



2025 IMPACT REPORT

A NOTE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND PRESIDENT & CEO



As we reflect on 2025, we are proud of the momentum and measurable progress achieved across the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce. This year marked an important chapter for our organization, with continued leadership transition and a renewed focus on strategic impact.

Under strengthened leadership and board direction, the Chamber advanced key economic development priorities, deepened regional collaboration through the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance, and elevated advocacy efforts supporting housing, workforce development, infrastructure, and small business growth. We have reinforced the Chamber's role as a trusted convener, connector, and voice for business in Manistee County.

Like any year of growth, 2025 brought both opportunities and lessons. Those experiences sharpened our focus, strengthened internal alignment, and positioned the Chamber to operate with greater clarity and purpose. The result is an organization that is more strategic, more responsive, and more committed than ever to serving our investors and community.

The accomplishments highlighted in this report reflect the collective work of an engaged board of directors, dedicated staff, committed investors, and valued community partners. Progress in Manistee County happens through collaboration, and that partnership continues to be our greatest strength.

We are energized by what lies ahead and confident in the foundation we are building together. Thank you for your continued trust and investment in the Chamber's mission.

With appreciation,

Dennis McCarthy
Board Chair

Carmen Kott
President & CEO

THE 2025 TEAM



Andrew Stafford
Director of Economic Development

Blade Gates
Marketing & Communications Specialist

Carmen Kott
President & CEO

Nicole Kaminski
Programs Specialist

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Chamber Board of Directors dedicate themselves to ensuring the Chamber of Commerce meets the business needs of Manistee County. Our board is a team of professionals across a wide variety of Manistee County industries, acting as a key resource to the community. They are the biggest advocates for the Chamber and act as guides for the Chamber’s mission.

 Dennis McCarthy Blarney Castle Oil & Propane BOARD CHAIR	 Jeff Reau Edward Jones - Jeff Reau VICE CHAIR	 Kelly Tomaszewski Munson Healthcare Manistee Hospital & Paul Oliver Memorial Hospital TREASURER	 Crystal Young West Shore Community College SECRETARY	 Dyllan Walker Packaging Corporation of America	 Shawn Buckner Meijer Corporation	 Alex Callaway Munson Healthcare Manistee Hospital
 Kyle Gurzynski Filer Credit Union	 Eric Gustad Consumers Energy	 Kevin Hughes Sandpiper III Charters	 Dan Mesyar Onekama Consolidated Schools	 Lynn Saunders Little River Casino Resort	 Jeff Dontz County of Manistee	 Bill Gambill City of Manistee

OUR INVESTORS

A chamber of commerce is defined by its members. Local businesses, organizations, and individuals drive the Chamber’s work in Manistee County. Through their investments, board service, and collaboration, these partners shape the county’s identity and success.

31
NEW CHAMBER
INVESTORS IN 2025

285+
TOTAL INVESTORS

YEAR AT A GLANCE

Our four priorities work in union to uphold the Chamber's mission:
TO BUILD A DYNAMIC AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION TO SERVE THE BUSINESS, WORKFORCE,
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF ALL IN MANISTEE COUNTY.

BUSINESS & LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

- With support from Traverse Connect and funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber secured \$10,000 in housing assistance for two Manistee County residents.
- In partnership with Rehmann, the Alliance helped businesses understand new federal tax benefits under H.R. 1 and Michigan tax changes.
- The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance helped secure a statewide legislative compromise supporting employers on the Earned Sick Time Act.
- State & Federal Budgets – The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance helped secure funding and protect key regional programs.

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- \$36 million in projects/investments in Manistee County.
- 82 full and part-time jobs created in 2025.
- Through Networks Northwest, the Chamber was awarded \$80,000 in Strategic Site Readiness funding from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.
- Looking to 2026, 4 new housing projects, a new childcare center, and 6 redevelopment projects are set to bring beautification, business enhancements, and jobs to our community.

LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 108 graduates of the Manistee Area Leadership Program.
- Since 2018, \$101,727 invested back into the community.
- 90+ organizations engaged through the Manistee Area Leadership Program
- Chamber Staff completed leadership and strategic professional development to strengthen organizational effectiveness and better serve the community.
- 11 community projects completed through the Manistee Area Leadership Program, highlights: Life Jacket Stations at five area beaches, First Street Beach Dog Park Rehabilitation, and Renovation and rehabilitation of “The Rec” Center at Sands Park.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

- Paid out \$102,957 in Facade Restoration Grants in 2025.
- The Manistee DDA was awarded a \$756,825 RAP Grant from the State of Michigan for the Downtown Streetscape Project.
- 7 new Downtown Manistee Businesses.
- \$22,719.09 spent in Downtown Manistee through Manistee County Cash
- Creation of a Target Business Group with the goal of intentional business attraction to the Downtown area.
- The DDA in collaboration with the Manistee County Tourism Authority invested in updated way-finding signage for the Downtown Area.

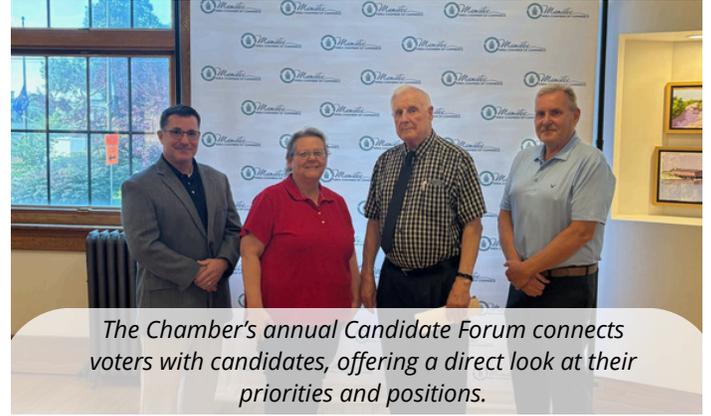
BUSINESS & LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

ADVOCACY BENEFITS EVERY MANISTEE COUNTY BUSINESS

The Chamber works at the local, regional, and state levels to strengthen the business environment in Manistee County.

Key Priorities:

- Advocacy on rural business policy.
- securing resources and funding for Manistee County.
- Maintaining legislative relationships
- Advocate for Manistee County businesses in statewide discussions and decision-making.



The Chamber's annual Candidate Forum connects voters with candidates, offering a direct look at their priorities and positions.



The 2025 Northern Michigan Policy Conference is designed to leverage strategies that support rural-centric business policy, sharing solutions to regional issues like housing, workforce, and talent attraction.



The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance was represented at the U.P. 200 in Marquette, MI.



**PARTNER OF THE
NORTHERN MICHIGAN
CHAMBER ALLIANCE**

The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance (NMCA) is a coalition of 20 chambers and economic development organizations from across Northern Michigan.

This coalition exists to:

- **SUPPORT** the success of existing Northern Michigan businesses.
- **DEVELOP** and attract a talented workforce in Northern Michigan
- **MAXIMIZE** the competitiveness of the rural Northern Michigan business environment.

10

SUPPORT LETTERS

5

ECONOMIC & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

1

WORKFORCE & EDUCATION

2

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

2

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

SUPPORT LETTERS

Highlights

- Fricano's Manistee River Land Sale
- Three Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act Districts (Wahr Hardware, PNC building, Dairy Jones Building)
- Thoroughbred Boat Company MEDC Grant
- City of Manistee Fire Department Expansion
- Great Lakes Energy - BEAD Grant Program
- WSCC - Skid Pad
- City of Manistee - Coast Guard Community
- Hotel Northern - RAP Grant
- Housing North - Zoning Atlas
- DDA - RAP Streetscape

ADVOCACY EFFORTS

LOCAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS

HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

Hosted the Northern Hotel groundbreaking celebration at 141 Washington Street.

GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

Candidate Forum held for City Council. Candidates were given a platform to express their stances local housing needs, childcare, business growth, and economic development.

LEGISLATIVE MONITORING

Broadcasted information about local elections and kept our investors informed on relevant, legislative updates in our regular advocacy newsletters.

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Cohosted the Business & Economic Summit with West Shore Community College, West Shore Bank, and Mason County Chamber Alliance.

INVESTOR & STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION

Tracked the Earned Sick Time Act and Paid Leave Minimum Wage legislation and kept investors informed on latest updates.

STATE & REGIONAL EFFORTS

MACP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Carmen Kott represented Manistee at the MACP Annual Conference, discussing the state of Michigan chambers and strategies to support local businesses.

CHAMBER DAY AT THE CAPITOL

Carmen Kott represented the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce at the annual Chamber Day at the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing Michigan.

NORTHERN MICHIGAN POLICY CONFERENCE

Carmen Kott and Andrew Stafford attended the Northern Michigan Policy Conference, where Michigan's top legislators discussed key policies affecting rural Northern Michigan.

GOVERNOR'S BREAKFAST

Carmen Kott attended the 47th Annual Governor's Breakfast with Governor Whitmer, legislators, and Northern Michigan business, hosted by the Cadillac Area Chamber of Commerce.

LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS & NETWORKING

Nicole Kaminski and the Leadership Cohort joined the Cadillac Area Chamber in Lansing, meeting key state legislators including Reps. John Roth, Curt VanderWall, and Sen. Michele Hoyenga.

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Business retention visit at TerraVest Tanks, learning about their operations and processes



652

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONTACTS IN 2025



141
CITY OF MANISTEE CONTACTS

242
DOWNTOWN MANISTEE CONTACTS

269
COUNTYWIDE CONTACTS (EXCLUDING THE CITY)

RECRUITING & BRINGING INVESTMENT TO MANISTEE COUNTY

Economic development is critical to Manistee County's long-term stability and quality of life. A strong local strategy:

- Supports year-round employment
- Retains residents and local talent
- Strengthens the tax base
- Enables investment in infrastructure, public safety, and essential services

Housed within the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce, the Manistee County Economic Development Council provides strategic leadership through business engagement and community partnerships—positioning Manistee County for sustainable growth and long-term economic resilience.

In 2025, the Chamber made 652 economic development contacts with businesses, housing developers, local units of government, and community organizations. These working discussions focused on:

- Business retention and expansion needs
- Housing capacity
- Workforce challenges
- Infrastructure constraints

Insights from this ongoing engagement directly inform a data-driven, locally grounded economic development strategy for Manistee County.

RIBBON CUTTINGS & GRAND OPENINGS

The Chamber recognizes local business milestones that strengthen Manistee County's economy. Chamber investors may host a ribbon cutting to mark a grand opening, expansion, or major achievement.

These events bring together Chamber ambassadors, local leaders, and the public to acknowledge business investment and economic impact.

Boyer Family Dentistry's ribbon cutting ceremony celebrated the expansion of their practice which was an investment of \$250,000 into Manistee County.



12

CELEBRATED RIBBON CUTTINGS

\$36 MILLION

INVESTED IN MANISTEE COUNTY IN 2025

82

FULL AND PART-TIME JOBS CREATED IN 2025

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPER DAY

In May 2025, the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce hosted its first Developer Day since 2018, renewing focus on catalytic investment opportunities across Manistee County. The event was designed to:

- Attract investment to high-impact, priority development sites
- Connect local banks, realtors, regional partners, and developers
- Bring key stakeholders together to support development opportunities

More than 50 participants attended, fostering meaningful dialogue around site readiness, housing development, and local investment potential.



Developer Day 2025 featuring speakers: Pete Beukema, Sammie Lukaskiewicz, Andrew Stafford, Carmen Kott, and Jeff Dontz

\$80,000

THROUGH NETWORK NORTHWEST, THE CHAMBER WAS AWARDED STRATEGIC SITE READINESS DOLLARS FROM THE MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION. THE FUNDS HELP COMMUNITIES PREPARE AND IMPROVE INDUSTRIAL SITES SO THEY ARE READY TO ATTRACT NEW BUSINESS INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT.



Manistee County - MI Sites Program
A 40-acre industrial site in Manistee Township has been selected for the MI Site Readiness Program, helping prepare the property for future development and investment.

MI SITE PROGRAM

To attract industry employers, the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce partnered with the City of Manistee in the MI Site Program, a state-supported site selection program, securing a Bronze designation for a 40-acre industrial site in Manistee Township. The goal of this program is to better position Michigan to attract new business investment by building a statewide portfolio of market-ready industrial sites.

This classification enhances the site's competitiveness and positions Manistee County for future state grant opportunities and business investment.

INVESTING IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MANISTEE COUNTY



LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the five Art for Art sensory board installed around Manistee County. Locations include: First Street Beach, the Manistee Riverwalk, Manistee County Library, Kaleva Library, and the Art Park at Crystal Mountain.



The Manistee Area Leadership Program fosters countywide collaboration among organizations to give participants meaningful insight and experience.

Program Topics:

- Natural Resources
- Industry
- Healthcare
- Education
- Government / Justice
- Tribal
- History

THE 2024/2025 COHORT

“Art for All” Art Sensory Board Installations

The 2024/2025 cohort’s community project, “Art for All,” brings inclusive, multi-sensory art installations to Manistee County. The project aims to showcase local creativity, engage people of all abilities, and create accessible experiences that foster connection and inspiration across the community.

THE 2025/2026 COHORT

The 2025/2026 cohort has chosen the Alternatives for Area Youth, aka “The Rec” for their community project. They plan to provide facility upgrades and enhancements. Leftover funds will be donated to “The Rec” for future programming and facility needs.



The Manistee Area Leadership Program is a nine-month program with a focus on creating knowledgeable and connected professionals across several industries. Each year, participants gain knowledge of the strengths, trends, and issues within Manistee County by meeting current community leaders, engaging key skills, and showcasing important areas of Manistee County.

The program's ultimate goal is to develop leaders who will pave the way for Manistee County's future.

118

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
SINCE 2015

11

TOTAL COHORTS

\$101,727

INVESTED BACK INTO
THE COMMUNITY
*SINCE 2018

11

TOTAL COMMUNITY
PROJECTS

76%

OF PARTICIPANTS
REMAIN IN MANISTEE
COUNTY SINCE 2015

90+

ORGANIZATIONS
ENGAGED THROUGH
THE PROGRAM

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

MANISTEE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA)

The Manistee Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has three main objectives:
to **PROMOTE** economic growth and development.
to **CREATE** an identifiable and attractive downtown.
to **STRENGTHEN** businesses and community ownership.

\$22,719

SPENT IN DOWNTOWN MANISTEE THROUGH MANISTEE COUNTY CASH

\$756,800

SECURED A STATE RAP GRANT (50/50 MATCH) TO INITIATE THE DOWNTOWN STREETScape PROJECT

242

DOWNTOWN MANISTEE CONTACTS IN 2025

\$102,957

IN FACADE GRANTS PAID OUT IN 2025 WITH THE DDA MATCH PROGRAM

7

NEW DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES



The DDA has continued the Facade Restoration program which offers a match grant for building owners to repair the exterior of their buildings.



The 'Stee Social District allows patrons to carry alcoholic beverages across the Downtown district, with 10 participating businesses.



DOWNTOWN MANISTEE STREETScape PROJECT

Communication & Public Relations:

The DDA partnered with RightSide Design Group to create Streetscape Plan marketing materials, including a project overview slide deck, and provided formal updates to the DDA Board in July and City Council and stakeholders in December.

Engineering & Budget Planning:

Spicer Group developed itemized engineering cost estimates, supported by RightSide Design and the Streetscape Ad Hoc Committee, **secured a \$756,800 state RAP grant (50/50 match)**, and prepared all necessary materials to release a Request for Proposal (RFP) to keep construction on track for spring 2026.



Streetscape: Poplar Street towards Maple Street

River Street RAP Grant from Pine Street to Spruce Street



\$7,689

SPENT ON HANGING BASKETS AND PLANTERS



\$4,776

SPENT ON HOLIDAY DECOR

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

The Chamber's programs provide **networking, recognition, and collaboration opportunities that directly support Manistee County's economic and community growth.**

Thanks to the support of sponsors and investors, these programs connect local leaders, foster partnerships, and strengthen the business community. By bringing together diverse perspectives, our events help drive innovation, build relationships, and advance the county's collective success.

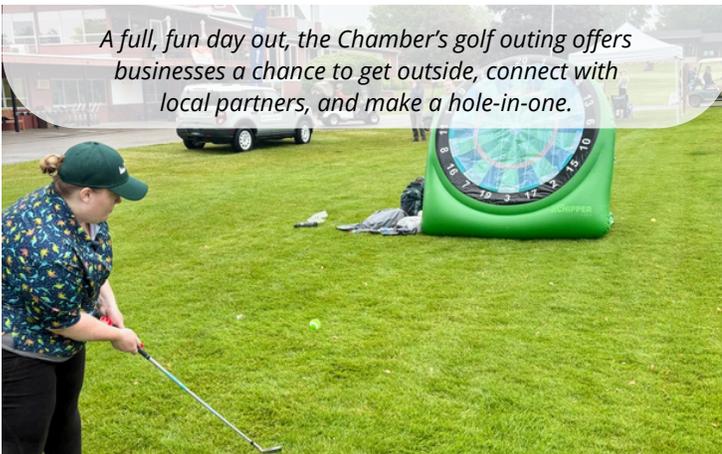
BUSINESS AWARDS GALA

The Business Awards Gala is an elegant evening of celebration, recognizing work of the past year from local businesses, organizations, and leaders. 2025's theme? Garden Party!



ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

A full, fun day out, the Chamber's golf outing offers businesses a chance to get outside, connect with local partners, and make a hole-in-one.



MANISTEE NATIONAL FOREST FESTIVAL

Since 1936, this festival has become a staple of Manistee County, attracting tens of thousands of visitors for moments like the Independence Parade and the fireworks show over Lake Michigan.



CHAMBER UNTAPPED

With four Chamber UnTapped's throughout the year, these networking nights bring together business professionals across Manistee County, often with food, drinks, raffles, and live music.



MANISTEE COUNTY COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS

Originally started during the nationwide lockdown in 2020, the Manistee County Community Christmas provides local residents, businesses, and non-profits the opportunity to showcase their holiday spirit.



 **manistee county ca\$h**

The manistee county ca\$h program is a county-wide initiative that advocates local spending. This popular community gift encourages patrons to spend their dollars here in Manistee County.

32

PARTICIPATING
BUSINESSES

\$27k

IN CASH
SPENT IN 2025

COMMUNICATIONS



MANISTEE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
26,268
 Page Visits

970,824
 Views

4,992
 Followers



DOWNTOWN MANISTEE (MANISTEE DDA)
25,772
 Page Visits

1,650,978
 Views

11,754
 Followers



MANISTEE NATIONAL FOREST FESTIVAL
22,753
 Page Visits

604,158
 Views

10,924
 Followers



MANISTEE AREA LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
5,423
 Page Visits

197,281
 Views

705
 Followers



MANISTEE COUNTY COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS
2,341
 Page Visits

42,192
 Views

1,293
 Followers



ManisteeChamber.com
 45,289 sessions
 38K users



ManisteeDowntown.com
 4,594 sessions
 3.6K users



ManisteeForestFestival.com
 30,110 sessions
 17K users

16

CHAMBER & DDA SPECIFIC NEWSLETTERS

76

EBLASTS TO CHAMBER INVESTORS

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MENTIONS OF THE CHAMBER & TEAM IN NEWS

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INTERVIEWS WITH THE CHAMBER

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PRESS/MEDIA RELEASES

12

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE COLUMNS

PREMIER INVESTORS

Premier Investors play a vital role in advancing the Chamber's mission, providing critical support that drives economic growth, strengthens local businesses, and invests in the future of Manistee County.



West Shore Community College has been a cornerstone of higher education in the region for over 50 years. The college offers a wide range of academic programs, workforce training, and community education opportunities, serving students from Manistee, Mason, Lake, and Oceana counties. WSCC is committed to providing accessible, affordable, and high-quality education to empower individuals and strengthen the local community.

Beyond academics, WSCC actively engages with the community through events, partnerships, and initiatives that promote lifelong learning and civic involvement.



Little River Casino Resort is nestled just moments from the Lake Michigan shoreline, this premier destination offers more than just excitement on the gaming floor, it's a full experience. From luxurious hotel accommodations and a relaxing spa to live entertainment and incredible dining, Little River truly has something for everyone.

Owned and operated by the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, the resort has long played an important role in the vibrancy and growth of our area. Whether you're looking for a weekend getaway, a night of entertainment, or simply a great meal, Little River Casino Resort delivers unforgettable moments - right in our backyard.



Serving the Manistee area since 1951, Filer Credit Union offers a full range of financial services to its members, including savings and checking accounts, personal and business loans, money markets, and more.

With deep local roots, Filer Credit Union consistently shows up for Manistee - supporting events, fostering connections, and helping individuals and families thrive. Their community investment extends beyond banking, with initiatives like awarding scholarships and hosting Financial Reality Fairs to empower youth with real-world financial knowledge.



As a cornerstone of the local healthcare community, Munson Healthcare Manistee Hospital has been dedicated to providing high-quality, compassionate care to the residents of Manistee County for decades. The hospital offers a wide range of services, including emergency care, surgical procedures, diagnostic imaging, and specialized treatments, all aimed at meeting the diverse needs of the community.

Beyond its clinical services, Munson Healthcare Manistee Hospital actively engages in community initiatives, supporting local events and programs that promote health and well-being. Their commitment to community involvement underscores their role as a trusted healthcare provider and a valued partner in fostering a healthy, vibrant community.

Thank You



SEE YOU IN 2026!



Our mission is to build a dynamic and sustainable organization to serve the Business, Workforce and Economic Development needs of all in Manistee County.

OUR FOUR PRIORITIES



BUSINESS &
LEGISLATIVE
ADVOCACY



ECONOMIC &
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT



LEADERSHIP &
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION

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