



**West Michigan Regional Diversity Strategy  
Interview Case No: 001**

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**WMSA: What is the Diversity Policy for Cascade Engineering/Quest Sustainable Solutions?**

**KL:** Cascade Engineering has a Diversity Purpose Statement: To create a work environment in which every employee in the Cascade Family of Companies, regardless of cultural or individual differences, knows they are respected and valued as a human being. Quest is a business unit in the Cascade Family of Companies.

**WMSA: Why was it important to bring the Jim Crow traveling museum to West Michigan?**

**KL:** Bringing the Jim Crow traveling museum is part of a broader initiative. Cascade has a Diversity Coordinating Council, which serves as the conscience of the company around diversity and inclusion. They help drive the purpose statement. Cascade has many initiatives to increase employee involvement, create diversity champions in the company, and broaden the learning and understanding of our employees and community. Originally, we were going to bring the museum to our employees, but because of our commitment as a community member we decided to offer a workshop through Quest Sustainable Solutions where people can experience the museum and then spend time working on a plan to enhance their diversity program. We then thought we would have a reception for the community to visit the museum and hear Fred Keller speak about why Cascade thought it was important to bring the museum to our company and our community. All Cascade employees will go through the museum as it replaces our monthly shift meeting. We will have a learning session to go along with it. We hope our community partners will be interested in attending the museum and it will lead to continued dialogue.

**WMSA: How do you think this exhibit (Jim Crow) will influence the public?**

**KL:** I think those who take the time to attend will learn things about racism and discrimination that they were not exposed to in the past. It will start to open their mind as to why there is still not a level playing field for everyone and how discrimination is sometimes part of the norm. I hope the public will be interested in having a dialogue about how Jim Crow influences our actions today and what we can do to negate the long term effects of Jim Crow.

**WMSA: What do you hope attendees to the exhibit will walk away with?**

**KL:** An open mind to think about the lasting effects of Jim Crow on our society today and that we need to do to be a more inclusive society. It would be great if they could also have a changed heart – a desire to create a more inclusive society. Be part of the solution to this very important challenge.

**WMSA: Do you feel West Michigan has made strides in the past 5-years when it comes to dealing with issues centered on diversity and racism?**

**KL:** I think there are pockets of change but I do not believe collectively we have made strides. In the business community it is not hard to attend a meeting internally or externally and see that things have not changed. If you talk to people who are doing diversity work in the community or in business, my experience is that strides have not been made. We still lose diverse talent because we have not learned how to be open and inclusive. That is my opinion and a question I think better posed to those who would be impacted by our community making strides. I wish that I had those answers but do not. We need to ask those who are personally impacted.

**WMSA: What are our region's strongest assets when it comes to diversity?**

**KL:** A community that truly cares about people. A business community that is willing to get involved in issues.

**WMSA: Where do you feel we need to improve?**

**KL:** We need to be willing to admit that there has been and still is racism in our community. Some of our denial is unconscious and some of it is conscious. We need to make it a priority. We need to clearly state what change needs to happen and then work together to make it happen.

Business has a great opportunity to make an impact in our community. So do our schools. If we have business leaders who model our desired outcome and place expectations in their organizations we can change many hearts and minds. Many of our early educational institutions are operating in crisis mode. It is hard to talk about addressing racism and inclusion when you are just trying to survive.

**WMSA: Is West Michigan ready for an in-depth (frank) discussion when it comes to recognizing and dealing with diversity and racism as it affects our region?**

**KL:** I think West Michigan leaders are ready – I am just not sure if they are willing at this time. Like many initiatives, it has to have support from those in the community who have the power to create change. I am moved by grass roots efforts, but because we need to really challenge our paradigms and understand that there have been great injustices that are still being felt into this generation, we need business and community leaders to come together and help create the future state for our region around eradicating racism and create genuine and purposeful actions, to make sure everyone is given similar opportunities.

I think we have the ability. We have a lot of smart people who really care. I think we are ready. I am just hoping we are willing. Because that is what it is going to take. We have all the resources. We have diversity training (i.e. *Institutes for Healing Racism*). We know how to come together around an issue or a challenge. But it will take will. Will we do it because we are losing talent; because we cannot attract talent? Will we do it because it is the right thing to do?

I think Jim Crow is an example of continued effort to bring awareness. What we recognize at Cascade is that each time we do this more people understand how important and valuable it is to create a society in which everyone person, regardless of cultural or individual differences, knows they are respected and valued as a human being. And everyone is treated as such.

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