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From the President's Desk



By Joe Sobieralski
President & CEO

Next year, BCU will celebrate its 50th anniversary. It is amazing to think about everything the organization has accomplished since 1972. All of the companies in the Fort Custer Industrial

Park, and all of the people that work there, stand as a testament to BCU's success.

It also occurs to me that this kind of economic development requires vision and planning. The decision to establish the industrial park was a long-term strategic decision and continues to bear fruit today. Battle Creek has become a center of advanced manufacturing and is now home to 25 international manufacturers from countries like Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, and Japan. This did not happen by accident, nor did it happen overnight. Instead, it was the result of smart decisions by many forward-thinking community leaders.

As BCU continues to evolve, the organization's scope has expanded. Today, BCU is also working hard to revitalize downtown Battle Creek. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, we are already seeing significant progress downtown. The Milton's residential units are now 100% leased and there is a growing waiting list for the smaller units. Handmap Brewing and Café Rica are becoming "go-to" spots for many people around town.

Another project which has finally come to fruition is Umami Ramen's new location. Congrats to Peecoon Allen and her team on their recent move. In October 2019, Umami Ramen was awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Downtown Real Estate Fund to renovate the building

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New Fund Set Up to Help Grow Washington Heights Businesses

BCU, in partnership with New Level Sports Ministries (NLSM), has established the Washington Heights Entrepreneurial Fund, a \$2 million program for entrepreneurial and real estate development projects in the historic Washington Heights neighborhood. The fund is supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The program prioritizes those who are Black, Hispanic, and Burmese – groups with traditionally limited access to capital. Projects may fall under the real estate or business categories. Applicants may be eligible for grants up to \$300,000 for real estate-only improvements. They may also be eligible to receive low-interest loans up to \$150,000 for viable startups and existing businesses.

Recipients will be provided with business services, such as accounting, marketing, or legal guidance. A suite of related services and mentors will help ensure long-term program success in Washington Heights. Business service professionals interested in program participation are encouraged to contact BCU or NLSM.

"NLSM, BCU, and the 846 Movement have together become the catalyst for entrepreneurship, land ownership, and economic development in the Washington Heights business district," said Pastor Christopher McCoy, executive director of NLSM. "That's been expanded here into an economic strategic plan that includes the entire Washington Heights community."

"Land and business ownership provide two of the main wealth accumulation tools," McCoy said. "But, above all, ownership provides the opportunity for self-determination – the process by which people control their own lives."

More capital will revitalize vacant commercial properties in the area. The program will spur job creation, increase wages, generate new opportunities, renew neighborhood ownership, and reduce blight.

BCU and NLSM are encouraged by the overwhelming enthusiasm for the program. The wide range and depth of applications thus far points to the economic potential of a neighborhood driven by devoted residents.

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Cosma Casting, Bowers Aluminum Announce Expansions

Two manufacturers with operations in the Fort Custer Industrial Park recently announced plans to expand their facilities. Magna's Cosma Casting Michigan will invest \$31.9 million to enlarge their plant and add new equipment, creating 68 new jobs. Bowers Aluminum will spend \$7.8 million on an addition, which will result in at least 17 new jobs.

Magna's Battle Creek operation specializes in high-pressure aluminum castings for the automotive industry. The company's aluminum body and chassis components help lighten

vehicle weight, which results in reduced environmental impact. Magna has been in Battle Creek since 2013 and employs more than 200 people. The company will add approximately 50,000 square feet of manufacturing space. Battle Creek was selected over several other sites nationwide.

Magna will participate in the Battle Creek TRAIN (Talent Retention, Attraction, and Inclusion iNcentive) program.

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Torti Taco Shifts Downtown Plans

Torti Taco's new downtown Battle Creek restaurant has made a pivot to 80 W. Michigan Avenue, where it will occupy the space recently vacated by Pastrami Joe's. Torti Taco began considering the shift after plans with a previous developer at a nearby location did not materialize.

The local Mexican eatery has been working with BCU, the City of Battle Creek, and the Downtown Development Authority to bring the project to fruition. In July 2020, Torti Taco was awarded a Real Estate Improvement Fund (REIF) grant, which will remain intact for the new location.

The REIF was made possible by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The program addresses significant hurdles faced by those who want to invest downtown by focusing on revitalizing vacant space, improving code compliance, resolving structural and mechanical issues, and supporting other upgrades to bring unoccupied properties back into productive use.

Grant dollars go toward significant renovations at the facility, which is owned by the City of Battle Creek's Downtown Development Authority. Plans include a new garage-door-style entrance, outdoor seating, upgraded fixtures and finishes, an oyster bar, and a performance stage. An interior wall will be moved to expand seating capacity.

"This has been a long time in the making and definitely worth the wait," said Javier Fortoso, owner and operator of Torti Taco. "Thanks to BCU, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the City of Battle Creek for all their support. We can't wait to bring a new Torti Taco experience to downtown Battle Creek."

"This shift will get a long-anticipated project over the finish line," said Joe Sobieralski, President and CEO of BCU. "We're grateful for Javier's continued patience and commitment to bring a premier Mexican restaurant to downtown Battle Creek."

Torti Taco's new downtown location will complement its existing operations on Beckley Road. The second restaurant will bear a twist on the Torti name, offering a completely different menu. The downtown space will feature a blend of historically significant ingredients and dishes not found at most Mexican restaurants.

"We are experiencing a tremendous amount of positive change in the center business district," said Ted Dearing, Assistant City Manager for the City of Battle Creek. "Torti Taco will only add to the momentum. We think Javier and his brand will be an excellent addition to the downtown."

Construction has already begun. Torti is aiming for a late-summer opening. The build-out takes place on a block of Michigan Avenue which is almost entirely under construction. In fact, there are three other development projects just across the street from Torti's new home.

City Establishes Outside Social District Downtown

This summer, patrons of bars and restaurants in downtown Battle Creek can enjoy a stroll between establishments – with a drink in their hand. Several months ago, the city dramatically expanded its downtown social district.

The State of Michigan laid out social district permits last summer to help businesses constrained by the occupancy limits. Under the new law, consumers may purchase beverages from participating businesses and then enjoy them within the social district boundaries.

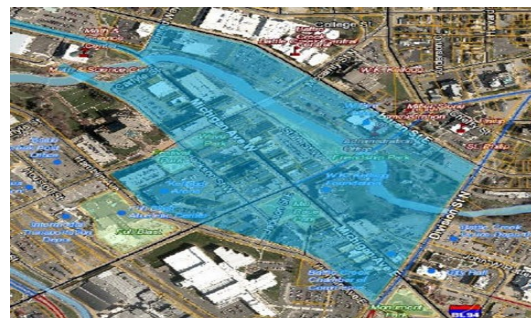
Originally, the City Commission created two districts in the downtown. Now the districts have been combined and expanded. Downtown Battle Creek's revised district stretches from Division Street to Gould Street, and includes space between Hamblin Avenue and Van Buren Street (see map).

"It creates a vibrant and active center location that also provides some additional support to, again, licensees that have got capacity limits that are affecting their businesses," said Ted Dearing, Assistant City Manager, when the district was expanded in February.

As the weather turns, more consumers have begun using the district. And even with state capacity limits expiring July 1, there are no plans to remove the social district, which has helped facilitate business for downtown establishments.

Approved participating businesses include Handmap Brewing, Rafaynee, Clara's on the River, Griffin Grill & Pub, Cricket Club, Kitchen Proper, and Café Rica. Others are expected to join, too, as more downtown restaurant development projects come online later this year.

Within the social district, alcohol can be sold on the premises of approved business permit holders. Designated serving containers – which cannot be glass or exceed 16 fluid ounces – help identify permissible beverages consumed within the district.



Battle Creek's new downtown social district

Congrats and Farewell to Dr. Shabaka Gibson

Congratulations to BCU Vice President Shabaka Gibson, who recently completed his PhD in Business Administration from the University of Maryland. Shabaka began working on his PhD in 2017 shortly after he moved to Battle Creek. His dissertation is titled *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Innovation Ecosystems*.

While we are happy to celebrate his accomplishment, we are also sad to announce that Shabaka will be leaving BCU. He has accepted a position in Wisconsin as Director of the Creative Destruction Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. CDL-Wisconsin works with is focused on risk management and leverages the UW-Madison School of Business

and School of Computing, Data and Information Sciences, a perfect fit for Shabaka.

At BCU, Shabaka worked with existing companies, assisting them with workforce issues and expansion plans. He also spearheaded the Tiger Room project. We wish him happiness and success in his new role.

Farmers Market, Food Trucks, BC Cargo Open for 2021

The Battle Creek Farmers Market kicked off the 2021 season on May 5. The downtown market is held on Wednesdays from 9 AM – 1 PM through October at Festival Market Square, in front of the Kellogg Arena.

2021 will also see an expansion of Food Truck Fridays. Starting this year, the food trucks will be at Festival Market Square every Friday, from 5 PM – 8 PM through August. In past years, the event was held just one a month. There will also be live music on Friday evenings.

Finally, BC Cargo opened on June 1. The pop-up market place, located at 35 Hamblin Avenue, includes seven retrofitted shipping containers, repurposed to launch local small businesses. Five of the shops are new for 2021. Businesses include:

- Aspidistra Naturals
- Cakes by Boo

- Creating by KK
- Margarita 1014
- New Story Community Books
- Sweet Addicts BC
- Theirlooms

BC Cargo will be open through Labor Day. Community members can shop from 10 AM – 6 PM Tuesdays through Fridays, and from 10 AM – 3 PM on Saturdays. For more info, visit bccargo.org



McCamly Hotel Donations Help Community Partners

As the liquidation sale wraps up at the McCamly Plaza Hotel, BCU made several donations to local organizations:

- Sheets, towels, and toiletries were donated to Charitable Union.
- Haven of Rest received a donation of pillows, food, and toiletries.
- The Battle Creek Share Center received food and toiletries.
- Several tables and chairs were donated to the Battle Creek Police Department.
- The Tiger Room Accelerator Kitchen also received tables and chairs.
- Historical artifacts and photos were donated to the Calhoun County Visitor & Convention Bureau.
- A donation was made to local activist Bobby Holley, which provided for the purchase of a new bicycle for a local child.

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TRAIN is a partnership between BCU and area companies designed to attract employees to Battle Creek. “We are pleased that Magna considered Battle Creek for their expansion. We are excited to partner with them on the BC TRAIN program to bring additional employees and residents to Battle Creek. This is a great place to do business and this announcement is another example of that,” said BCU Vice President Shabaka Gibson.

Bowers Aluminum began operations at 1401 Shiga Drive in 2018. The company provides contract anodizing and fabrication services for aluminum products to manufacturing companies nationwide. Their anodizing operations serve multiple sectors, including automotive, healthcare, appliance manufacturing, and office furniture. The proposed 70,000 square foot expansion will double the company’s footprint and enable the company to expand its processes to include extrusion and fabrication. That would allow Bowers to do more business and create more local jobs.

“We are excited about expanding in Battle Creek. We will put an emphasis on hiring local” said owner, Jon Bowers. “When possible, we will hire locals because it benefits both of us. Local employees add value to our overall economy. Also, if they are closer to our facility, it is more likely that they will stay and grow with our company.”

The Battle Creek City Commission approved local tax abatements for both projects. Construction on both projects is underway now.



Construction on the expansions at Cosma Castings (top) and Bowers Aluminum (bottom) is already underway.

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at 215 W. Michigan Avenue. After extensive improvements, the restaurant reopened for carryout in late March 2021 and resumed in-person dining in late April.

Looking ahead, work on the McCamly Hotel is accelerating. Construction at New Holland Brewing continues and Torti Taco’s new location is expected to open in late summer. Multiple housing projects downtown are being considered. The old Kmart building has been torn

down and will soon be converted to greenspace in preparation of future development.

As an economic developer, I am always looking to the future. It is a great feeling to see some of the things which the BCU team has been working towards start to take shape. I see it everyday downtown. More and more people are out and about, taking full advantage of the new social district. I cannot wait to see you downtown, enjoying the warm weather, and everything that Battle Creek has to offer.

Consumers Energy Launches New Resources For Businesses

Michigan businesses can sign up for a free environmental management systems analysis through a collaborative pilot program launched by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and Consumers Energy.

A joint evaluation group of members from the Clean Energy Solutions Teams at Consumers Energy and from EGLE's Integrated Assessment Program will provide businesses with a comprehensive sustainability assessment throughout their onsite operations. The evaluations will identify ways that a business can realize short- and long-term bottom-line savings through upgrades, mitigate the risk of regulatory non-compliance and improve their stewardship of the environment.

The joint assessment will provide project recommendations for energy, air, water, waste, recycling, compliance and other sustainability measures. This collaboration will offer businesses a convenient and comprehensive assessment to improve sustainability goals.

The confidential evaluation will provide the business with a site-specific action plan. It will also identify and provide support for applying for incentives or funding opportunities through EGLE or Consumers Energy to make recommended changes.

A full evaluation will take between two to four hours. The Consumers and

EGLE team will then schedule a follow-up meeting to review with the business possible next steps to realize savings in any of the targeted areas.

After receiving its completed evaluation, a business is not obligated to implement any or all of the recommendations.

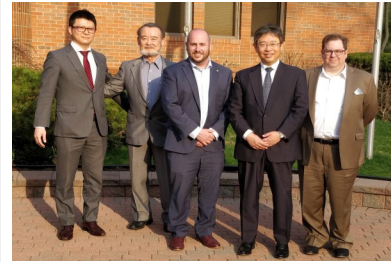
A business gets:

- Customized experience based on their interests – EGLE & CE staff will have an introduction call with the customer to identify key areas of interest which we will focus on.
- EGLE Integrated Assessment Report – Recommendations to improve sustainability and/or compliance goals.
- Consumers Energy Report – Recommendations to reduce energy waste, optimize rates, renewable energy programs, and/or EV program information and support.
- Access to EGLE grant funding to support sustainability projects.
- Support with Consumers Energy, energy efficiency incentive applications.

To be eligible, companies must have no more than 500 employees per site and be served by Consumers Energy.

To set up an appointment for a full range sustainability assessment, contact EGLE's Integrated Assessment Program Coordinator, Chris Babcock, at BabcockC4@Michigan.gov or call 517-599-7939.

BCU Out And About



In April, the BCU team had the honor of being hosted to dinner by the Japanese Consul General Tsutomu Nakagawa at his home prior to his return to Tokyo. The food was delicious, and we greatly enjoyed his

warm hospitality. We look forward to seeing Consul General Nakagawa in Japan on our next visit to Japan.

In May, BCU met with US Congressman Peter Meijer in Battle Creek. Staff discussed BCU's mission and strategic priorities, as well as our efforts to revitalize downtown. We greatly appreciate the time Rep. Meijer took to meet with BCU and look forward to working with him and his staff.



Kmart Demo Complete

Demolition of the former Kmart building on Capital Avenue is nearly completed. The building was built in 1968 and closed in early 2018. BCU purchased the lot for future development. The parcel will be converted to green space, with grass to be planted.



Contact BCU

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. The 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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Follow BCU online:



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"This program is designed to meet the needs of Washington Heights' land and businesses owners, both current and prospective," said Joe Sobieralski, President and CEO of BCU. "We are excited to partner with NLSM and the Washington Heights community and begin a new chapter of our economic development role in Battle Creek. BCU is excited to accelerate these diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in Battle Creek."

More information on the Washington Heights Entrepreneurial Program can be found at bcurlimited.org/whcf. The program selection committee, which vets projects, will meet in June to determine the initial round of awards. Applications continue to be accepted; there is no deadline for submittals.