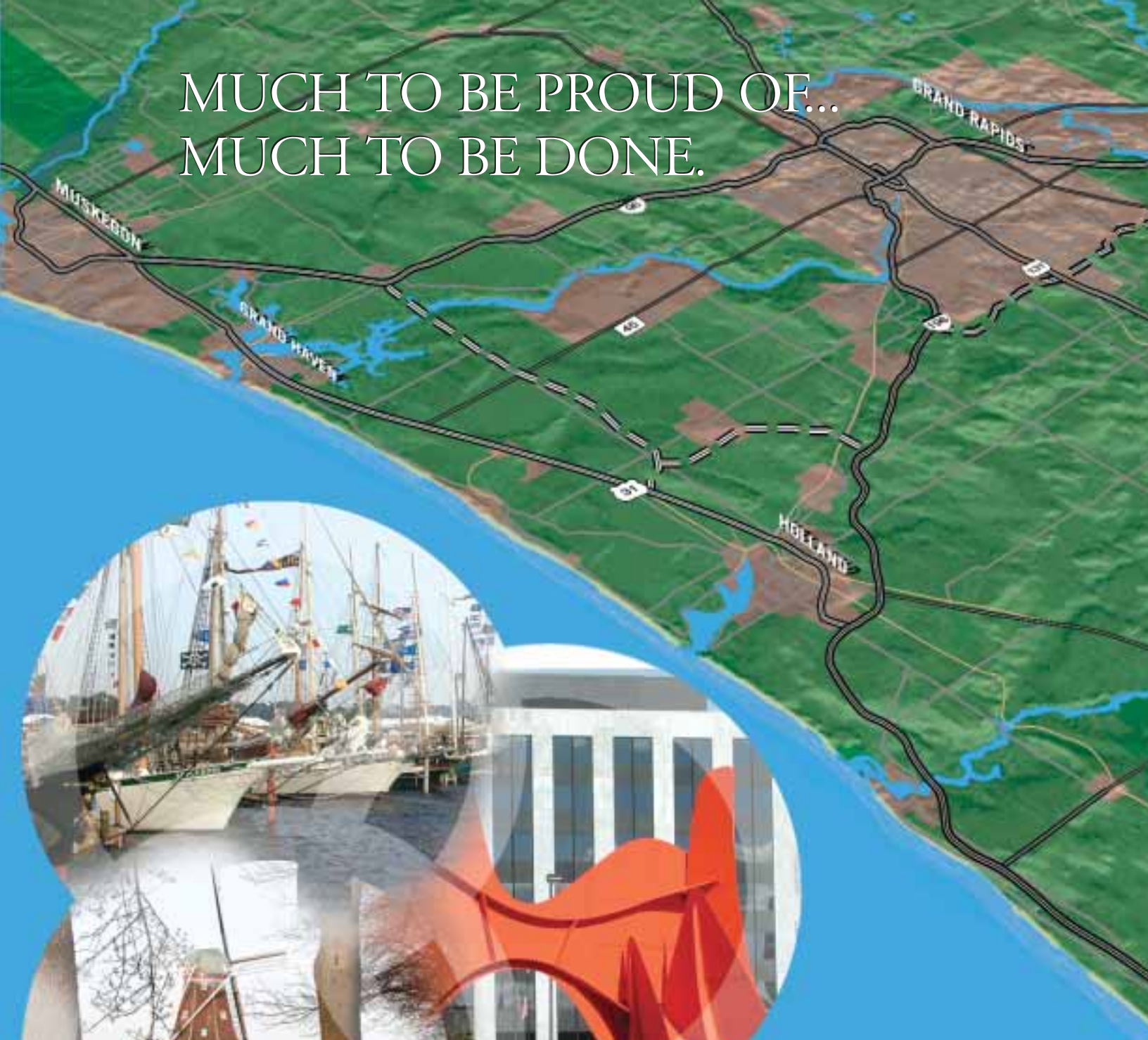


MUCH TO BE PROUD OF...  
MUCH TO BE DONE.



REGIONAL REPORT 2002-2003

developed by the



WEST MICHIGAN  
**STRATEGIC  
ALLIANCE**

*Collaborating to secure our future*



**MISSION**

The mission of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance is to be a catalyst for regional collaboration.

**VISION**

Our vision for West Michigan is to be the best place in the Midwest to live, work and play.

- Create a Regional Mindset
- Foster a Prosperous Economy
- Strengthen Community Through Diversity
- Ensure a Sustainable Environment
- Revitalize Our Urban Centers
- Develop A Tri-plex Growth Strategy

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**To the West Michigan Community:**

Over the past three years, the West Michigan Strategic Alliance has provided a forum for government, business and institutional leaders to share ideas and concerns about the future of our region. Hundreds of men and women from the greater Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Grand Haven and Holland area have participated in this comprehensive long-range strategic planning process. The Alliance has gathered objective data and information that serves as a valuable resource for decision makers. We have encouraged dialogue and shared learning among regional stakeholders with diverse perspectives.

Participants have expressed a common vision for West Michigan as the best place to live, work and play—a place with distinctive, livable, sustainable communities that balance economic prosperity, environmental integrity and social justice.

In August 2002, we published *The Common Framework: Information and Maps for Decision Makers*, a snapshot of West Michigan that can be used as a tool to create shared understanding about our region. *The Common Framework* identifies six Priorities for Regional Collaboration—areas where effort and resources can be pooled for mutual benefit. Over the past year, many organizations and individuals have worked toward tangible action that addresses these priorities.

We are gratified that West Michigan is embracing this spirit of cooperation. We are witnessing many examples of regional collaboration among organizations and across government, business and institutional sectors. We invite you to review this report, which highlights several of these exciting new initiatives.

The Alliance has worked diligently to fulfill its roles as catalyst and convener, while encouraging groups to govern and control their own future. Much has been accomplished... Much is yet to be done!

On behalf of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance Board of Directors,

Jim Brooks, *Chair*

Jay Peters, *Executive Director*

# priority

## Create A

*West Michigan is in global competition for survival and prosperity. We must learn to think like an interactive and interdependent region before people and organizations can be expected to act like a region.*

*"The partnering that took place between Muskegon County and sponsors from around the Tri-plex to produce the Huntington Harborfest Tall Ships Challenge was a wonderful example of regional cooperation to bring an event of this magnitude and the attention that it generates, to West Michigan."*

**Jim Dunlap**

*West Michigan Regional President  
Huntington National Bank*

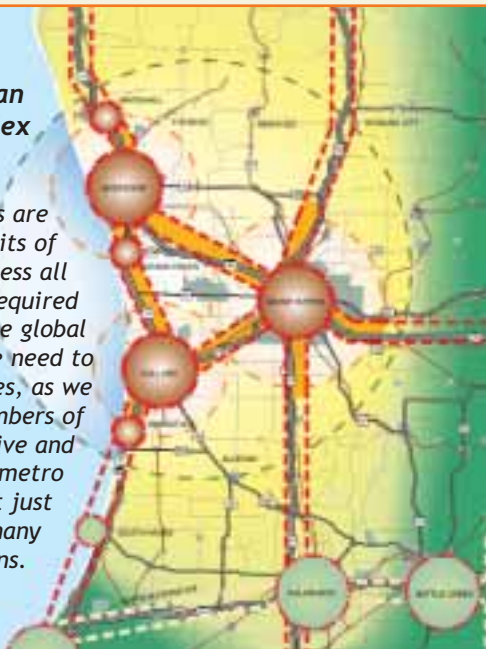


### CHANGING HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES *One Mind At A Time*

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance consistently brings together people from government, business and institutions throughout the West Michigan region. Because of our inclusive approach and unique, impartial facilitator role in the region, the Alliance is building a foundation of credibility and trust.

#### **The West Michigan Metro Tri-plex**

*Regions are the smallest units of community that possess all of the resources required to compete in the global market place. We need to see ourselves, as we really are—members of an interactive and interdependent metro community, not just residents of many separate jurisdictions.*



**Since the publication of *The Common Framework* in August of 2002, the Alliance has:**

- Conducted interactive presentations attended by thousands of interested citizens and community leaders from throughout the region.
- Distributed more than 13,000 copies of *The Common Framework* to decision makers throughout West Michigan.
- Established a Communications Committee to guide communications and mass media strategies that promote broad public awareness and understanding.
- Created a dynamic website to be used as a powerful communications tool. The site provides the community with an opportunity to participate via an on-line discussion board.

[www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)

# Regional Mindset

## DEVELOPING REGIONAL LEADERS

### *Leadership West Michigan*

Leadership West Michigan is a collaborative program of the Chambers of Commerce of Grand Rapids, Holland, Muskegon, their respective leadership programs and the West Michigan Strategic Alliance. It is the “next step” in community-based leadership programs, in this case focused not on a single community but rather on a regional understanding of West Michigan as a globally competitive area.

Leadership West Michigan’s curriculum is based on *The Common Framework* produced by the Alliance. In seven, day-long sessions, participants interact with a rich variety of national, regional and local experts exploring the interrelated systems, challenges and issues that define West Michigan.

#### **Leadership West Michigan seeks to:**

- Create a regional mindset among leaders.
- Sharpen skills that enable participants to affect the development of regional collaboration.
- Increase awareness of regional resources, issues and opportunities.
- Develop networks of diverse decision makers to encourage cooperation and to make informed choices.
- Inspire commitment to serve the West Michigan region.

[www.leadershipwestmichigan.org](http://www.leadershipwestmichigan.org)

*“The creation of *The Common Framework* by the Strategic Alliance gave us an incredible resource for developing our curriculum. It will be the first piece of required reading.”*

**Kathleen Ponitz**  
*Chairperson, Leadership West Michigan*  
*Senior Vice President, Progressive AE*



## DEVELOPING A REGIONAL IDENTITY

### *Michigan’s West Coast*

The new regional brand identity, *Michigan’s West Coast*, was developed to capitalize on our region’s diverse, accessible, culturally rich blend of resources found in Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Grand Haven, and Holland. The combined assets of the region—all the services and amenities of a million plus metro combined with the scenic beauty and recreational opportunities of a resort community—make *Michigan’s West Coast* an attractive tourism destination, highly differentiated from its competitors. The effort seeks to promote local communities with distinct characters through a complementary rather than competitive approach.

The primary motivation for the *Michigan’s West Coast* branding effort is clearly economic—to increase tourism and convention business throughout the region—but it also plays an important role in building a regional mindset among the area’s 1.1 million residents.

[www.michiganswestcoast.com](http://www.michiganswestcoast.com)

*“The Alliance served as a “neutral convener” as the Convention and Visitors Bureaus from around the region worked together to develop a process and organizational structure that fosters win/win collaboration.”*

**Joann Hatch**  
*Tourism Development Director*  
*Muskegon County Convention*  
*& Visitors Bureau*





# Foster A

*Our regional economy generates many of the resources we use to enhance our quality of life. Given the new global competitive forces at work today, acting as a region is imperative.*

## COLLABORATION VS. COMPETITION *West Michigan Economic Development Partnership (WMEDP)*



The economic development professionals of Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon and Allegan Counties have come together in a partnership to foster regional cooperation, collaboration and communication to meet the economic development goals of West Michigan. This action is reflective of a key trend in the delivery of economic development programs, the growth of regionalism.

The Partnership's first initiative is the development of an Internet site. In today's marketplace, websites have come to the forefront in the process of site selection for economic development. The website will be robust and data-rich, with information that decision makers seek. This type of website reflects the best practices and trends in the field of economic development. Work is underway to secure funding for the WMEDP website.

The current WMEDP members are: The Allegan County Economic Development Alliance, Muskegon Area First, Ottawa County Economic Development Office, Inc, The Right Place, Inc., Holland Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg, Consumers Energy, Inc., and Whittaker Associates, Inc.

An invitation to join the Partnership has been extended to the economic development professionals of Newaygo, Barry and Ionia counties. Others with an active interest in working with the region's ED professionals should contact WMEDP.

[jgnorthrup@cmsenergy.com](mailto:jgnorthrup@cmsenergy.com)

*"We expect our work will reinforce and complement the Michigan's West Coast branding initiative and tourism marketing campaign. This is the kind of natural synergy the West Michigan Strategic Alliance has helped to foster and illustrates the power of regional cooperation."*

**Greg Northrup**  
Chair, WMEDP  
Director Economic Development -  
Special Projects  
Consumers Energy, Inc.



# Prosperous Economy

## PARTICIPATING IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY *West Michigan Broadband Coalition*

High-speed telecommunication capability is essential to the future of our region's economy. Access to broadband is an important foundation for business, education, and community development.

Plans are underway to form a Broadband Coalition with representation from seven West Michigan counties (Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Muskegon, Newaygo and Ottawa.) The Coalition will play a vital role in promoting and maintaining the broadband connectivity plans developed by the LinkMichigan Projects. It will also facilitate collaborative efforts to establish a broadband infrastructure, provide information/education, and aggregate demand.

[hoagr@iserv.net](mailto:hoagr@iserv.net)

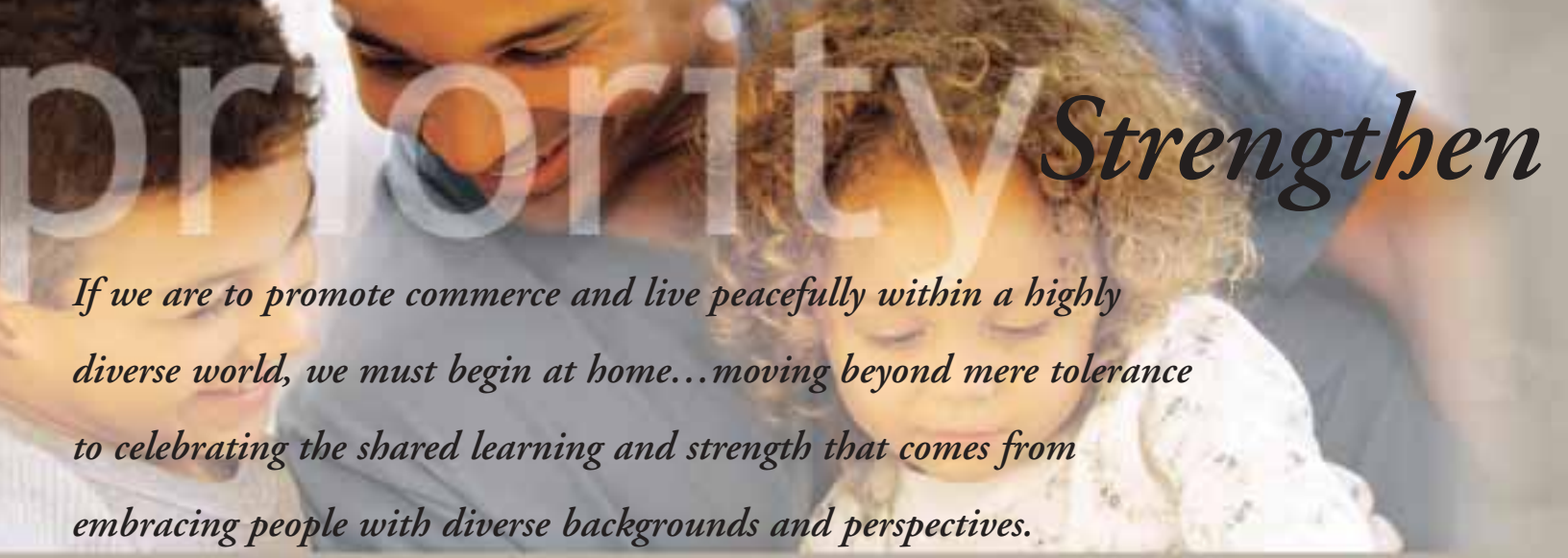
*"Businesses already know the value of regional thinking; that is why competitors cluster in one location, local supplier networks are created and chambers of commerce formed. In many respects, regional planning is simply the public sector following the lead of the private sector."*

**George Erickcek**  
*Senior Regional Analyst*  
Upjohn Institute



### LINK MICHIGAN

*Link Michigan is a state sponsored study to assess the capabilities of broadband infrastructure throughout Michigan. The Alliance helped the West Michigan counties of Ottawa, Muskegon, Barry, Ionia and Kent work together on this planning phase. The Broadband Coalition will build on the momentum, activities and relationships established through the LinkMichigan Projects.*



# Strengthen

*If we are to promote commerce and live peacefully within a highly diverse world, we must begin at home...moving beyond mere tolerance to celebrating the shared learning and strength that comes from embracing people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.*

## EMBRACING DIVERSITY *Strategic Alliance Diversity Task Force*

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance Diversity Task Force works to ensure that the leadership and support network for all Alliance activities includes people who reflect our region's diverse population.

### **Specific Diversity Task Force activities proposed include:**

- Ensuring that sensitivity to diversity issues is woven into all Alliance activities.
- Investigating the best practices used in other areas of the country related to making diversity strength.
- Inventorying and understanding the purpose and goals of the diversity related organizations in the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex and encouraging collaboration when appropriate.

[www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)

*"This Task Force is committed to the most inclusive discussion of diversity at all levels of the Alliance's work. Our region is only as strong as our weakest link."*

**Margaret Sellers Walker**  
*Associate Director*

Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership,  
Grand Valley State University



*"We need more than tolerance. We need a culture of acceptance. None of us wants to live in a place where we are simply tolerated. But we do want to be where we are fully accepted, valued, and even celebrated."*

**Dean Whittaker**  
*President*  
Whittaker Associates



## THE ECONOMICS OF DIVERSITY *The Creative Class*

Dr. Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of The Creative Class*, puts forth a new theory for economic development: "Regional economic growth is powered by creative people, who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas."

A convergence of diverse perspectives is the key to creativity and innovation. Without new thoughts and ideas our economy will become stale, shrivel and die. Embracing diversity is both a moral issue and a vital economic necessity.



# Community Through Diversity

## LEARNING TO EMBRACE DIFFERENCES *Institutes for Healing Racism*

Institutes for Healing Racism are being conducted throughout the West Michigan Tri-plex. They are designed to provide participants with a transformative experience geared to set a course for healing racism in their own lives. The Institutes are carried out in an atmosphere of caring, sharing and exploring new information, which allows participants to feel safe, help clarify misinformation, dispel fears and break down barriers to understanding true community.

### Existing programs include:

- The Employers' Coalition for Healing Racism of the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce  
[www.grandrapids.org](http://www.grandrapids.org)
- The Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism  
[www.graceoffice.org](http://www.graceoffice.org)
- The Institute for Healing Racism  
– Grand Rapids **616.735.0552**
- The Institute for the Healing of Racism  
– Lakeshore Area  
[www.ethnicdiversity.org](http://www.ethnicdiversity.org)
- The Institute for Healing Racism  
– Muskegon **231.727.6005**
- Institute for Healing Racism  
– Wedgwood Christian Services **616.831.5581**
- Woodrick Institute for the Study of Racism and Diversity at Aquinas College  
[www.woodrickinstitute.org](http://www.woodrickinstitute.org)

*"The community and businesses in particular, need to move beyond compliance, arriving at a desire to value differences and to unconsciously demonstrate respect of all human beings. While many businesses are already recognizing the value that diversity brings in creativity and innovation, there is still a lot of work ahead."*

**Fred P. Keller**  
*Chairman and CEO*  
Cascade Engineering



## MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS *Person to Person*

While no single regional effort is underway to create networking opportunities for our increasingly diverse business community, the anchor communities of Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon are each establishing gatherings to expand social and professional relationships.

### **M.A.P. Program**

The Multiracial Association of Professionals (MAP) grew out of numerous conversations among professionals of color in the Grand Rapids area. It is an intentional effort to assist those entering the community, as well as those already here, to connect to the many wonderful people and resources that exist in the West Michigan community.

[www.maponline.org](http://www.maponline.org)

### **A Networking Affair**

Recognizing the growing diversity in the Muskegon business community, the Community Foundation for Muskegon County and the Urban League of Greater Muskegon have partnered to promote improved networking opportunities with an emphasis on gathering young, professional people of color. A Networking Affair takes place on the last Thursday of each month.

[aboezaart@cffmc.org](mailto:aboezaart@cffmc.org)

### **Connections**

The Holland Area Chamber of Commerce has created Chamber Connections to host social events that facilitate networking between those new to the area and representatives of Holland's multicultural community.

[www.holland-chamber.org](http://www.holland-chamber.org)

# Revitalize

*Migration of business and higher-income families away from our central cities and our tendency to segregate by race and class put a huge stress on our urban centers. If we are to achieve our vision for West Michigan, all of our communities must be great places where people want to live, work, learn, shop and play.*

## LIVABLE, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES Our Urban Centers

The Alliance Urban Center Revitalization (UCR) Task Force believes that all residents of our urban centers deserve to be safe, healthy and economically self-sufficient, with options for affordable housing, employment, healthcare, public transportation, education, cultural activities and greenspace. The UCR Task Force's focus is on the data collection, research and planning necessary to create a plan for comprehensive regional action.

The UCR Task Force accomplished the following in 2002-2003, with the help of the Community Research Institute at GVSU and the Community Leadership Institute at Aquinas College:

- Profiled thirty-six revitalization initiatives currently underway in the urban centers of the Grand Rapids area, Muskegon and Holland.

- Used the National Issues Forum method to gather diverse input on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing our urban centers at three community sessions—one each in Holland, Muskegon and Grand Rapids.
- Performed a two-phase literature search, to draw comparisons and contrasts with “best practices” from around the country.
- Identified Key Result Areas and prepared an initial draft of strategies to address these areas.

Successful urban revitalization cannot be accomplished by any one sector acting alone. It requires partnering by government, business and institutions from throughout the West Michigan Tri-plex.

[www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)

*“Each urban center in our region has many important revitalization initiatives underway. Our commitment is to connect these initiatives, promote shared learning and move forward together to create a comprehensive action program for each of our urban centers.”*

**Penny Pestle**

*Facilitator, UCR Task Force  
Director, The Delta Strategy*



# Our Urban Centers

*"Historically, urban revitalization has been seen as a city problem. In reality, the central city is impacted by policies and decisions made outside our jurisdiction. It's becoming more and more evident that this discussion needs to take place at the regional level."*

**Soren Wolff**  
*City Manager*  
City of Holland



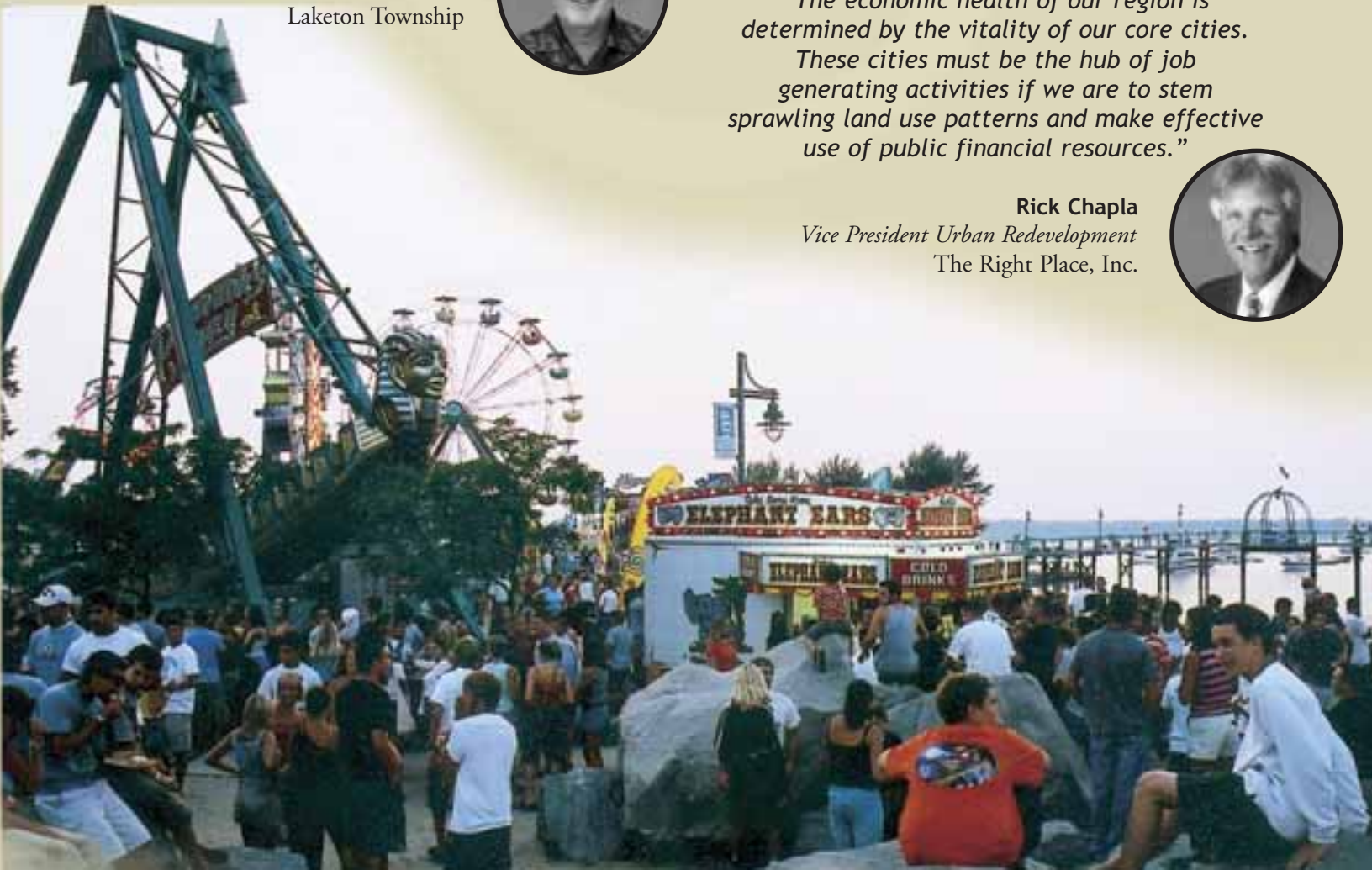
*"Revitalizing our urban centers will enhance the lives and economics of urban center residents as well as those in surrounding towns, townships and rural areas."*

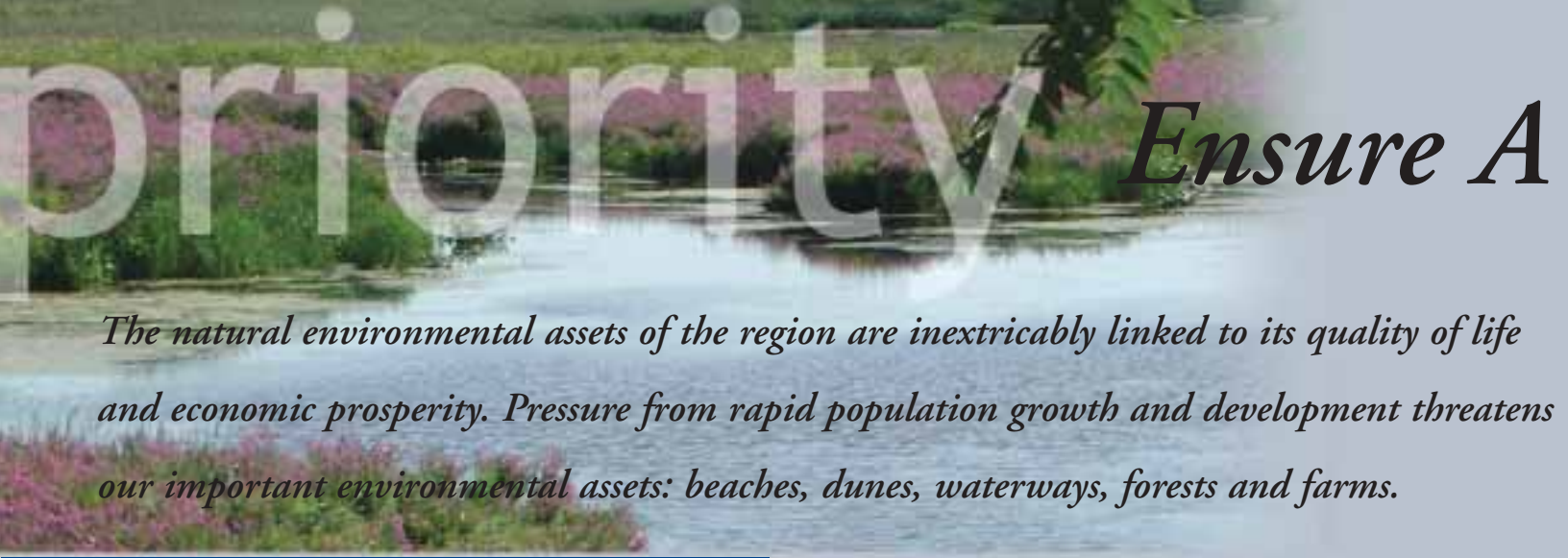
**Roland Crummel**  
*Township Supervisor*  
Laketon Township



*"The economic health of our region is determined by the vitality of our core cities. These cities must be the hub of job generating activities if we are to stem sprawling land use patterns and make effective use of public financial resources."*

**Rick Chapla**  
*Vice President Urban Redevelopment*  
The Right Place, Inc.





# Ensure A

*The natural environmental assets of the region are inextricably linked to its quality of life and economic prosperity. Pressure from rapid population growth and development threatens our important environmental assets: beaches, dunes, waterways, forests and farms.*

## WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY **Green Infrastructure Task Force**

A regional Green Infrastructure Task Force seeks to define a 25-year vision for green infrastructure in West Michigan supported by five and one-year action plans. The Alliance convened this Task Force.

### **In 2002-2003 the Task Force:**

- Held a series of public input sessions in Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon, providing insights about regional environmental activities.
- Produced a report on national best practices: "Analysis of Initiatives and Best Practices for Regional Green Infrastructure Visioning and Policy Setting."
- Compiled an inventory of environmental initiatives currently underway in the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex.

The Task Force encourages communities to invest in a green infrastructure just as they routinely invest in the gray infrastructure of roads, water lines, and sewers to accommodate our growth. Identifying ways to preserve the green infrastructure is the focus of the Task Force. Their recommendations are scheduled for release in November 2003.

[www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)

*"It is exciting to experience what a dedicated group of citizens can do for the future of our most precious environmental assets. Ensuring our quality of life depends on a proactive regional effort."*

**Lynn Kotecki**  
*Tri-Chair, Green Infrastructure Task Force  
Vice President Lakeshore  
Group Corporate Banking,  
Huntington National Bank*



## SEEING THE BIG PICTURE **Comprehensive Information System**

The possibility of connecting the existing geographic information systems (GIS) for the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex has implications for all of the "Priorities for Regional Collaboration" identified in *The Common Framework*.

To further the work of the Green Infrastructure Task Force, the Annis Water Resources Institute of Grand Valley State University is reviewing the compatibility of GIS systems in the region and offering recommendations on how a region-wide system might share mutually beneficial information.

[kochesj@gvsu.edu](mailto:kochesj@gvsu.edu)

## POOLING OUR KNOWLEDGE **Watershed Coordination**

In July 2003, the Alliance, working in conjunction with the Community Foundation for Muskegon County and the Department of Environmental Quality, convened a meeting of representatives of all 20 watersheds in West Michigan. Participants valued the opportunity to discuss current best watershed practices, identify critical issues and needs as well as explore the possibility of future regional watershed coordination.

[aboeraard@cffmc.org](mailto:aboeraard@cffmc.org)

# Sustainable Environment



## CREATE A TRAIL NETWORK

### *West Michigan Trails/Greenways Coalition*

The West Michigan Trails/Greenways Coalition's purpose is to provide regional coordination among trail and greenway supporters and local units of government and to develop a regional trails/greenways network. This 40-plus-member partnership project was initiated by the Timberland Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, Inc. Their goal is to expand the 152 miles of existing trails with another 500 miles. The resulting network will connect communities around West Michigan with natural areas and parks, historic landmarks, cultural venues, civic destinations and water-based resources.

Currently, the Coalition is undertaking a Feasibility Study to determine the level of community support available for a \$90 million public/private campaign to complete the 500 miles of trails needed to connect the network.

[phil.dakin@mi.usda.gov](mailto:phil.dakin@mi.usda.gov)

## LEAVING A LEGACY

### *Denison Property Aquisition*

The insights contained in *The Common Framework* and amplified by the Green Infrastructure Task Force confirm that the region's Lake Michigan shoreline is one of our most distinctive and valuable assets. There are very few undeveloped stretches left.

Situated with the City of Saugatuck's Oval Beach on the south and the Saugatuck Dunes State Park on the north lies of one of the last, large stretches of privately-owned, relatively undeveloped Lake Michigan shoreline in lower Michigan. The one-mile stretch known as the Denison property encompasses the mouth of the Kalamazoo River and 413 acres of property with exceptional natural, scenic, recreational and economic (tourism) values.

With Alliance support, a major regional effort lead by the Land Conservency of West Michigan is underway to secure this land for public access and preservation.

[www.naturenearby.org](http://www.naturenearby.org)

*"The Alliance is helping to focus the attention of people from all around West Michigan on the importance of preserving the unspoiled section of the lakeshore known as the Denison property. It's a legacy for future generations."*

**Patty Birkholz**  
Michigan State Senator



# Priority Develop A

*If current trends and fragmented planning practices continue, our West Michigan Tri-plex will eventually become “Los Angeles on the Lake” with congested roads, polluted air and water and dramatic loss of green space and overall quality of life. Our governments, businesses and institutions must work together to develop a common long-range vision, guiding principles and coordinated action that manage growth in a sustainable manner.*

*“If all of us in West Michigan make the Strategic Alliance objectives our own objectives, we have a bright future.”*

**Arend D. Lubbers**  
*Chair, Tri-plex Growth Strategy Retreat  
President Emeritus  
Grand Valley State University*



## WILL WE BECOME LOS ANGELES ON THE LAKE? *A Tri-Plex Growth Strategy*

Region-wide plans for land use, transportation and infrastructure will take time to develop and implement. This can be done without compromising local decision control. But certain actions—such as restoring a watershed or designing the regional framework for a transportation system—cannot be accomplished by any single business, institution or governmental unit. These must be shared decisions that align resources in support of mutually beneficial goals.

**During 2003, the Alliance used the formation of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council (MLULC) as an opportunity to convene more than 80 stakeholders representing diverse perspectives throughout our region to:**

- Discuss current development trends in West Michigan and the negative unintended consequences.
- Provide West Michigan’s perspectives to the MLULC.
- Identify important issues that must be addressed collaboratively to create a Tri-plex growth strategy that earns broad community support.

Ultimately, the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council made a potentially important contribution to the development of a Tri-plex growth strategy by:

- Reviewing best practices used in the state and nation.
- Creating a strategic land use vision for Michigan.
- Establishing guiding principles for land based industries, revitalizing central cities, infrastructure/public services, and planning/regulation.
- Making recommendations for State legislative and regulatory action.

In 2003-2004, the Alliance will again convene regional stakeholders to review the MLULC report and continue the process of developing a long-term growth strategy for West Michigan.

[www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)

# Tri-Plex Growth Strategy

## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

### *Sub-Regional Planning Alliances*

The Grand Valley Metro Council is forming sub-regional planning alliances to look at land use planning in a different way. These alliances are groups of local governmental jurisdictions that come together based upon a unique role or place in the metropolitan region to plan jointly for their future.

For example, the Southbelt Planning Alliance brings together all the local government authorities that are directly responsible for land use and planning decisions close to the new M-6/Paul B. Henry Freeway on the south side of the Grand Rapids metro area. Other sub-regional groups include a high-value watershed, an unique agricultural area, and an urban services area.

There is a great need for local government authorities to share perspectives, information and administration of certain important cross-jurisdiction land use changes. Coming together in logical groups helps give local jurisdictions a wider perspective on these important issues.

[www.gvmc.org](http://www.gvmc.org)

*“At GVMC we feel that this sub-regional planning approach will allow for just the right amount of local autonomy, neighborhood input, and regional networking to bring about a much needed new way of looking at ourselves and how we grow.”*

**Andy Bowman**  
*Planning Director*  
Grand Valley Metro Council



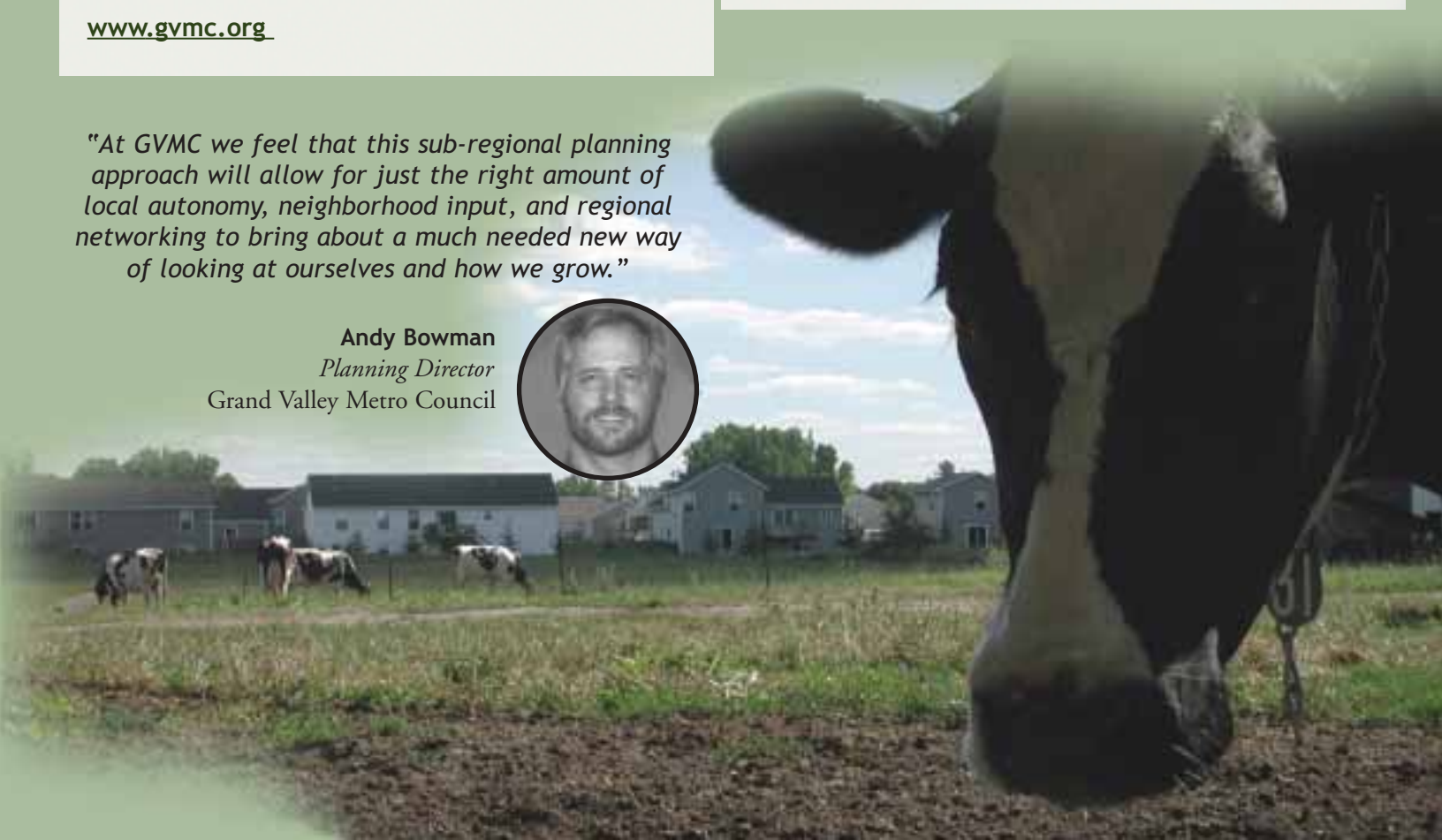
## WILL YOU STILL WANT TO LIVE HERE IN 20 YEARS? *Muskegon Area-Wide Plan*

The Muskegon Area-wide Plan (MAP) is a unique partnership of local governments, citizens, business leaders, and policy-makers working together to create a vision and strategy to guide future growth and development in Muskegon County.

Fourteen Muskegon County townships, seven cities and two villages are participating in the MAP project, which is being coordinated by the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission.

MAP is a grass roots process designed to produce a Countywide Land Use Plan, so that future community development can occur in a more cooperative and unified fashion.

[www.wmsrdc.org](http://www.wmsrdc.org)



visit our website

[www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)



WEST MICHIGAN  
**STRATEGIC**  
**ALLIANCE**

*Collaborating to secure our future*

Phone: 616-494-9202

FAX: 616-494-0460

Email: [info@wm-alliance.org](mailto:info@wm-alliance.org)

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