



*Extraordinary place.  
Extraordinary space.*

## About Southwest Michigan First

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### Overview

In the mid 1990s, Southwest Michigan saw a series of events that took several of its base industries from the region. The greatest impact came when the General Motors Kalamazoo Stamping Plant (now Midlink Business Park) closed its doors, leaving about 3,500 people jobless. First of America Bank merged with National City Bank and moved its headquarters to Cleveland. The Upjohn Company merged with the Pharmacia Corporation, moving the headquarters to New Jersey. And finally, the local paper industry collapsed, which involved the closing of five paper plants and the loss of more than 1,500 jobs. In the midst of this economic struggle and great uncertainty, Southwest Michigan First was born and brought with it vision and hope to the community.

Southwest Michigan First was created by local community, education, and business leaders in September 1998. The organization was commissioned to create a long-term economic strategy for the community and build sustainable economic development. Five years later, Southwest Michigan First has already laid the foundation for a new era of success in the Kalamazoo region and has started a trend toward improving the economic status of the community.

Southwest Michigan First is a privately funded, 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation formed by business and higher education leaders to promote economic development in the Greater Kalamazoo region.

Collaborating with Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Southwest Michigan First has contributed to the efforts of two new industrial parks: WMU's Business Technology and Research Park and KVCC's Groves Education, Business, Technology Park. Both the BTR Park and The Groves have emerged as two of the premier locations in the state to nurture and develop life-science companies. Southwest Michigan First also played a part in the development of other facilities, including the construction of Target's Regional Distribution Center, the expansion of Flowserve Corporation, American Greetings DesignWare, Richard-Allan Scientific, and many more, plus the start-up of six new life-science companies.

Southwest Michigan First also works to ensure the ongoing success of companies in the area by making annual visits to identify potential problems and to point out opportunities for expansion. Through hard work and dedication to the region, Southwest Michigan First has led the Kalamazoo area through a time of economic distress to the brink of a new golden age for the community.

Southwest Michigan First is actively involved with Midlink Business Park. Southwest Michigan First Vice President Jill Bland meets weekly with Midlink officials to discuss business and community issues and to assist in the promotion of Midlink Business Park and the region.

### Mission Statement

The mission headed by Southwest Michigan First is to promote the region as the premier place for economic growth. We strive to pursue excellence and form strategic partnerships to assist existing and new businesses in expanding or creating their companies.

### Media Information

Interviews are available with officials from Midlink Business Park, Southwest Michigan First, and Comstock Township. Please contact Galen De Young at Francis Marketing at 616-235-1122 ext. 31 or [gdeyoung@francis-marketing.com](mailto:gdeyoung@francis-marketing.com) to arrange an interview or request additional information. For more information on Midlink Business Park, please go to [www.midlinkbusinesspark.com](http://www.midlinkbusinesspark.com). Learn more about Southwest Michigan First at [www.southwestmichiganfirst.com](http://www.southwestmichiganfirst.com).