A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT...

I would like to express my gratitude to the Greater Bemidji Board of Directors, our Executive Director Dave Hengel, and Executive Assistant Kim Anderson for all their support this last year. I also want to give a special thanks to all our investors that support Greater Bemidji. The number of businesses that provide support to Greater Bemidji keeps growing, which validates our work and commitment to the Greater Bemidji area.

Greater Bemidji had several successful projects in 2017. Here are a few items that will make a substantial difference for our community and region:

- Greater Bemidji renovated the lower level of the Mayflower building to support the expansion of our LaunchPad initiative. The remodeling was completed in 2017 and today has 49 members. Tiffany Fettig, our LaunchPad Coordinator, has done a terrific job supporting the region’s entrepreneurs.

- Early in 2017 Sanford Health came forward with a $10 million-dollar gift to be use towards a sports and wellness center and asked that Greater Bemidji take a leading role on this project. We have spent a great deal of time researching the project to determine if it is the right thing for our community. The Greater Bemidji Board supports this project and believes this should move forward. Thank you, Sanford Health for your commitment to Bemidji.

- We also have been working collaboratively with Visit Bemidji, Bemidji Chamber of Commerce, Bemidji Downtown Alliance to look at how we can align our efforts, support each other and ensure we are all moving in the same direction. Greater Bemidji is very thankful to these partners, and see the benefits of these organizations being aligned with a common vision and strategic direction.

Bemidji and the Greater Bemidji area is positioned to continue the economic growth. We see current business expand, and we see new business coming to Bemidji. The perception of Bemidji is changing. It is vibrant, progressive, and a great place to live and work with all the amenities that it has to offer.

As I move on to retirement, I know Greater Bemidji will be the one organization that I will struggle with leaving. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on the board and appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this organization.

Thank you,

Leon Kremeier
Area Manager
Otter Tail Power Company
Dear Investors and Partners,

What an exciting time to be a part of the greater Bemidji community! Even more, what a great time to be a partner and investor in our Greater Bemidji organization.

Over the past five years, Bemidji has clearly positioned itself as the state’s emerging regional center. Among regional centers in Minnesota, Bemidji leads in its growth in population, employment and labor force. New, young entrepreneurs are emerging. Downtown is as vibrant as it has been in recent memory. Nearly every economic indicator for the community is strong.

As exciting as it is to be a part of our growing region, it is equally exciting for me to be the incoming President of the Greater Bemidji organization, and lead our exceptional Board of Directors. Greater Bemidji has worked hard to be a difference-maker in the region. Our Executive Director Dave Hengel likes to refer to us as “civic entrepreneurs”. From creating innovative initiatives like the LaunchPad and Minnesota Innovation Institute (MI2) to driving the development of the proposed Sanford Family Sports and Wellness Campus, there is a real entrepreneurial and can-do spirit at Greater Bemidji. It is important to us that we work hard, are passionate about our community, and hold ourselves accountable to our investors and our community.

The next year will be one of “recalibration”. In the coming weeks, Greater Bemidji will be announcing a community-wide initiative to envision and choose Bemidji’s future. In it, we will challenge our private, non-profit and public sector leaders to come together behind a common vision for our region. We encourage each of you to partner with us in this effort. Our community and our region will only realize our full potential if we do so together.

In closing, let me thank our Board of Directors for their investment in the region we serve. Particular thanks goes out to our Executive Committee members, and those leaving the board in the coming year. Also, a “tip-of-the-hat” to our outgoing President, Leon Kremeier of Otter Tail Power Company. Leon has led Greater Bemidji for two years of unprecedented success. He is a true steward of the greater Bemidji region. Finally, I’d like to acknowledge the exceptional leadership of our Executive Director, Dave Hengel. Dave’s enthusiasm, vision, and drive for our community is not only appreciated, it is contagious.

Your Greater Bemidji staff and board are ready to lead our community and its development during these exciting times. Bring on 2018!

Sincerely,

Gary Johnson
CEO and General Manager
Paul Bunyan Communications
A Message from our Executive Director...

To our investors, partners and friends,

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” Margaret Wheatley

This past year has been one of great success for our organization and our region. Our economic growth is strong. In many cases, our growth exceeds that of our peer regional centers throughout Minnesota. In the past, I have said that Bemidji has become the regional center for north-central Minnesota. All the data we track on economic growth does nothing but confirm that.

Your Greater Bemidji organization has also been successful. Our LaunchPad and Minnesota Innovation Institute (MI2) initiatives continue to grow in their impact. We have led efforts to dispel old misconceptions about who we are and what we have become. With a nudge from Greater Bemidji, Twin Cities Business called Bemidji the state’s “hidden gem”. We have also supported business growth and development, playing key roles in the recruitment of Magnum Trucking, expansion of Stittsworth Meats, and start-up of key new companies such as Elite Additive. Finally, we drove the development of the proposed Sanford Family Sports and Wellness Complex—a potential game-changing development for our hospitality industry.

I have gotten in the habit of annually asking myself what I learned over the past year. As we enter 2018, two things stand out to me:

- I am convinced that Bemidji’s success today was built on a foundation of strategic alignment that began over a decade ago. The past few years, I have sensed the need to reaffirm our vision and strategic direction, and renew the calls for stewardship. We have to ask ourselves again, “what do we as a community care about?”, “who do we want to be when we grow up?” and “are we moving in the same direction?”. Greater Bemidji stands ready to lead our community in answering these questions; and

- I am a firm believer in our need to measure our progress with other regional centers in Minnesota—Duluth, St. Cloud, Rochester, and Mankato. Some would argue (and the data would confirm) that we are substantially smaller than each of these communities. True. But I genuinely believe that is our competitive advantage. We are smaller, so we try harder. We have to, or we will not be successful. That means we have to raise the bar on our community. Greater Bemidji is prepared to raise the bar on itself, and encourage other leaders to follow suit.

Let me take a moment to express my sincere appreciation to our investors, our partners, and our board members. Greater Bemidji cannot be effective without your support and leadership. A special thank you goes out to our Executive Committee members—especially Leon Kremeier who is finishing his second year as President of Greater Bemidji. Each of you are great stewards of our community.

As a community, take a moment to enjoy our success of 2017. More importantly, let’s get ready to drive development in 2018 and beyond.

Sincerely,

David Hengel
Executive Director
Greater Bemidji
MISSION:
Greater Bemidji exists to drive development and promote prosperity throughout the greater Bemidji region.

AREAS OF STRATEGIC FOCUS:
Greater Bemidji is committed to having a positive impact on the following focus areas:

- Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation;
- Growing, attracting and retaining a talented workforce;
- Promoting the region as a great place to live, work and own a business; and
- Growing our economic development toolbox in support of business growth and development.
ECONOMIC
DATA & HIGHLIGHTS
The population of the greater Bemidji region continues to grow rapidly. Total population of the region (30-mile radius) in 2016 was 62,885, an increase of nearly 2,400 people since 2010. By 2021, the population of the region is projected to exceed 65,000 residents.

In comparison to other regional centers in Minnesota, Bemidji compares favorably in several areas:

- As a percent, greater Bemidji’s employment growth has exceeded that of any other regional center in Minnesota. Since 2007, employment has grown 14.6%, including 2.3% in the past year. Both growth rates exceed that of other regional centers.
- Likewise, the region’s labor force growth exceeded that of other regional centers. This is a strong indicator of our region’s ability to attract and retain workers.

Comparisons with other Minnesota regional centers also highlights our economic challenges:

- Bemidji’s unemployment rate, although down from previous years, remains the highest of the state’s regional centers. Unemployment was 4.9% last year, down from 5.3% in 2016.
- Bemidji also remains the poorest of the regional centers in Minnesota. Weekly wages are growing, but remain substantially behind other regional centers. Our wage growth since 2013, however, exceeded that of any regional center.

From 2005 to 2015, the gross sales in Bemidji more than doubled (103% increase). In 2015, gross sales exceed $1.2 billion.

Sales tax collections, a strong indicator of economic activity, continued to climb. From 2012 to 2017, sales tax collections grew by 24%. The past year saw only modest gains however, increasing one half of a percent from 2016 to 2017.

Building permits in the city of Bemidji reached $35 million in 2017. This was a substantial decline from 2016 and a modest decline from 2015. Unfortunately, the building permit information is for development occurring in the city limits of the city of Bemidji. Substantial development is occurring outside the city but within the greater Bemidji region.
Regional Economic Comparison

Labor Force Growth by Regional Center

Unemployment Rate by Regional Center
## Regional Economic Comparison

### Employment Growth by Minnesota Regional Center

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bemidji</td>
<td>19,895</td>
<td>22,273</td>
<td>22,794</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>53,588</td>
<td>57,963</td>
<td>58,498</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duluth</td>
<td>135,839</td>
<td>134,273</td>
<td>136,606</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2,333</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
<td>101,218</td>
<td>105,275</td>
<td>106,865</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>109,745</td>
<td>115,298</td>
<td>116,329</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>1,031</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
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### Labor Force by Minnesota Regional Center

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bemidji</td>
<td>21,173</td>
<td>23,514</td>
<td>23,999</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>55,651</td>
<td>59,808</td>
<td>60,241</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duluth</td>
<td>143,722</td>
<td>142,305</td>
<td>143,458</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>1,153</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
<td>101,218</td>
<td>109,593</td>
<td>110,923</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>1,330</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>114,351</td>
<td>119,171</td>
<td>119,972</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
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### Average Weekly Wage by Minnesota Regional Center

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bemidji</td>
<td>$88</td>
<td>$19</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>$67</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
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<td>-0.2%</td>
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<td>St. Cloud</td>
<td>$92</td>
<td>$22</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>$84</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
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### Unemployment Rates by Minnesota Regional Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bemidji</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankato</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duluth</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES
Sanford Sports and Wellness Campus

In the spring, Sanford Health announced its intention to provide a $10 million gift to the community. The gift was to be used for a project that has a two-fold impact on the community: promoting youth and family wellness, and encouraging economic development. From a community assessment, Sanford Health saw the need for a wellness center with aquatics, a multi-purpose fieldhouse and a two-sheet ice complex.

Greater Bemidji agreed to partner with Sanford Health in part to assess what should be included in the initiative. Since that time, a significant amount of work has been done:

- Toured 14 different facilities in the upper Midwest;
- Held over 60 community discussions, meetings and interviews;
- Reached out to key partners, including the Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce, Visit Bemidji, the Inn-Keepers Association and Food and Beverage Association;
- Developed an estimated operating budget and construction budget; and
- Measured the economic impact of the project.

It was the anticipated economic impact that convinced Greater Bemidji of the merits of the project. The development would create an estimated 16,000 hotel night stays through new and expanded tournaments and competitions to be held here. Total economic impact is projected to approach $10 million annually. At a time when talent recruitment is critical to economic development, having a community amenity like the proposed complex is a game-changing development.

From the research, Greater Bemidji and Sanford Health are recommending the following:

- Construct a facility that includes all three components located together: family wellness center with signature aquatics area, a multi-purpose sports bubble and an ice plex;
- Match Sanford’s gift with $10 million in philanthropy locally; and
- Creation of an Amateur Sports Commission to create and encourage additional sports tourism in Bemidji. In partnership with the Bemidji Area Chamber, Visit Bemidji, Inn-Keepers Association and Food and Beverage Association, the Commission would be funded, in part, by a 2% hospitality tax.

The future of the project will become clearer in early 2018. Greater Bemidji wishes to thank community members who served on the project task force: Pete Aube, Bryan Nermoe, Gary Johnson, Kayla Winkler, Troy Hendricks, Kay Mack, Brad Neis, and Bob Fitzgerald.
**MAGNUM TRUCKING EXPANDS TO THE REGION**

Greater Bemidji is excited to welcome Wayne Gadberry and Magnum Trucking to the Bemidji community. On October 12, 2017, Magnum broke ground on a new facility in the Bemidji industrial park.

Magnum has more than 640 employees and operates terminals/offices in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Its corporate headquarters are located in Fargo, North Dakota. Other Minnesota locations include Duluth, Willmar and Minneapolis.

Greater Bemidji worked with Magnum in to encourage the company to expand here. We helped develop an incentive package for the company, and navigated the permitting process on the company’s behalf.

**GREATER BEMIDJI SUPPORTS STITTSWORTH MEATS’ EXPANSION**

Stittsworth Meats is planning a $1.86 million expansion that will enable the business to sell its products more locally. The project includes the creation of a mobile slaughter unit as well as a new manufacturing and processing plant. The company, whose expansion is expected to create 26 jobs.

Greater Bemidji has partnered with Mychal Stittsworth in several ways over the past year. Mychal, one of the region’s leaders of the entrepreneurial movement, has worked with Greater Bemidji LaunchPad, making use of consulting from the Small Business Development Center, and taking advantage of several of the retired-CEO mentors the LaunchPad offers. In addition, Greater Bemidji worked with Stittsworth to put an expansion funding package together that includes several regional sources as well as the Minnesota Job Creation Fund. Finally, Greater Bemidji worked to navigate the permitting process for the expansion.

The project will begin in spring, 2018.

**GREATER BEMIDJI FINISHES 1,2,3 START-UP GUIDE**

In 2017, Greater Bemidji completed the development of “1,2,3, Start-Up”, a guide to starting a business in Bemidji. The goal—to help those looking to start or expand in Bemidji work through the development process. The first step is clear—contact Greater Bemidji and let us help navigate the process with you.

The next step will be making the guide, and the applications involved in funding and permitting, available electronically. Greater Bemidji will complete that work in 2018.
One of the focus areas of Greater Bemidji is to promote the region as a great place to live, work and own a business. The biggest challenge in promoting the region is dispelling the myth that we are a small, remote tourist town of decades ago. Today, Bemidji is much more than that. We are a vibrant regional center with a strong, growing economy.

In 2017, Greater Bemidji made several intentional decisions to promote the new Bemidji, with success. The most significant successes were in enticing the Twin Cities Business Magazine to highlight Bemidji, and Minnesota Monthly Magazine to choose Bemidji as its “Best Town in Minnesota”.

In its February 2017, seventeen page spread of Bemidji entitled “Bemidji 2.0: This former lumber town has rebuilt itself as a high-speed, regional center of enterprise without sacrificing its lumberjack character”, Twin Cities Business highlighted the things that set Bemidji apart, including the GigaZone gigabit broadband speeds, our vibrant entrepreneur scene, the investment Sanford Health has made in our region, the natural beauty and more.

The second paragraph of the article summed up the Twin Cities Business impressions perfectly: “While you weren’t looking, this town of 14,500 people- and surrounding population of another 65,000- has become one of the most dynamic regions in Minnesota- if not, in fact, the most dynamic. It may be the best-kept secret in the state”.

With leadership from Visit Bemidji, Greater Bemidji also worked to garner the support from Minnesota Monthly Magazine to name Bemidji its inaugural “Best Town in Minnesota”. Announced in November, Minnesota Monthly again shared not only the natural beauty of the region, but the long-term investments made by the region to position Bemidji as a regional center. The article states: “As charming as Bemidji is, it has grown a lot in the past decade. Funding has gone into a new civic center, heart and cancer centers at Sanford Health of Northern Minnesota, and gigabit broadband for all residents- among the most progressive internet services in the country’s rural areas, set up to attract entrepreneurs.

Greater Bemidji is thankful to its partners in promoting the region, especially Visit Bemidji and the Bemidji Area Chamber of Commerce.
Greater Bemidji’s LaunchPad, now approaching its third year. Its mission to support the needs of our region’s entrepreneurs and build a strong and vibrant start-up community. From coordinating the weekly Meetups to on-site business consulting and mentoring, and space for solo-preneurs and start-ups, LaunchPad has become the go-to place for the business community to connect, get assistance, collaborate, and co-work.

Early 2017, after piloting the co-working idea for nearly a year and half, Greater Bemidji decided to invest further into the LaunchPad program and renovate the lower level of the Mayflower building. This expansion added 7,000 square feet of co-working space, including 6 dedicated desk spaces (campsites, as we call them), another much needed conference room, a kitchen and game space, and additional flexible work spaces for part-time members. Thank you to the Neilson Foundation for their financial support and Kraus Anderson for their craftsmanship on this renovation project!

The finished space challenges one’s perception of a basement. The bright lights and creative work spaces and innovative uses of wood and metal combine for a distinctively ‘Bemidji’ feel. The space is available 24/7 for members, giving entrepreneurs more flexibility. Combined with the main level amenities, members have various spaces to meet their needs from formal to casual, large to small.

With this expansion we have seen membership grow from 20 to near 50 members. The six campsites filled rather quickly and currently house two web design firms, three start-ups, and a paralegal. The membership base is diverse with those in the pre-launch phase to mature businesses, and even a few students. With the introduction of a Corporate plan and a Friend of the Pad membership local entrepreneurs and businesses are joining LaunchPad to have access to the unique space but more so to be part of the community it is creating.
IDEA Competition

IDEA is a competition that turns great ideas into great businesses. Through the competition IDEA provides training, business coaching, and capital for northwest Minnesota entrepreneurs who want to turn an idea into a fast-growth business. Bemidji area entrepreneurs had another strong showing at the 9th Annual IDEA Competition. LaunchPad continues to support the IDEA program through hosting the Kickoff Party, giving participates an opportunity to practice presenting at Meetups, and provides participants free memberships during the competition.

2017 Winners
- Bolton Bees - Chiara & Travis Bolton, Hubbard County
- DeanUltraThinRetainer - Todd Sandwick, Fosston and Bryce Oakes,
- Bemidji
- Stittsworth Meats - Mychal Stittsworth, Bemidji

2017 Runners Up
- Bare Cloth - Keila McCracken, Turtle River
- Raptor Rack - Jeremy Leffelman, Bemidji
- Squarrel - Russ Karasch & Robert Monahan, Park Rapids

True North HackFest

LaunchPad was happy to host the first True North HackFest in April 2017. A HackFest is a competition among teams of IT-skilled individuals charged with creating a technological solution to a particular problem. The event saw 7 teams compete for a $1,000 award for the most innovative IT solution. The event also included a youth gaming challenge featuring 22 middle and high school students from around the state. LaunchPad partnered with the following organizations for this successful event: Northwest MN Foundation, Blandin Foundation, Bemidji State University, Evolve Creative, and Paul Bunyan Communications.

TEDxBemidji

Spring of 2017 also included the first ever TEDxBemidji event held at the Historic Chief Theater. TEDx is a local version of the global TED Talks designed to help communities, organizations, and individuals to spark conversation and connection through a TED-like experience. Greater Bemidji/LaunchPad provided fiscal agent services for the event and staff chaired the sponsorship and ticketing committees. The event included 100 attendees at the theater and dozens more at two off-site viewing parties. The theme was Thrive and event featured 6 incredible speakers from the Bemidji community. Planning is underway for the second TEDxBemidji event in the coming year that will fill the theater to capacity and show the world the ideas worth sharing right here in Bemidji!
LAUNCHPAD MEMBER

Our members are the heart of what LaunchPad is all about. Some are contemplating a business idea, others are in the midst of expanding their business, while some are working remotely and appreciate the community and connections. Here is a deeper look at one member and what LaunchPad has meant to him.

KEVIN JOHNSON,
OWNER OF GREAT RIVER DESIGN

At an early age Kevin knew he loved computers, outsmarting his computer science teachers in high school. He started building a software catalog website to teach himself programming and this site eventually became a popular software download website. During the dot.com bust, Kevin sold the site and transitioned to freelance web development/programming. Great River Design just celebrated its 21st anniversary in business.

Kevin has always operated his business out of his home. With the opening of LaunchPad he saw an opportunity to solve two of his biggest challenges with a home office. #1 – Meeting space, Kevin had to meet in coffee shops with clients. This was always challenging with noise, lack of privacy, and struggles with equipment logistics. LaunchPad gave him the professional space he was craving. And #2 – Productivity, when home and office life combine distractions abound. Kevin says with a membership at LaunchPad his productivity saw a sharp improvement! No laundry to be folded or floors to vacuum. In addition, the 24/7 access in crucial for Kevin, as you will often find him in on weekends to take care of a client needs.

Kevin has seen a significant increase in business over the past two and half years he has been a LaunchPad member. He contributes this to his accessibility to clients here at LaunchPad, and being around entrepreneurs who are in need of his services all the time. “Facebook recently told me that I had made 100 new friends in 2017,” Kevin reported. “When I reviewed who they were, they are entirely comprised of people I’ve met via LaunchPad.”

Kevin may be considered a solo-preneur, but rarely will you find him alone. His trusted companion, Norway, a 6 year old black lab, is always at his side. Norway is a certified therapy dog that Kevin takes around to nursing homes and schools throughout the community. Norway has been labeled “the LaunchPad Mascot” and loves to greet visitors and members every day.

What is Kevin looking forward to in the coming months? He is excited for the continued growth in the membership base, as well as, his social media work for Greater Bemidji and the development of a podcast area within LaunchPad.

“Becoming a full-time member and moving into a campsite was a no-brainer, and I consider it one of the best decisions I’ve ever made for my business.”

www.greatriverdesign.com
Launchpad Start-up Business

Michael Block, Elite Additives

In the summer of 2016 Mike Block and his family moved to Bemidji from Grand Rapids, MN. Having graduated in 2007 with a BS in Design Technology from BSU, Bemidji was a familiar community and one Mike was excited to call home. After spending about ten years in the additive manufacturing industry, most of those years with Stratasys, one of the leading companies in 3D printing technologies, Mike decided to explore the possibility of starting up his own 3D print shop.

Mike was encouraged to reach out to Greater Bemidji and LaunchPad to learn about the opportunities for starting a business in Bemidji. Mike started coming to the weekly Entrepreneurs Meetups. Through the Meetups he gained valuable insight into business basics, including defining market, risk-taking, business planning, and more.

Through the LaunchPad he was also connected with mentors, David Olderman and Kevin Erpelding, and Grant Oppegaard from the Small Business Development Center. With their guidance Mike began refining a business plan. The mentors were there to help Mike tackle the tough questions and determine the best avenue to launch this new business.

Mike began forming relationships with other entrepreneurs. A few from the Entrepreneur leader team took time to meet with Mike and talk through his business model and projections. The peer-to-peer mentoring model is a powerful tool providing some reality checks at critical points in the business planning process. He also developed connections with potential local customers/partners in the industry, helping to quantify the potential revenue potential for this business.

Once Mike’s business plan was complete he was ready to present at an Entrepreneur Meetup. It was an opportunity for Mike to share about the 3D industry and its growth potential and to articulate his niche within it. Mike found the experience helpful and was encouraged by the support he received. As is often the case the meetings after the meeting brought about even more valuable connections and important feedback.

In fall of 2017 Mike left his position at Stratasys and November 6th Elite Additive was born. It’s a premier 3D printing parts provider. The company focuses on three main processes: Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM), Polyjet (UV curable resin), and Selective Laser Melting (SLM). In addition they offer high precision 3D laser scanning (great for reverse engineering), CAD design, and post processing (Hydro Graphics Dip, Smoothing, Bead Blasting, Painting, Epoxy Sealing, Electroplating). As the company grows Mike looks forward to the addition of staff and a building that will house industrial 3D printers right here in northern Minnesota.

Best piece of advice you received?

“Fail to plan, plan to fail.” – David Olderman

Elite Additive is an example of how LaunchPad’s resources and connections can help entrepreneurs move their ideas into reality.

www.eliteadditive.com
Greater Bemidji Continues to Support Creating Talent for Manufacturing and Trades in the Region

The Minnesota Innovation Institute (MI2), a project of Greater Bemidji, was created in 2013 by companies in this region to grow the region’s workforce talent. MI2 focus is to help people obtain technical skills and find employment with regional companies. While focused on manufacturing, our skills development are relevant to construction trades, automotive and any workplace requiring maintenance skills. MI2 annually serves 125-175 participants per year...over 1,000 people since its inception.

Incoming Workforce:

MI2 continues to focus on our regional companies by providing training with credentials from the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC), National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS) which are the gold standard for front-line industrial training.

All training and services have been designed with employer input and are delivered in a format that allows flexibility. By design they are ACT: Adaptable (Face to face, Online or a combination), Cost Effective (Most courses are provided for less than $25 per instructional hour), and Time Sensitive (Most people complete a course in 1-4 weeks).

Employers contribute their time, materials and dollars to ensure MI2’s programs reflect what’s expected in the workplace. They also advocate for alignment of public resources with MI2 to strengthen the region’s workforce capacity. For every dollar invested by the local companies approximately $3 is leveraged from public resources, primarily tax dollars also paid by MN employers, as projects for workforce development programs.

Entry Workforce:

MI2 is working with area high schools to provide skill training for those students interested in industrial/trade careers. In partnership with Bemidji Career Academies, MI2 provides the Mechatronics Career Academy. Through that effort, students have taken Mechatronics and Computer Numeric Control courses with the support of corporate sponsors, project funds and some funds from Bemidji Schools. MI2 has provided training to over 50 student/trainees with many going to work in the region.

In addition to student/trainees attending courses at MI2, instructors and coordinators have routinely provided support during registration fairs, classroom Work Seminars and mock interviews. Partnership with Bemidji High School has been expanded as well as outreach to Bagley, Kelliher, Crookston, Moorhead, East Grand Forks and Fisher School Districts as well as Headwaters and Park Rapids homeschoo...
EMERGING WORKFORCE:
Employers asked MI2 to continue its focus on expanding the workforce by helping grow a pool of ready applicants. With alignment in mind with public programs and support, MI2 forged a partnership with Workforce Impact, Beltrami County’s workforce development program. Transitioning workers have varied experience and sometimes life challenges. Support from Workforce Impact allows participants to utilize short cycle daily face to face training learning industrial skills as well as workplace skills (attendance, timeliness, team work, etc.) while continuing the resource support from navigators and employment specialist. This alignment focuses on Workforce Impact assessing each client needs, bridging them to training and ultimately placing them in career appropriate employment.

INVESTMENT & RESULTS:
MI2’s placement rate varies by our participant groups: Incumbents – 100%; Emerging – 95%; and Transitioning – 75% for an overall average of about 80%. MI2’s funds come from private company contracts and grant projects. DEED continues to support MI2 by providing training dollars for eligible Entry Workers and Emerging Workers, however there are gaps in funding. Entry and Emerging Workers require additional staff time to prepare them for employer expectations so the partnership with Workforce Impact allows for some of these services to be supported. Equipment maintenance and space costs are projected to increase.

OPPORTUNITIES:
Opportunities continue to grow for Greater Bemidji leading the way among economic development organizations. Economic development groups and cities continue to seek advice as to how to develop a rapid response to workforce development.

Partnerships with higher education to provide career pathways continue to be pursued with a focus on local entities. Continue the work with Adult Basic Education (ABE) to develop foundational skill and career readiness for transitioning workers.

The Northwest Private Industry Council (NWPIC) is asking for assistance in deploying incumbent worker training. The Governors Workforce Development Council (GWDC) has been apprised of MI2 and asks how that can be developed in other regions.

In addition, our regional companies continue to inform our efforts in programming by asking for development of more training in soft skill foundational development, assembly/production, solar/passive technology and construction/trades.
“We were tasked with providing training to our maintenance departments and Norbord was utilizing a company out of Atlanta, Ga. Through the Minnesota Innovation Institute, we were able to tailor our training around our own work schedules and not have a negative impact in our business by either shutting down for training or sending our members all the way down south to attend training.

We have been able to use the mechatronics program to help us develop potential maintenance candidates and also to further our existing maintenance personal in their skills. It has also helped to cross train our existing members in both mechanical fabrication and hydraulics as well as electrical skills.”

- Jon Anderson, HR Manager, Norbord Minnesota, Bemidji, MN

Festus Rockensock from Norbord working on the Mechatronics Capstone Trainer Fall 2017

“We Enjoy a close Relationship with the Minnesota Innovation Institute and consider it to be invaluable as we utilized them to fulfill the related training aspects or our apprenticeship programs...we share a common goal of helping members of our community become trained and employed.”

- Andy Wells, III, President of Wells Technology

LAS VEGAS RES (Reservation Economic Summit) Show—March 13-16 2017
From Left to Right : Andy Wells II, James King, Tim Knudson Robert Meeshenow
MI2 Trainee: Travis Waldrep

Travis Waldrep, just recently out of military service, is one of the entry workers making his way through the computer numeric control program. Unemployed after finishing his time with the military, Waldrep said he visited the workforce center and MI2 was immediately brought up as an option.

“When I got over here I was able to see all the different things capable with the machinery and found that really interesting,” Waldrep said. “With the leading edge technology that they have here, it really makes learning easy and understandable for my background as avionics technician.”

“I didn’t know how difficult things were going to be when I got out of the service and I was admittedly, not myself. However, thanks to all of the support and encouragement I received from the MI2 staff I truly believe that they helped me get back to my full potential. Your efforts will never be lost on me, my time at MI2 was what helped me move one foot in front of the other.”

After finishing in June of 2017, Travis moved to the Twin Cities and enrolled at Anoka-Ramsey Community College and is studying engineering. He hopes to one day work for Tesla or SpacEx.

MI2 Trainee: Jacob Smith

Bemidji High School Class of 2017

Jacob took multiple courses through MI2 in 2017 after working part time at Wells Technology during his senior year, is now attending Alexandria Technical and Community College (ATCC) for Machine Tool Technology. Since taking Mechatronics courses at MI2 as part of his schedule at BHS in his senior year, he has earned college credit from ATCC, saving him time and money.

“Going to MI2 for classes was a wonderful opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and skills that will help me in my career as well as my own projects. As a high school student I liked the freedom and responsibility.”
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Thank you! The Greater Bemidji Board of Directors and Staff would like to thank those businesses, individuals, and organizations that have provided financial support to, or pledged financial support for Greater Bemidji in 2017.

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