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### FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



## Looking Back, Looking Ahead

By Joe Sobieralski  
President & CEO

The weather has begun to get colder, meaning the year is almost over. As I look back over the past year and take stock, I am in awe of all that this organization has accomplished.

- Work on The Milton building downtown is nearing completion and the first residents will soon move in.
- The Record Box is opening, with many holiday parties scheduled in December. Coworking space Collab BC will soon follow, with Handmap Brewing soon behind.
- The Battle Creek Real Estate Improvement Fund is helping to bring more new businesses downtown. The first successful applicants have been announced and more announcements will be coming in the following weeks and months.
- Northern Initiatives and the Small Business Loan Fund continue to work with entrepreneurs looking to grow in Battle Creek.
- Grand Valley State University opened its outreach center downtown in November to help get more local students into college.
- We have a full pipeline of companies considering expansions in the Fort Custer Industrial Park. Just last week, we had two different companies in town for site visits.
- BCU continues to push ahead with the Tiger Room and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) initiatives, two transformative projects which will have a wide reaching impact on the community.
- Work continues at WACO/Dimor and the WMU College of Aviation, both at the airport.
- Planning is underway for the 2020 Economic Outlook, scheduled for February 18.

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## Battle Creek Chosen by Japan Foundation for Gen-J Trip

In late September, the City of Battle Creek was selected to participate in the Grassroots Exchange Network-Japan (GEN-J) Invitation Program. Battle Creek is home to 19 Japanese manufacturers and has had a long-standing sister-city relationship with Takasaki (Gunma Prefecture) since 1991. The city was nominated for the program by the Japanese Consulate in Detroit.

Battle Creek Mayor Mark Behnke, City Manager Rebecca Fleury, and BCU President & CEO Joe Sobieralski represented the city. While Mr. Sobieralski had visited Japan several times before, this was the first visit for the mayor and city manager.

The program was sponsored by the Japan Foundation, which seeks to cultivate friendship and cultural understanding between Japan and the rest of the world. The group from Battle Creek departed on Sunday, October 27 and returned on Saturday, November 2.

Ms. Fleury remarked that she was honored for the city to be among the communities invited to participate by the Japan Foundation. Upon arriving in Tokyo, she was struck by Tokyo's beauty and cleanliness, which is home to over 37 million people.

Along with Battle Creek, 27 other officials from several states took part in the program, representing Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.

During the week, the group met with representatives from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Keidanren (the Japan Business Federation), and the Kariya Chamber of Commerce. During their meetings, the group learned about the Japanese government, the role of the emperor, parliament, and the prime minister. They learned about Japan's efforts to strengthen relationships with international partners and the role of foreign direct investment in Japan.

See "Battle Creek Chosen" on page 3



The Battle Creek delegation pose at DENSO headquarters.

### SAVE THE DATE:

## Economic Outlook set for February 18

BCU will hold its 2020 Economic Outlook on Tuesday, February 18. Join BCU and more than 200 local business, government, and community leaders for BCU's signature event of the year.

BCU's President & CEO Joe Sobieralski will provide an update on activities in 2019, including efforts downtown. Jim Robey of the W.E. Upjohn Institute will review regional, state, and national industry trends as they relate to Battle Creek and

Southwest Michigan, providing employment projections and an overall economic forecast for our area.

The event will be held at the Kellogg Arena. Registration will begin at 7:00 AM, with presentations to begin at 7:30 AM. The event is free of charge, but advance registration is required. Online registration will begin in January. We look forward to seeing you there.

## Downtown Progress

The conditions outside may be cooling down, but the Downtown Battle Creek Real Estate Improvement Fund is heating up. Three recipients – LKV Ventures, JPG Resources/Café Rica, and Umami Ramen – have already started their respective downtown projects. Announcements for other program recipients will follow in the coming weeks and months.

BCU announced the \$2 million fund back in late June, which was made possible through the generosity of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). Program dollars – up to \$250,000 per applicant and capped at 40 percent of total project cost – go toward real property and fixed assets which will allow the investments to stay with the downtown buildings for years to come.

The Real Estate Improvement Fund was created in response to barriers for existing and prospective businesses and property owners. In addition to eligible activities, program qualifications require projects to meet at least one of four charitable criteria: affordable housing; temporary/permanent jobs for low-to-moderate-income individuals; historical preservation; and minority-or women-owned businesses.

LKV Ventures was awarded \$240,508 for its plans to rehabilitate 70 E. Michigan Avenue, former home to The Hair Shed. Sarah and Jeff Versical, who founded LKV Ventures and own the building, are creating a mix of affordable housing and market-rate apartments on the second and third floors. They are also renovating the ground floor to accommodate a retail or professional service tenant. Construction is anticipated to begin before the holidays.

A couple doors down, JPG Resources was granted \$208,618 for the buildout of its storefront suite, which will house future anchor tenant Café Rica. JPG Resources, which owns 62 E. Michigan Avenue, will also address the facility's fire suppression system. The food and beverage consulting firm already occupies office space at the facility; it will also move more jobs there in the coming months.

Café Rica, founded in 2016 by brothers Tristan and Jackson Bredehoft, has become a known local brand. Currently, the coffemaker is situated in a downtown incubator space a few blocks from its future permanent home. Taking advantage of a larger space and further capabilities, Café Rica plans to expand its menu offerings in food and beverage alike.

Across downtown at 215 W. Michigan Avenue, existing local staple Umami Ramen has been awarded a \$250,000 grant to relocate its operations. The move will allow the restaurateur, whose current location is routinely packed, to grow its business – and be more centrally located. In addition to more seating, Umami Ramen plans for an outdoor patio, and a small stage for various performances and entertainment. Peecoon and Lance Allen, owners of Umami Ramen, also hope to expand hours of operation.

As other Real Estate Improvement Fund recipients progress with their due diligence and begin project execution, BCU will keep issuing updates on the program's announcements and results. BCU also continues to accept new applications. To learn more about this program, contact Adam Reid at 269-962-7526 or by email at [bcrealestatefund@bcunlimited.org](mailto:bcrealestatefund@bcunlimited.org).

## Tom Davis of Prairie Farms Retires

BCU congratulates Tom Davis on his recent retirement from Prairie Farms Dairy. Davis served as General Manager, Michigan at Prairie Farms since 2004. In 2008, he was appointed to the BCU Board of Directors. During his tenure, he served on the BCU Development Review Board and was the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair since 2015. In recognition of his years of service, the city named a section of Hill Brady Road N. in his honor. Mayor Mark Behnke recently presented Davis with a commemorative street sign. BCU greatly appreciates Davis's dedicated service to Battle Creek and wishes him well in retirement.



## MEDC MarComm Team

On Monday, November 4, the Michigan Economic Development

Corporation's Marketing and Communication

(MarComm) Team visited

Battle Creek to see all the

good things going on

around town. The group

toured the Battle Creek Air

National Guard's Cyber

Range operation, Duncan Aviation, The Milton, the Record Box, and the

Home Run Dog Park. BCU hosted the group for lunch at its offices in the

industrial park and provided a brief overview of BCU's mission, history, and

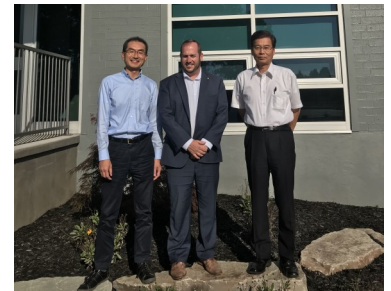
strategic goals.



## Hi-Lex Executive Meets with BCU

Hi-Lex Managing Director Shoichi Hirai visited Battle Creek in September. After meetings at the Hi-Lex facility, he stopped by BCU's office to tour the new facility. Mr. Hirai worked in Battle Creek several years ago and was very excited to see BCU's new office. He especially enjoyed seeing the timeline photos which depict the growth of the Fort Custer Industrial Park. Hi-Lex (then known as TSK of America) was the

first Japanese company to set up operations in Battle Creek.



### President's Desk ...cont'd from page 1

- Planning has also begun for our 2020 trip to Japan. Our Vice President of Attraction visited Japan in early September, and I traveled with the Battle Creek Mayor and City Manager to Japan in October. In 2020, we will do several seminars to promote Battle Creek to

companies in Takasaki, Shiga, Tokyo, and Aichi.

- Perhaps most importantly, BCU is preparing to defend its title in BC Ignite's Broomball Tournament, to be held at The Rink on Saturday, December 7.

On behalf of all of us at BCU, I wish everyone the happiest of holidays and a prosperous New Year.



## Consular Corps Reception

BCU President & CEO Joe Sobieralski attended the annual Consular Corps of Michigan reception, hosted by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in September. The event was held at the Governor's Residence in Lansing.



## Shiga Prefecture Officials Visit Battle Creek

On Friday, October 18, officials from Shiga Prefecture visited Battle Creek. Shiga Prefecture is Michigan's sister state in Japan, located in central Japan, near Kyoto. The group consisted of Masaki Hirowaki, Director of the General Policy Planning Department; Minoru Shirai, Director of the International Affairs Division; and Shunsuke Nishimura, Shiga Visiting Official in Michigan. In their meeting with BCU, the group discussed opportunities to collaborate and talked about Shiga companies which may be interested in expanding into the USA.



### Battle Creek Chosen ... cont'd from page 1

For Ms. Fleury, the highlight of the trip was visiting DENSO in Kariya, about 15 miles south of the city of Nagoya. DENSO is Battle Creek's largest employer, and Battle Creek's facility was DENSO's first American operation. The group met with executives then toured the Nishio plant and visited the DENSO museum. They even met a Battle Creek native working at the Nishio plant on a two-year assignment. She said, "This tour gave me a deeper understanding of DENSO's mission, passion, and use of technology, helping them provide quality automotive products in the most efficient and effective manner."

In addition to their meetings in Tokyo and Kariya, the trip included several cultural experiences as well. The group visited Sensō-ji (Asakusa Temple), the Tokyo Skytree, toured the Ginza market and entertainment district, participated in a tea ceremony, and toured Inuyama Castle and the Meiji-Mura museum in Nagoya.

Looking back, Ms. Fleury said, "I am proud to report that I have a deeper understanding of Japan, its people, culture, government, and business practices, than ever before. I will use this new understanding to support our Japanese companies, employees, and neighbors who live, work, and play in Battle Creek."

## New Walking Path

Work finished on the new pedestrian path through the Fort Custer Industrial Park which will run along Hill Brady Road from Dickman Road to Skyline Drive. The shared path, approximately two miles long, will accommodate walkers, runners, and cyclists. The path was made possible with support from the City of Battle Creek, the BCTIFA, and the Michigan Department of Transportation. In the spring, crews will make final repairs to sprinklers and lawns.

## Battle Creek Central High School Career Academies: Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders

Battle Creek's regional competitiveness depends on the community's ability to establish an educational foundation that builds a strong and sustainable workforce. Yet many current students find themselves facing several challenges revolving around a lack of effective post-graduation preparation, including lacking sufficient soft skills, technical knowledge, and practical understanding of industry expectations.

In an effort to begin bridging the gap in workforce and community preparedness, Battle Creek Central High School (BCCHS) is implementing wall-to-wall student enrollment into industry-relevant career academies. Students will deeply explore content related to their chosen career pathway throughout high school and have increased opportunities to directly engage with area employers in order to better understand the integration of education and industry. Goodwill Industries of Central Michigan's Heartland is working with BCCHS to generate a stable base of community partners who are interested in engaging with academy students enrolled in one of the following career pathways: Business, Finance, Information Technology, Engineering & Skilled Trades, Healthcare, Nursing, Education, and Public Safety.

These engagements will help students build the marketable credentials needed to achieve economic success, as well as provide employers with a workforce that has the skills, competencies, and credentials needed to sustain and grow their business by engaging in a range of activities.

These activities include, but are not limited to: career fairs and panels, mock interviews, company tours, guest speaking in the classroom, job shadows, internships, teacher externships, and certification mentorship.

In addition to direct industry engagement, students will take specialized courses in their career area and all state-required core content (math, science, etc.) will incorporate real-world examples to create increased workforce relevance. The academy model provides all BCCHS graduates the opportunity to earn either college credit or an industry-recognized credential from their respective career pathway. That college credit may include dual-enrollment credits or early-middle college credit (where students receive a 2-year Associate's Degree upon high school graduation).

Our goal is that every BCCHS Career Academies graduate will walk across the stage career, college, and community ready, resulting in a workforce that is able to support industry expansion as well as economic and business development. Join us today to prepare the leaders of tomorrow!

For more information about becoming a BCCHS Career Academies partner, please contact Sarah Kerry: (269) 420-3429 or [skerry@goodwillcmh.org](mailto:skerry@goodwillcmh.org).

## COMPANY SPOTLIGHT

# Aequitas Mobility Services

When the city bus service was canceled due to extreme temperatures during January's polar vortex, Aequitas Mobility Services (AMS) stepped up and helped get people to where they needed to be. AMS, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, provides transportation solutions to people throughout the Battle Creek area.

One of the biggest hurdles for employees is reliable transportation. Being able to get to work, especially for employees working second and third shifts, can be a challenge. AMS provides door-to-door and near door-to-door on-demand transportation services. There are no fixed routes or stops; the service provides rides to work, as well as school, medical appointments, and other locations around Battle Creek.

Rides are scheduled by phone at least 24 hours in advance. New riders first need to complete a short telephone screening to assess their needs. Starting December 1, a one-way ride will cost \$10. AMS offers discounts for packages and bulk purchases.

AMS operates a fleet of vans and currently operates 24 hours a day Monday through Friday, and 12 hours a day on Saturday and Sunday. AMS vehicles are clearly marked and equipped with cameras for safety. AMS drivers wear an AMS uniform and AMS ID badge. Drivers are also trained in First Aid/CPR/AED, passenger safety, and equality, diversity, and inclusion.



Executive Director Scott Cubberly has been working to get AMS up and running since 2018. The service was designed to provide an option when other sources of public transportation are not available. The name "aequitas" means equity in Latin.

AMS serves Battle Creek, Springfield, Bedford, Pennfield and Emmett Townships. Between January 25 and October 31, AMS provided 6,575 rides. More than 80% of AMS riders are going to/from work. More than 28 companies in the Fort Custer Industrial Park have employees who have utilized the service. AMS has also provided rides for employees working at Firekeepers Casino.

AMS has been supported by several community partners, including BCU, the Battle Creek Community Foundation, and Northern Initiatives.

As AMS grows, they hope to partner with more companies in the Fort Custer Industrial Park. To learn more about the service, visit [www.rideams.com](http://www.rideams.com) or contact Scott Cubberly at [scott@rideams.com](mailto:scott@rideams.com).

## Out and About



BCU Vice President for Attraction Robert Corder traveled to Japan in September. He was accompanied by Ken Masumoto, BCU's Japan Advisor. They met with Japanese companies with facilities in Battle Creek and attended the Midwest US-Japan Association Conference. They also met with government representatives in Shiga Prefecture, Michigan's sister state, and Takasaki, Battle Creek's sister city.



Above left: City Manager Rebecca Fleury exchanges business cards with Asako Omi, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs in Tokyo. Right: Mayor Mark Behnke makes a toast at the Japan Foundation reception for the GEN-J delegates.



BCU participated in United Ways' annual Day of Caring on November 22. Staff volunteered with the South Michigan Food Bank, packing orders for holiday food deliveries. BCU and Farrow US staff after volunteering in the morning (above) and afternoon (below).



## Contact Us

Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) is focused on investment generation and job creation in Battle Creek, Michigan. BCU works closely with community partners to attract new companies to the Battle Creek region while also supporting the growth of existing companies. BCU was established in 1972 to develop the Fort Custer Industrial Park (FCIP), the largest industrial park in Michigan. Today the FCIP is home to over 80 companies, including 25 international organizations, which collectively employ more than 13,000 people. FCIP covers more than 3,000 acres, with over 1,000 acres available for development, and offers convenient access to rail, air cargo, interstate and international trade highways as well as an international port of entry and a Foreign-Trade Zone.

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