

In this issue...

- From the President's Desk
- Torti Taco Opens Downtown
- Michigan Launches New COVID-19 Relief Program for Businesses
- Washington Heights Entrepreneurial Fund Awards \$2M in Grants
- 2022 Going PRO Talent Fund Grants Announced
- Federal Program Helps Michigan Companies Hurt by Imports
- Call for Entrepreneurs for BC Cargo 2022
- New Tool Connects Manufacturers and Suppliers
- Major Construction Projects Coming Soon
- Battle Creek Launches New Text Service to Keep Residents Informed
- New Home for Puppywarmer
- Michigan and Ontario Partner on UAS

From the President's Desk

By Joe Sobieralski
President & CEO



Good things are happening in Battle Creek! Work continues on the McCamly Hotel. This week, MiBiz awarded BCU its 2022 Deal of the Year Award for Economic Development for the hotel redevelopment project. This award recognizes the transformative impact the renovated hotel will have on Battle Creek and the capital which we have secured to make the project a reality.

The McCamly Hotel is being completely renovated inside and out, with the total project cost estimated to be \$59 million. BCU is partnering with local educational institutions to create a hospitality training program for youth and area residents. The hotel is expected to be completed in 2023 and will employ approximately 165 people. Check out MiBiz for more information on the [2022 Deal of the Year Award](#).

I was excited to see the Torti Taco Bar and Grill on Michigan Avenue open last week. BCU has been working with owner Javier Fortoso on this project for more than two years. I am looking forward to enjoying tacos and cerveza on the patio once the weather gets warmer.

In December, President Biden signed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 into law. The total budget of \$768.2 billion included almost \$60 million for projects in Battle Creek, which will significantly benefit the local economy and position our military installations for future growth. Approved projects include:

See "President's Desk" on Page 4

Torti Taco Opens Downtown

Congratulations to Javier Fortoso and his team at Torti Taco on the opening of their new location in downtown Battle Creek. The new Torti Taco Bar and Grill, located at 80 W. Michigan Avenue, officially opened on Monday, February 21.

A \$250,000 grant from BCU's Real Estate Improvement Fund (REIF) helped with the renovation costs. The building which houses the new restaurant is owned by the City of

Battle Creek's Downtown Development Authority and previously housed Pastrami Joe's.

Compared to the Javier's original Torti Taco on Beckly Road, the new restaurant has an expanded menu, a full bar, and an oyster bar. With its modern décor and garage-style door that can be opened in warm weather, the Torti Taco Bar and Grill is a welcome addition to Battle Creek.

Michigan Launches New COVID-19 Relief Program for Businesses

The Michigan Department of Treasury is administering a \$409 million business grant relief program designed to help Michigan businesses that have experienced a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Under the Afflicted Business Relief Grant Program, eligible businesses in operation before October 1, 2019 may receive a percentage of their loss in total state sales through a grant. Businesses that began operating between October 1, 2019, and June 1,

2020, may receive a grant equal to 25% of certain specified costs.

To be eligible to apply for an ABR grant, you must be one of the following business types listed below and not tax exempt, and not a government entity:

- Entertainment Venues
- Recreational Facilities and Public Places of Amusement
- Barbers and Cosmetologists
- Exercise Facilities
- Restaurant and Food Services

See "Michigan Launches" on page 2

Washington Heights Entrepreneurial Fund Awards \$2M in Grants

The Washington Heights Entrepreneurial Fund (WHEF) is bolstering the community and an ambitious group of entrepreneurs-of-color through the distribution of \$2 million in business support targeted at the Washington Heights neighborhood. Award recipients receive training, grants and low-interest loans for business and real estate development projects.

"We are truly grateful to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for this opportunity, and we are grateful for our incredibly dedicated and focused grantees and the team that reviewed and selected them," said Joe Sobieralski, President and CEO of

BCU. "These recipients have put in months of hard work to get to this stage. We're delighted to see them accelerate and we can't wait to see the results."

The \$2 million program, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, was established by Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) in partnership with New Level Sports Ministries (NLSM). The fund prioritizes low-to-middle income Black, Hispanic, and Burmese individuals, who have traditionally had limited access to capital. Eleven projects will receive funding to support businesses ranging from a counseling

See "Washington Heights" on page 4

2022 Going PRO Talent Fund Grants Announced

In December, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced the state would award \$40 million in training grants to more than 1,000 businesses as part of the Going PRO Talent Fund. Eleven companies in Calhoun County were among the recipients, with combined grants totaling more than \$477,000.

The Going PRO Talent Fund provides grant funds to train and develop newly hired and current employees. Training must fill a demonstrated talent need experienced by the

employer and lead to a credential for a skill that is transferable and recognized by industry. More than 5,000 businesses have received training grants since the program started in 2014.

To learn more about the Going PRO Talent Fund, visit Michigan.gov/TalentFund.

Calhoun County Recipients include:

BASF Toda America	\$43,211
Bickford of Battle Creek	\$75,000
BleiStahl	\$28,654
DENSO	\$30,000
NexThermal	\$11,925
North Pointe Woods	\$75,000
Omega Castings, Inc.	\$15,965
Rosler Metal Finishing	\$32,115
Senior Care Partners P.A.C.E.	\$40,500
SnackWerks of Michigan, LLC	\$11,055
Tenneco	\$114,000

Federal Program Helps Michigan Companies Hurt by Imports

Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms (TAAF), a little-known federal program, is designed to help small manufacturers recover and rebuild business lost to imports. For companies in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, the program is managed by the Great Lakes Trade Adjustment Assistance Center (GLTAAC).

The GLTAAC works with companies to identify, plan, and implement business improvement project to strengthen their overall competitiveness. Qualified companies are eligible for \$75,000 in matching funds to pursue business process improvement projects to increase their competitiveness.

To qualify, a company must be losing both sales and employment due, in part, to imports. There is no cost to apply and GLTAAC handles all the paperwork. A quick phone call is usually all it takes to determine if a company can qualify.

The TAAF program was created in 1974 and is administered through the US Economic Development Administration, part of the

Department of Commerce. Each client works with a Project Manager to create a customized action plan, which identifies high-impact projects needed at the company. This plan acts as a roadmap for recovery. Then the TAAF provides up to \$75,000 in co-funding assistance to implement the projects in the plan. Most clients complete four to six projects through the program, typically in three to five years.

The TAAF program is extremely flexible. This assistance can be used with a wide range of projects including:

- Marketing and Sales Support – lead development; sales training; market research; rebranding; e-marketing; product testing
- Operations – Lean and Six Sigma implementation; ISO/AS/IATF certification prep; process re-engineering; automation implementation
- Systems – selection, implementation, training for ERP, CRM, MES, etc.; HR and Purchasing improvements

- Training – CAD; CAM; machine skills; safety; computer skills; leadership development; supervisor training
- Other – financial management; job costing; bank relationship development; succession planning.

GLTAAC has worked with over 300 impacted companies in the Great Lakes region. Companies which have utilized the TAAF program report a significant increase in sales, productivity, and staff retention. Firms report that the TAAF program improved their competitiveness and profitability. In Southwest Michigan, Caster Concepts in Albion and Humphrey Products in Kalamazoo are two companies which have taken advantage of TAAF's support.

More information including case studies is available at gltaac.org. To learn more, contact Great Lakes TAAC Project Manager Jani Hatchett at 734-998-6227 or by email at hatchett@umich.edu.

Michigan Launches cont'd from page 1

- Nursery Dealers and Growers
- Athletic Trainers
- Body Art Facilities (tattooing, piercing, etc.)
- Hotels and Lodging

Businesses applying for a grant will be required to include tax and other financial information and documentation to support their claims.

Applications will be accepted starting on Tuesday, March 1. The deadline to apply is Thursday, March 31. Grant awardees will be notified in the spring and grant awards will be distributed by July 1, 2022.

To learn more about the Afflicted Business Relief Grant Program or read frequently asked questions, go to www.michigan.gov/abr.

Call for Entrepreneurs for BC Cargo

The City of Battle Creek is currently accepting applications for BC Cargo's 2022 season. BC Cargo is a Pop-Up Shop Marketplace located on city-owned property at 35 W. Hamblin Avenue. Seven refurbished shipping containers and two mobile food carts are available to lease.

BC Cargo was created in 2018 as a launch pad for entrepreneurs seeking to open a business in Battle Creek. Through short-term seasonal leases, and affordable all-inclusive rental rates, the marketplace reduces barriers to market entry and supports merchants with wrap-around services to nurture business development and growth. For more info, visit www.bccargo.org.



New Tool Connects Manufacturers and Suppliers



The Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (The Center) recently launched CONNEX Michigan, a national directory of manufacturers and suppliers. The online tool is part of the CONNEX Marketplace, an Industry 4.0 software platform designed to connect and strengthen the American manufacturing supply chain.

CONNEX enables manufacturers to connect with each other, find local and domestic suppliers, explore production capabilities, and manage their supply chain. The system also has tools to help manufacturers identify single supplier risks and find opportunities for diversification in their supply chain.

Users can view and post RFPs, RFQs, RFIs, surplus material or equipment lists, and any other type of business need they may have. Companies can get free lifetime access to CONNEX if they sign up before April 30. After that, the service will cost \$500 per year.

The CONNEX marketplace is supported by the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NIST-MEP); the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM); and more than 100 state and regional trade associations, economic development associations, and chambers of commerce.

Michigan is the sixth state to roll out the CONNEX platform, joining Missouri, Kansas, Florida, Oklahoma, and Utah. The program is backed by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), which uses The Center for supplier scouting and matchmaking requests as part of its Pure Michigan Business Connect (PMBC) program.

Interested manufacturers can find more information and request an account by visiting www.the-center.org/CONNEX or by contacting The Center at 888-414-6682 or CONNEX@the-center.org.

Major Construction Projects Coming Soon to Battle Creek

Several major construction projects are about to get underway in Battle Creek. MDOT unveiled plans in January for a 4-year project to rebuild I-94 between Helmer Road and F Drive North. Preliminary work is expected to begin later this year, with the major construction scheduled for 2023 and completed in 2025.

The project will repave the highway, replace road signs, and upgrade the drainage. The project includes rebuilding the bridges at 6½ Mile Road, M-294, 9 Mile Road, the Kalamazoo River and Capital Avenue as well as repairing the bridges at Riverside Drive, F Drive North and I-194 ("The Penetrator"). In addition, the Capital Avenue ramps will be repaved and the sidewalks across the bridge

will be widened. The westbound Beckley Road approach to Capital Avenue will be widened and the eastbound I-94 rest area parking lot will be repaved and the ramps rebuilt. The project is estimated to cost over \$120 million, with \$105 million coming from the Rebuilding Michigan Bonding Program.

Downtown, Consumers Energy will complete its updates to the electrical system. Last year, Consumers installed a new underground electrical vault and upgraded conduit along Jackson and Beacon Streets, between Hamblin Avenue and McCamly Street. Work began in late January to remove old electrical cables. Once complete, the old underground vault will be filled in and sidewalks patched. Work will be done in phases to minimize the impact. No

outages are planned and Consumers expects the work to be completed by the early spring.

Near the industrial park, the Battle Creek Tax Increment Finance Authority (BCTIFA) will upgrade Watkins Road from Mercury Drive to the CN train tracks. Watkins Road provides access to the new building under construction by Industrial Partners USA. The plan calls for Watkins Road to be resurfaced and widened to accommodate a dedicated left turn lane from the Mercury Drive intersection to the train tracks. In addition, the Mercury Drive intersection will be widened for dedicated turn lanes. The cost of construction is estimated to be \$1.6 million, with the project expected to be completed in Spring 2022.

Battle Creek Launches New Text Service to Keep Residents Informed

In January, the City of Battle Creek announced the launch of Textedly, a text messaging tool. Residents can sign up to receive text messages from the city to their mobile devices. The city will continue to communicate through its website, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, as well as email.

The city will provide three categories of messages: Emergency alerts, general city news, and COVID19 information. To subscribe:

- Text **BCNEWS** to 844-673-7474 for general city news like building closures, events, elections, and general city service info.
- Text **BCCOVID19** to 844-673-7474 for COVID19 information.

Residents can subscribe to any or all the updates. The service is free of charge standard SMS/texting fees may apply. Once signed up, subscribers will receive an automated reply. This message will include the estimated number of texts you will be sent a month, how to cancel your subscription, and how to seek help with this system.

- Text **BCALERTS** to 844-673-7474 to sign up for emergency alerts such as boil water advisories, severe weather, crime emergencies, etc.

New Home for Puppywarmer

Congratulations to Puppywarmer, which recently moved from the Customs Cargo Center to a new facility at 4045 West Columbia Avenue.

The company's ceramic infrared incubators and oxygen concentrators are used by veterinarians, dog breeders, and animal rescue groups to improve the viability of at-risk puppies. The company was started in 2018 as a side business for owner Ken Sunden. When the company outgrew his home, Ken approached BCU, which was able provide 5,400 square feet of manufacturing space in the Customs Cargo Center facility. After 18 months in BCU's building, the company was again in need of more space.

The company is leasing 14,000 square feet from Clark Logic, which will provide plenty of space for them to grow. We wish Ken and his team continued success in their new facility.



Michigan and Ontario Partner on UAS

In January, the Michigan Department of Transportation announced that the state will collaborate with the Canadian Province of Ontario to test the feasibility of commercial unmanned aerial systems (UAS) operating beyond the line of sight of a pilot. MDOT said the two governments will explore how drones could be used for cross-border delivery, medical transport, or other small-scale applications.

The data gathered from this feasibility study will be used to further decision-making in preparing for the future of advanced air mobility in North America. Detroit-based Airspace Link was selected by MDOT to conduct the analysis. The company will examine the existing airspace, air traffic

infrastructure, and ground infrastructure required to ensure operational safety. The analysis also will include the potential economic impacts, applicable state and local zoning restrictions, environmental factors (like social equity and noise considerations), travel impacts, and connections to existing aviation, surface transportation and transit modes.

One of Airspace Link's partners is Grand Sky Development Co. LLC, which authored BCU's 2019 drone feasibility study and operates the Grand Sky UAS business park in North Dakota. We look forward to the results of the MDOT study as BCU works to develop its drone business park at the Battle Creek Executive Airport at Kellogg Field.

Washington Heights cont'd from page 1

center to a funeral home to an urban arts incubator.

"The interest in this program has been overwhelming," Sobieralski said. "The fund is a first of its kind, and we hope its demonstrated success will change the dynamics for those who have been traditionally excluded from conventional business development practices."

WHEF projects were awarded after an initial cohort of applicants completed several months of business classes. The free courses, offered by the Michigan Small Business Development Center, helped participants strengthen their business plans and cash flow projections, positioning their business for sustainable growth.

Washington Heights was selected because it is adjacent to downtown Battle Creek, the focal point of much recent redevelopment, and at 67% of the population, Washington Heights is the largest concentration of Black residents in Battle Creek.

"Historically, communities of color have been shut out of business loans and financing," said Pastor Chris McCoy of New Level Sports Ministries. "This program is an important step in bringing opportunity to Black, Hispanic and Burmese entrepreneurs. It will help level the playing field for business owners and improve the Washington Heights community."

Projects fall under real estate or business categories. Applicants were eligible for grants of up to \$300,000 for real estate-only improvements. Business applicants were eligible for low-interest loans of up to \$150,000, with the possibility of

forgiveness, for viable startups and existing businesses. A single applicant could be funded in both areas, but total grants will not exceed \$350,000.

"This fund is transformative for the entrepreneurial community of Battle Creek," said Devon Wilson, founder of Sunlight Gardens. "This program empowers entrepreneurs with the skills and resources they need to be successful."

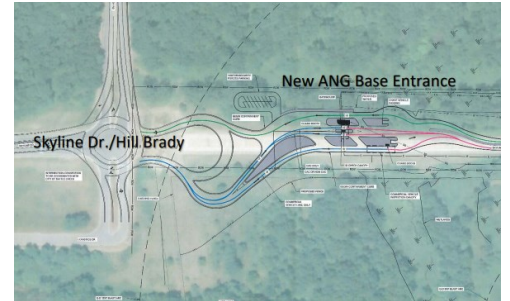
Hexxon Villa, founder of Hexx Design, was provided with support to develop an expansion plan for his business. "This grant will allow us to create an affordable pricing model so we can provide services for those who need it the most," Villa said. "This program provides entrepreneurs at any stage with the tools to reach the next level. We are extremely grateful to have been a part of the first class."

The 2022 WHEF Recipients include:

- Brilliant Minds Family Counseling – Keith Matthews, Brook-Lyn Glass
- Sherrill Cotton Funeral & Cremation – Sherrill Cotton
- Hexx Design Co – Hexxon Villa, Juliet Villa, David Niniz, Javier Fortoso Jr.
- The Link – Tonesha Heath
- New Level Church – Dr. Gregory Dotson
- Simply Sensational Berries – Markeeta Haddley, Craig Owens
- Sunlight Gardens – Devon Wilson
- Tommy & Co – Marcus Willis
- Urban Arts Incubator – Jaziel Pugh, Iroham Ekeledo, Carolyn Washington, Marcus Ervin, Taylor McCoy
- VIATAG – Jeffrey Cotton
- West End Kitchen – Sidney Ekeledo, Treione Barlow

President's Desk cont'd from page 1

- \$10 million for the Battle Creek Air National Guard Base to build a new main gate and entrance facility off Skyline Drive



Proposed new entrance for the Air National Guard Base off Skyline Drive

- \$49 million for a new training facility at the Marine Corps Operations Support Center, including a new vehicle maintenance facility
- Funds for PFAS remediation at the Battle Creek Executive Airport
- Continuation of STARBASE, a STEM promotion program for K-12 students offered at the air guard base.

We continue to see a lot of interest in the Fort Custer Industrial Park. Construction continues on the expansions at Magna and Bowers Aluminum. Viking-Cives expects to break ground on its new manufacturing facility in the spring. Work on the interior of Industrial Partners USA's spec building on Watkins Road will soon be complete. BCU also has several prospects that are considering investments in Battle Creek that we hope to announce later this year.

All in all, 2022 is off to a great start at BCU.

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.

Battle Creek Unlimited

www.bcuunlimited.org

4950 W. Dickman Road, Suite 1

Battle Creek, MI 49037

TEL 269-962-7526

Email comments, questions or suggestions to:

BCUletter@bcuunlimited.org

Follow BCU online:

