excited to report on some of those here.

Public and Private Sector Partnership

I am proud to report that throughout the pandemic we have retained almost all public and private sector investment. Despite difficult times, businesses and our public sector partners have recognized

GREATER NILES

Chamber of Commerce

the need for the service we provide, first helping our businesses navigate the pandemic, and now catalyzing the economic recovery.

COVID-19 Emergency Relief Program

In 2020, the Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce organized the COVID-19 Emergency Relief Program (ERP), that distributed \$100,000 in business relief grants to help aid businesses weather the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. These were Greater Niles Chamber funds. 17 locally owned businesses received grants, four of which were Buchanan businesses, including: DPM Events, Pure Rituals, Redbud Fitness, and Union Coffee House.

Approximately 24% of grant recipients were from Buchanan, with a total \$24,628 distributed to Buchanan businesses, representing approximately 25% of the total ERP fund.

We are currently designing the next phase of COVID relief funds and are hoping to do a similar grant program in the coming months. We're also working with State and County partners on some additional funds to be made available to help those businesses/industries that have been hardest hit. We're hoping we'll be able to administer the distribution of some of those funds.

Manufacturing Days

Employers in our region have increasingly relied on us to help with their workforce needs. In 2020, the Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce, the South Bend Regional Chamber of Commerce, Berrien RESA, and MI Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren, worked together to bridge two prominent Manufacturing Day programs from Indiana and Michigan to premiere the new MFG Days event and resource toolbox. These community partners from across the region pivoted to shine a virtual spotlight on local manufacturers and illuminate pathways to the career opportunities they offer. For the first time, Manufacturing Day was not only featuring a new collaborative across state lines, it was presented in a new, digital format that extended the reach and inclusivity of the program to affect more educators, students, and parents.

Organizing partners created a robust landing page to house numerous resources available to educators, students, and community members alike, including:

- LIFT Network Career Exploration Videos: a collection of approximately nine carefully crafted career exploration videos showcasing local employers and their workforce.
- The Partner Video Library: a curated collection of manufacturing-related videos, highlighting varying careers in manufacturing, further education opportunities, and regional manufacturers and the products they make.
- Live Session Recordings: a collection of recorded zoom conversations with industry representatives on a diverse collection of topics.

GREATER NILES

Chamber of Commerce

- Career Pathway Pages: career overview pages that provide audiences a glimpse into in-demand manufacturing careers, highlighting educational requirements, general career tasks, average salaries, and more.
- PowerPoint Presentations: educational presentations on metal manufacturing, plastics manufacturing, and careers in advanced manufacturing,
- And other resources designed to aid educators in showcasing the manufacturing industry.

To date, the MFG Days resource toolbox has seen approximately **7,000** hits and the career exploration videos and the MFG Days live session recordings have been viewed **over a thousand** times. Following the event, **58%** of participating students reported to the Chambers in a post-event survey, a heightened interest in a career in manufacturing as a result of the program, and **89%** of students reported an increased understanding of advanced manufacturing. Additionally, **33%** of participating students also reported sharing the MFG Days information with a parent or guardian, sharing the resource toolbox beyond the classroom.

MFG Days is still available to students, educators, and the community at www.GreaterNilesChamber.com/MFGDays.

Building Trades Week

The Greater Niles and South Bend Regional Chambers' Building Trades Week Event (BLDG Trades Week), that took place in April, was modeled after the success of the [Chamber's 2020 Virtual Manufacturing Days](#), which to date, has connected industry and education/training partners with more than 4,000 high school students and educators, along with adult education students, parents, and the broader community.

BLDG Trades Week featured a virtual toolbox showcasing career opportunities in the building trades through resources such as live industry chats with area professionals, career pathway pages, a cultivated video library, and more!

This event has seen almost 3,000 hits across the region, with hundreds of views through the video library and live session recordings. Following the event, 42% of participants reports a new interest in the electrician career field, 36% reported a new interest in architecture or engineering, and 33% reported a new interest in electrical engineering. Additionally, 50% of students reported sharing their findings with a parent or guardian.

BLDG Trades Week is still available to students, educators, and the community at www.GreaterNilesChamber.com/BLDG2021.

GREATER NILES

Chamber of Commerce

Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce Visitor Guide & Business Directory

To help draw attention to the Niles-Buchanan region, the Greater Niles Chamber of Commerce produces the annual Chamber Visitor Guide & Business Directory. Over 4,000 copies of this distinguished magazine are distributed across Southwest Michigan and Northwest Indiana, including target market locations such as the South Bend International Airport, Michigan travel centers (in collaboration with MDOT), additional Chambers of Commerce, and a variety of other local businesses! Additionally, the Greater Niles Visitor Guide & Business Directory is provided to new residents and new visitors to our area so that they may find the best locations to eat, play, and shop!

The 2021 directory is set to premiere in mid-June and will be featuring a quality of place article featuring Buchanan's recent acknowledgment as the Nicest Place in America.

Business Attraction

Since the first of the year, our team has worked on 27 projects that have proposed more than \$15 billion in investment and have over 24,000 associated jobs. Our chief focus is landing those prospects in the area, and we spend a lot of time helping them get to know the region better and zeroing in on sites that meet their needs. Because of the proximity of the communities and the labor shed in the area, residents of virtually every city, town and township would benefit on those projects. We're happy to talk more about those efforts at any time.

As travel is opening, we are back on the road selling the region. This week for example, we have teams in two different locations in the Southeast meeting with site selectors and real estate professionals. Prior to the pandemic, we did 30 trips annually to 15 states to sell the region. We are anxious to get back to that work.

I am sorry for the length here, but I am afraid I've only scratched the surface. I hope it gives you a feel for some of the important work we have in our work plan, and we are hopeful for the opportunity to continuing working with you and the city team on how we can best meet the community needs.

If I can answer questions, or meet individually or collectively as a group, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at jeff@greaternileschamber.com or on my cell at 574-286-2660.

Sincerely,



Jeff Rea, President & CEO