

OAKLAND
thrive

Together Helping Realize Inclusive & Vibrant Economies

2023

Press Kit





MEET OAKLAND THRIVE

Oakland Thrive is a nonprofit organization that connects Oakland County's entrepreneurs and small business owners with the resources they need to be successful.

Oakland Thrive is a strategic partner to Oakland County government and administers the innovative *Business Forward* program. *Business Forward* serves all Oakland County small businesses with special focus on underrepresented communities and minority, woman, and veteran-owned businesses.

Oakland Thrive partners with local business service providers, chambers of commerce, local governments and other known economic support organizations to bring a wide array of services, resources and assistance to startups and companies poised for growth. While Oakland County has a great many programs and organizations that support community and economic development, too often business owners are unaware that these resources exist or how to access them. *Oakland Thrive's* *Business Forward* consultants proactively reach out to Oakland County's small and micro companies to connect them with these much needed benefits.

Business Forward Consultants are business experts with a deep understanding of Oakland County's business climate and decades of combined experience in the challenges facing small businesses, knowledge of how companies grow into large global entities, and the limitations of government. *Oakland Thrive* works with entrepreneurs and small business owners to provide free targeted support including one-on-one consultations, training, and workshops in business development, market research, eCommerce, legal support, accounting, marketing and more.



OUR STAFF & BOARD

Oakland Thrive's Board of Directors, Officers and Staff are all committed to leveraging their expertise and passion to build thriving business ecosystems and communities and to help realize inclusive, vibrant economies.



Vicki Selva

Thrive Chief Executive Officer

Vicki Selva has been managing budgets, developing programs and strategies, and working to grow Michigan companies for over 20 years. She is the former Executive Director of the Michigan Defense Center, which was created in 2006 to support the state's federally funded programs and contractors. Prior to this she served for over a decade as Senator Carl Levin's Director where she built her reputation working with global, national, and local companies and has developed many important relationships with key members of industry, government, and academia. She also developed and led initiatives to connect constituents and businesses to resources offered at all levels of government, academia, and nonprofits. Working within government, she was able to innovate, including recommending new programs and legislation which assisted hundreds of companies to respond to economic challenges.



Laura Dodd

Thrive Chief Operating Officer

Laura Dodd has spent her career improving lives through public services. As a nonprofit leader, she has worked in voluntary health, higher ed, historic preservation, tourism, human rights, and economic development organizations throughout the country. Most recently, Dodd worked as part of Oakland County's Economic Development organization leading external affairs and business information. During this time, she was an integral component in delivering vital grants, technical support, and personal protection equipment to small businesses throughout Oakland County. Dodd serves on the Huron Valley Schools Board of Education as Vice President. She has an undergraduate degree from Western Michigan University in Organizational Communication and a master's degree in Nonprofit Administration from the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.



Sean Carlson

Thrive Board Chair

Sean Carlson serves as an Oakland County Deputy Executive and is a founding member of the *Oakland Thrive* Board of Directors. Carlson's role on the Board, which begins after awards and contracts are granted, is to provide direct oversight of county funds and ensure close coordination between the county and contractors. Prior to this, Carlson served as the Executive Director of the Michigan Defense Center, Vice President of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's international trade program, and Senior Deputy Director of Michigan's Department of Management & Budget. In 2006, the National Association of Government Accountants named Carlson as one of the top state leaders in the country for his development of policies bringing integrity to public procurement. After 20 years in the Air Force both on active duty and in the Air National Guard, Carlson retired as a lieutenant colonel.



Grace Lee

Thrive Board Member

Grace Lee is the CEO/President of Ashford Connex, LLC. Prior to founding Ashford Connex, she was a co-founder and CFO of Logic Solutions, Inc., a global web technology company. She has over 20 years of experience in both corporate/public accounting and human resources. Lee is a passionate advocate of diversity and entrepreneurship. She serves on the Michigan Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission as Vice Chair and on the board of Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship. Lee received the MIT Enterprise Forum Excellence Award in 2012 as well as the Diversity award from Corp! Magazine in 2008. She holds a BA in Economics from UCLA and a Master's in Business Administration from Eastern Michigan University.



Alan Kiriluk

Thrive Board Member

Alan Kiriluk is the founder and chairman of KIRCO, a Michigan-based commercial real estate development, construction, and property management company. He began his career as a subcontractor in paving and road construction for his father's business. Kiriluk later expanded that business to include office construction and corporate build-to-suit projects. Since its beginning in 1974, KIRCO has built a reputation of quality and integrity throughout the country and has grown to include locations in Ohio, Alabama, Minnesota, and Florida. Alan's leadership has grown beyond his own company and has established him as a recognized leader in the real estate industry as well as in his government and community endeavors, primarily in the fields of healthcare and transportation. He has been recognized for his success by publications and local communities and has received numerous awards for his philanthropic and fundraising efforts.



Shannon Steel

Thrive Board Member

Shannon Steel was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan and has a degree in Economics from the University of Houston and a certificate of finance from Harvard Business School Online. At 23, she became the youngest stockbroker at Axa Advisors and one of the youngest in the country. While at Axa she increased retired client's portfolios by 15-20%, and was awarded the General Motors account where she managed and strategically invested their 401k, pension, and buyout funds for retirees. Steel also has experience with private banking and has held executive and board of director positions with various private offshore banks. Steel recently became one of the youngest female hotel owners in the country after completing a \$3,000,000 renovation on a Wyndham hotel. She was awarded Wyndham hotel and Resorts developer of the year for 2019.



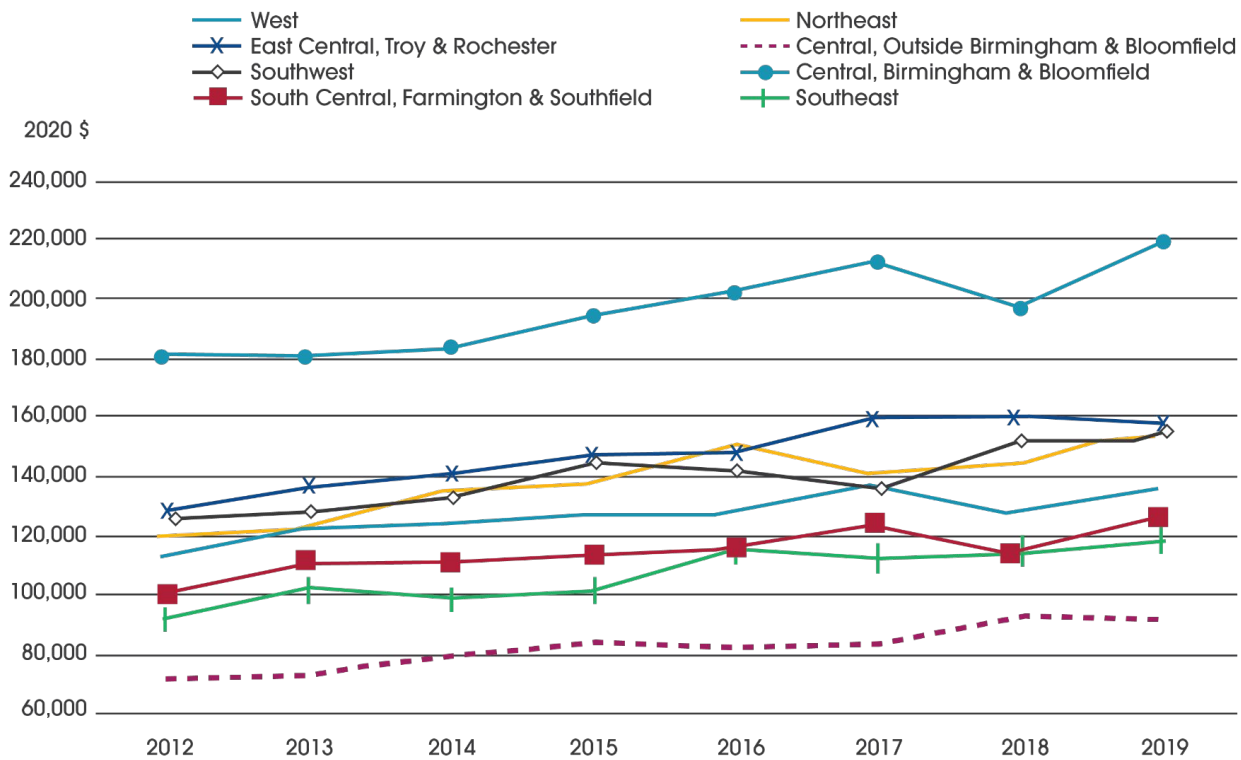
Renee Pipis Axt

Thrive Board Member

Renee Pipis Axt is the founder and President of RCP Associates, LLC., and SOSWorks, both headquartered in Detroit. She is solution-driven and has demonstrated experience in both the public and private sectors, including leadership positions within the Wayne County Executive's Office and the Wayne County Airport Authority Board. Renee has worked extensively in nonprofit, government, and event management, budgeting, grassroots organizing, and economic development. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan and has served with several other boards and organizations in Southeast Michigan.

WHO WE SERVE

Oakland Thrive is working to bolster economic development throughout Oakland County, an affluent and desirable area that attracts both residents and business owners. Currently, many regions in Oakland County have household incomes that greatly exceed the average across Michigan and our nation, especially the City of Birmingham and Bloomfield Township. However, other areas, including cities such as Pontiac and Auburn Hills, have incomes far below the statewide average and that of neighboring communities. By connecting with small and micro businesses in every Oakland County region and providing free support and services, Oakland Thrive will close prosperity gaps and level the playing field for all of the areas we serve.



SUCSESSES | Total Glamour Beauty Supply | Southfield



Total Glamour Beauty supply opened in 2021 as the first black-owned beauty supply store in Southfield and possibly all of Oakland County. Competition for foot traffic in the area was fierce as there were several beauty supply retail stores throughout the area that were carrying similar products. Total Glamour Beauty owners Tara and Gloria Smith, two former GM engineers, had a dream to provide products and services to their community.

Business had been slow and no one knew they existed. Merchandise offerings were sparse due to limited cash flow. They did some eCommerce on their website to supplement sales. The owners were tired, burned out and at their wits' end. They needed marketing assistance, education on retail best practices, and funding.

Business Forward introduced the Smiths to SCORE, a colleague organization that could help guide their marketing strategy. Using what they learned from SCORE, Total Glamour Beauty began drawing the community into their shop by hosting customer events such as their Sip and Shop event. They continued to work on their social media presence and were recently featured in Southfield Chamber's Member Highlight.

One of the owners completed a Women's Entrepreneurship program with Cornell University and is excited about what she learned and for the future of Total Glamour. They worked with CEED Lending, an initiative of the Great Lakes Women's Business Council that also works with Business Forward. **The Total Glamour owners are now the first participants in CEED Lending's program which will provide assistance for their new website and professional development preparing them for success.**



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Southfield, MI 48033
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SUCSESSES | Recipes 4 A Reason | Highland Township



In spring of 2022, Cynthia Dane, Founder and CEO of *Recipes For A Reason*, was looking for help to develop her small business. She shared with her Business Forward Consultant that she needed assistance in working with Quickbooks to track her businesses finances. She also wanted to learn how to build her market by effectively using social media. But, Cynthia's real mission was to make inroads into Whole Foods, where she wanted to sell her food products

In her Business Forward profile, Cynthia explained her vision to sell 8 oz jars of vegan, organic, nutrient-dense, gluten free, dairy free, soy free soup both in retail shops and online.

The Business Forward Consultant connected Cynthia with a valued and well connected Resource Partner for Oakland County. **The Resource Partner connected Cynthia and Recipes for a Reason with Whole Foods which gave Cynthia an opportunity to present samples for consideration.** The Business Forward Program is continuing to work to assist Cynthia with her Quickbooks and social media needs.



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