

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

HOWELL AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023



Howell Area
Chamber
of Commerce

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THE STORY OF THE CHAMBER

In 2023, the story of the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce is guided by three priority areas Community & Organizational Excellence, Economic and Workforce Development, and Catalytic Leadership. These priorities work in union to uphold the Chamber's mission, to be a catalyst for a vital business environment and an exceptional community.

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce was founded in the fall of 1949 and is a non-profit 501(c)(6) organization. It was formed to promote and enhance business and community in the Howell area, and the surrounding Livingston County Communities. Since then, it has become so much more! Our recently renovated space is better equipped to serve businesses in Livingston County than ever before with space and resources to innovate and grow at the Livingston Business Hub.

Every good story is best told by its authors, and the Chamber is no exception. Our performance as an organization is highlighted below by the Chamber Board Chair, Andrea Dahline, and our Chamber President, Janelle Smith.



A NOTE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENT

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce annual report is a testament to our community's collaborative spirit and achievements. Howell stands as a leader in Michigan, thanks to united efforts from local and state government, businesses, investors, and our community. Notable projects, such as the launch of the Livingston Business HUB, reflect our commitment to growth and innovation.

The Chamber remains dedicated to member needs, addressing challenges like the demand for talent and resources. Initiatives for transportation, and housing accessibility underline our commitment to sustaining local competitiveness.

With an unwavering focus on our goals, we encourage businesses to stay competitive, attract talent, and contribute to community well-being. The Chamber continues to turn ideas into action, making business operations more efficient and effective for our members.

We extend sincere thanks to each member, supporter, and partner for your commitment to Howell's success. Together, we've achieved much, and with continued collaboration, we look forward to a future of growth and prosperity.

Sincerely

Andrea Dahline, and Janelle Smith

THE CHAMBER TEAM

At the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce, our multi-talented, team approach has elevated our work and enabled the organization to continue making a difference for the business community.

Janelle Smith
President

Dianne Samples
Member Development Director

Donna Luce
Office Manager

Jennifer Nielsen
Membership Manager

Christine Bennett
Administrative & Event Assitant



CHAMBER BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Board of Directors dedicate themselves to ensuring the Chamber of Commerce meets the business needs of Members and the community. They set the mission and vision of the chamber with the needs of our members and community at top of mind.

- Andrea Dahline, Board Chair
- Geof Greeneisen, Vice Chair
- Marcia Gebarowski, Treasurer
- Nicole Domitrovich, Secretary
- Patti Griffith, Past Chair
- Suzy Murphy
- Dennis Perkins
- Richard Lim
- John Scotta
- Alan Shevela
- Holly Ward-Lamb
- Susan Pominville
- David Yancho
- Anthony Coratti

LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND STATE REPRESENTATION

Our President, Janelle Smith, serves on various Boards, increasing the scope of the Chamber's influence. Together, we advocate for the best interests of the business community in Livingston County.

- Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals, Board Chair- This is the industry association for chambers of commerce in Michigan, dedicated to building excellence through training and access to national programs.
- Economic Development Council of Livingston County, Vice Chair & Secretary- This council is committed to strengthening the economic base for Livingston County. The EDCLC works closely with public and private entities to facilitate community and economic development activities, strategic initiatives, and regional, national, and international collaborations to the benefit of all of Livingston County.
- Housing Catalysts- Develop and implement a SMART work plan for Livingston County that produces more affordable and attainable housing over the next 5-7 years.
- Education and Employer Advisory Council, Executive Committee Member - Dedicated to inspiring career exploration, expanding employment opportunities, and promoting career pathways in and around Livingston County.
- Transportation Coalition, Steering Committee Member- Committed to implementing the transit master plan for Livingston County and addressing transportation needs.
- Greater Livingston County Chamber Alliance- A regional alliance between the Hartland, Howell, and Greater Brighton Area Chambers of Commerce convening and addressing key issues facing the Livingston County Region.

POSITIVE IMPACTS ON THE COMMUNITY

- Cultivate high-quality, impactful, and civic-minded leaders
- Grow the number of businesses in Livingston County
- Attract, recruit, and cultivate talent in our area
- Showcase Livingston County in a positive way
- Improve the overall quality of life and foster an engaged population by providing opportunities to get involved



POSITIVE IMPACTS WITHIN THE CHAMBER

- Articulate the value of engagement, with investors and the community
- Develop appropriate, long-term, sustainable funding for the organization
- Increase the Chamber's pool of quality investors
- Retain quality, talented staff

CHAMBER COMMUNICATIONS

Whether on podcasts, YouTube, newspaper, emails, Facebook, or other social platforms the Chamber's story remains the same. Communicating, convening, and connecting are among the primary functions of the Chamber, as we work to enhance the overall business landscape in the Howell and Livingston County community.

19

EPISODES OF THE
HOWELL BUSINESS BEAT
PODCAST

10

MEDIA/PRESS RELEASES

52

E-NEWSLETTERS TO
MEMBERS

26

NEW VIDEOS
ON YOUTUBE

We aim to share the story of the Chamber's work with as many businesses, non-profits, and community organizations as possible in the Livingston County region. We communicate with our members and investors through Chamber Advantage (eblasts), features in the local news, and more. In addition, our team organizes and conducts our own Podcast interviews, press/media releases, and Chamber weekly highlight letter from the Chamber President.

SOCIAL MEDIA & WEBSITES



**HOWELL AREA
CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE**

195,385
Page Reach

9,554
Page Visits

5,333
Page Likes

31,050
Instagram
Page Reach



**MICHIGAN
CHALLENGE
BALLOONFEST**

163,055
Page Reach

54,460
Page Visits

13,173
Page Likes

1,212
Instagram
Page Reach



FANTASY OF LIGHTS

54,333
Page Reach

14,432
Page Visits

4,524
Page Likes



**HOWELL'S SUNDAY
FARMERS' MARKET**

325,562
Page Reach

27,597
Page Visits

5,705
Page Likes

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce team maintains **seven different social media pages**: Howell Area Chamber of Commerce Facebook, Howell Area Chamber of Commerce Instagram, Howell Area Chamber of Commerce LinkedIn, Michigan Challenge Balloonfest Facebook, Michigan Challenge Balloonfest Instagram, Howell's Sunday Farmers' Market Facebook, and Fantasy of Lights Facebook. We are excited to celebrate the growth of our following on social media, especially as we spread the story of the Chamber throughout our community.

In addition to our social media presence, there are also two websites managed by the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce: Howell.org, and MichiganChallenge.com. These websites serve as a resource for our investors, developers, visitors, and community representatives.

102k

WEBSITE VIEWS ON
HOWELL.ORG

258k

CLICKS/DOWNLOADS
ON HOWELL.ORG

45k

NEW VISITS TO
HOWELL.ORG

COMMUNITY & ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

SIGNATURE PROGRAMS & EVENTS

2023 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AND ANNUAL DINNER

The Citizen of the Year and Annual Dinner event is our celebration of the Howell Area business community, non-profits, and individuals who went above and beyond in the past year. Held on February 2nd at Cleary University, we had a **sold out event**.

HOWELL'S SUNDAY FARMERS' MARKET

The weekly Howell Sunday Farmers' Market returns the first Sunday in May and runs every Sunday through October on State and Clinton streets. The market features the finest in locally grown produce, bedding plants, flowers, homemade goods, and crafts. The Market draws thousands of visitors downtown each Sunday for six months out of the year with an average of **27,000 visitors** each season.

MICHIGAN CHALLENGE BALLOONFEST

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce's biggest signature event is the Michigan Challenge Balloonfest, held every year during the last full weekend in June. The event consists of over 35 hot air balloons and their pilots competing for points. Five launches are scheduled throughout the weekend. In addition to the main attraction the event includes an open-air marketplace, a family fun tent, headline bands, live entertainment, a balloon glow, a pilot meet & greet, carnival, fireworks, and more. This festival alone had an estimated attendance of **80,000-100,000 people**.

BALLOONS & BREWS

The Michigan Challenge Balloonfest, Balloons & Brews, back for its second year in Downtown Howell on State Street boasted an afternoon of beer tasting, food, games, and entertainment. The event had over **120 guests** and **6 local breweries**. The proceeds from this event support the Fantasy of Lights Parade (a program of the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation)

HOWELL CHAMBER GOLF CLASSIC

Completely sold out with **144 attendees**, the Annual Chamber Golf Classic is a community tradition and opportunity to reconnect with other business professionals on the green.

SPARKLE & STRIVE

Annual Women's Leadership event offering the opportunity for women to come together to uplift, empower, celebrate, and elevate each other. This year's conversation brought mental health to the forefront and cultivated a space for awareness and acceptance. The event also featured pop-up shops, decadent desserts, wine and snacks for over **90 guests**.

FANTASY OF LIGHTS

For almost 40 years, the Fantasy of Lights Parade, hosted by the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation, has served as the official kick-off to the holiday season in Howell. A cherished holiday tradition for many families, the parade unfolds as the lights dim. Parade spectators warm-up with vendor concessions and hot beverages as they witness beautifully lit floats gliding down Grand River, accompanied by local marching bands, first responders, special guests, and the big guy himself – Santa!

Other activities include shopping with local merchants, refreshments, live entertainment, and visits with Santa and his Reindeer. The Fantasy 5K race and one-mile family fun walk is one-of-a-kind. Runners don their favorite holiday apparel, costumes, and lights to race along the parade route. The atmosphere is fun and exciting with a crowd on each side of Grand River cheering on our festive racers. The event has an **average attendance of 35,000**.

CONNECTING, CONVENING & COLLABORATING



STRENGTHENING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Communication is the key to growth, and the Chamber has imparted its goal to convene and connect within the Downtown Merchants. Every quarter, we facilitate downtown Merchant meetings in partnership with Howell Mainstreet & DDA, inviting every merchant in the district. This allows us to gather feedback and foster collaboration among businesses on events and promotional opportunities.

Ongoing and regular communication is relayed to the Chamber and Mainstreet/DDA by block captain representatives. This is a wonderful way to share events and celebrate new businesses.

6

EDUCATIONAL
WORKSHOPS TO
SUPPORT BUSINESS

77

OPPORTUNITIES TO
NETWORK & GROW

12

COUNTY-WIDE
ALLIANCE EVENTS

62

COMMITTEE MEETINGS &
ROUNDTABLES HELD

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONIES & GRAND OPENINGS

Celebrating the accomplishments of our investors is one of the most rewarding chapters of our story! These businesses and entrepreneurs have worked hard to bring their visions to life, and at the same time, create jobs that employ our friends and neighbors. In 2023, we welcomed the grand opening of over 20 businesses with ribbon cutting celebrations.

20

CELEBRATED RIBBON
CUTTINGS

\$2.7 MILLION

INVESTED IN LIVINGSTON COUNTY
*DATA PROVIDED BY AASPARK

84

FULL AND PART-TIME JOBS
CREATED OR MAINTAINED

CHAMBER KNOCKOUT MEMBERSHIP EVENT

The Chamber Member Knockout Event successfully convened more than 80 enthusiastic volunteers eager to discover the mission and functions of the chamber. Under the guidance of five dedicated event chairs, these volunteers formed teams and engaged in a spirited competition to attract the highest number of new members within a three-day timeframe. The collective efforts of chamber members and volunteers resulted in an astounding growth of over 170 new members. Beyond numerical success, the event also effectively communicated the positive narrative of the chamber while fostering a lively and enjoyable atmosphere for all participants.

80+
VOLUNTEERS
ENGAGED & TRAINED

3
DAYS

170
NEW MEMBERS

235

NEW CHAMBER MEMBERS IN 2023



ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce has placed a strong emphasis on Economic and Workforce Development within Livingston County. In the current year, the Chamber has introduced on-site training opportunities for both employers and employees.

LIVINGSTON BUSINESS HUB

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Ann Arbor SPARK, secured the MEDC Business HUB Grant to establish an Innovation Center and Business Hub, positioning Livingston County and the Howell Chamber as a leader in business support services. This multifaceted initiative, envisioned in late 2020, addresses the evolving needs of businesses and entrepreneurs. The Livingston Business HUB is the reimagined use of the existing chamber space. The renovated facility features co-working spaces, conference rooms, and office suites, fostering growth and learning. Through the grant, the Chamber will be able to outfit the space with updated technology, and furnishings, and provide programming. The HUB grant will support business training, upskilling and growth for the next three years.



Beyond the walls of our physical space, the Chamber is advancing economic development in Livingston County through key partnerships with the following organizations:

- Economic Development Council of Livingston County
- Livingston County Convention and Visitor Bureau
- Howell Main Street and DDA
- Housing Catalysts, Community Catalysts
- Livingston County Transportation Coalition Steering Committee

In addition to business attraction, transportation, and housing the chamber's large community events attract roughly 142 thousand visitors to the region each season to shop, dine, play, and stay locally.

142K

VISITORS TO COMMUNITY EVENTS

CATALYTIC LEADERSHIP

Change does not happen overnight, and we work hard at local, regional, and state levels to be a voice for business. We foster relationships throughout the year and support initiatives that support our business and community.

LOCAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Collaboration begins at home and making a difference in our local city and county government. This past year, the Chamber of Commerce has made the priorities of the business community heard in various ways. Some specific examples include:

- Attended Michigan Chamber Day in Lansing and met with Senator Lana Theis.
- Met with Fowlerville-based businesses, Ann Arbor SPARK, and LETS to advocate for Howell connections to MTA bus routes for businesses to tap into the Flint labor market.
- Held County Commissioner Meet & Greet Breakfast with members discussing their roles and broadband expansion plans in Livingston County along with ARPA funding allocation.
- Attended a presentation from Howell Superintendent Erin MacGregor to support the 2023 Bond Proposal for Howell Public Schools
- Held Coffee, Council, and Candidates to provide opportunities for members to meet our local elected and appointed officials and candidates.
- Chamber staff attended the Livingston County Convention and Visitor Bureau's Partner Luncheon. In addition to the Luncheon throughout 2023 all chamber staff became Certified Tourism Ambassadors for Livingston County.
- Attended the Economic Development Council of Livingston County Annual Dinner Event and received the Resilience award for the launch of the Livingston Business HUB.



LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- Career Z Challenge Grant to support work-based learning fostering connection between education and industry
- LETS RAISE Grant to support Transportation in Livingston County
- Michigan Works South East for Barrier Removal and Employment Success Funding Program
- Howell Opera House and Livingston Arts Council Grant application for restoration
- Support Business Growth and Expansion Opportunities for Glamping MI
- Support for Robbin Grants in Livingston County to create more access to broadband

GREATER LIVINGSTON COUNTY CHAMBER ALLIANCE

CHANGING THE GAME SERIES & RISING PROFESSIONALS

The Livingston County Chamber Alliance 5-part Changing the Game Series touched on several impactful topics impacting business this year including the economy, supply chain, artificial intelligence, cyber security, and generational differences. The Alliance also continued to provide support to the Rising Professionals in Livingston County. This group meets monthly and plans educational and networking opportunities for those just getting into the workforce, starting a new career, or new to networking. Whatever phase of life their goal is to connect, develop, and grow.



CHAMBER TEAM

LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- President, Janelle Smith and Member Development Director, Dianne Samples attended the Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals conference in Traverse City.
- President, Janelle Smith attended the Michigan Association of Chamber Professionals CEO Summit in New Buffalo with other Large Chamber Executives from across the state to learn about leading industry trends.
- Chamber Staff Dianne Samples, Laura Pinozzi, and Donna Luce became Certified Tourism Ambassadors.



Howell Area
Chamber
of Commerce

AS THE CHAMBER CONTINUES
OUR WORK TO SHOWCASE AND
ELEVATE THE HOWELL AREA,
WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR
NEVERENDING SUPPORT IN
THOSE ENDEAVORS.

