

CEC 2026

NEWAYGO & FREMONT, MI

2026 STATEWIDE CONFERENCE

Thursday, May 28 & Friday, May 29

11:00am Check-in—Lunch Provided

**Heritage Museum of Newaygo County
12 Quarterline St, Newaygo, MI 49337**



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

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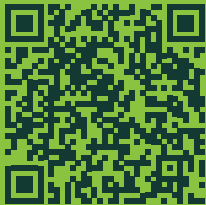
Welcome! Thank you for joining us at this year's Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) conference in beautiful **Newaygo & Fremont**. We truly appreciate your passion for entrepreneurship in Michigan.



5/28 OPENING

KEYNOTE: Tourism Trends & Local Success: How Small Businesses Adapt, Innovate, and Thrive in a Tourism Economy

Hear how local entrepreneurs are crafting unforgettable visitor experiences—paired with sharp, tourism-focused insights from regional experts. This energetic panel dives into what's driving success right now, including the surprising fact that Newaygo County attracts more tourism spending than neighboring Lake Michigan counties despite having fewer traditional destinations. Discover why it works—and what untapped opportunities might be waiting in your own community.



**SCAN FOR
MORE INFO
ON BREAKOUT
SESSIONS**

Moderator: Lola Harmon-Ramsey

Lola Harmon-Ramsey is Director of Impact and Engagement at Fremont Area Community Foundation. In her role, she advances grantmaking initiatives—particularly in education—and helps convene partners to strengthen community connections and promote civility. A lifelong Fremont resident, Harmon-Ramsey previously co-owned Cart-Right Recycling with her husband, Mark, serving Newaygo County and beyond for more than 15 years. She also serves on the Fremont City Council.

Julie Burrell

Julie Burrell is the Area Manager of Government & Community Affairs for ITC Holdings, where she partners with local governments, community leaders, and stakeholders to advance infrastructure that supports reliable energy and regional growth. She is known for her collaborative, solutions-oriented approach to strengthening communities and driving long-term economic vitality. Prior to joining ITC, Julie led economic development efforts for Newaygo County at The Right Place, Inc., where she focused on business growth and rural initiatives across West Michigan. Julie serves on the executive committee of the Newaygo County Tourism Council and contributes to several local boards.

Alex Harmon

Alex is an arcade owner and amusement operator who has been in business in the West Michigan area for over 10 years. His arcade, Clubhouse Arcade, has been open for 5 years and has become a staple in the Fremont Community area. Alex is dedicated and passionate about bringing FUN to the area for years to come!

Martha Gabrielese

Martha Gabrielese is an experienced banking executive and certified SCORE Mentor with a demonstrated history of working in the financial services and manufacturing industries. Previously, she had a 16 year career at JP Morgan Chase. She has also volunteered for more than 30 years with the West Michigan District Export Council. For the last four years, Martha has also worked at 37 North in downtown Newaygo.

Jay Allen

Jay Allen has owned and operated a fly fishing guide service for 26 years. In the spring of 2021, Jay and his wife Heather opened the Muskegon River Inn in downtown Newaygo and for the first time were able to apply the lessons learned in the ecotourism business to a project they owned. Jay and Heather spent 4 years dreaming and planning the civil war era building's renovation, purchasing the property in 2017.

5/29 CLOSING KEYNOTE: The Partnership Effect:

Collaborating for Community-Driven Impact

This session highlights real examples of cross-sector collaboration, the power of aligned resources, and how philanthropic and entrepreneurial leaders can work together to strengthen vibrant, resilient communities. A dynamic panel of leaders, philanthropists & entrepreneurs will be lead in a conversation on how partnerships accelerate community impact, facilitated by Newaygo County Administrator Christopher Wren.

Moderator: Christopher Wren

Christopher D. Wren is an experienced public sector leader and County Administrator for Newaygo County, Michigan, where he oversees an \$85 million budget and a workforce of 300 employees. Christopher has successfully led major infrastructure and community development projects, strengthened financial stability through innovative budgeting strategies, and fostered transparent, collaborative organizational cultures. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Oakland University and remains actively involved in numerous professional and civic organizations.

Shelly Kasprzycki

Shelly Kasprzycki is the President and CEO of Fremont Area Community Foundation. Her career includes serving as CEO of Michigan Humanities and other nonprofit organizations. She was recognized as one of Crain's Notable Leaders in Philanthropy in 2025. She serves on the Corewell Health Gerber Hospital Community Board, Newaygo County Economic Development Partnership, and Newaygo County Influential Women in Leadership Committee.

Matt Nieboer

Since 1958, Nieboer Electric has been a staple in the Fremont community. Matt Nieboer is the third generation to lead the family business, which provides commercial, residential, and agricultural electrical services throughout Newaygo County and beyond. Giving back is important to the Nieboer family, and they are consistent volunteers and contributors to local events, school fundraisers, and community needs. Matt is a father of two, married to his wife, Katie, and they reside in Fremont.

Todd Visser

Todd Visser is the Senior Vice President & Chief Financial Officer at Gerber Federal Credit Union. Prior to joining the credit union staff in 2024, he served as a volunteer on their Supervisory Committee and Board for the previous 14 years. He was born and raised in West Michigan and attended Holland Christian High School and Calvin University. With 33 years of work experience in West Michigan across multiple industries, he has called Fremont his home for the past 26 years along with his wife Kristi and their four children. Since 2002, Todd has been an active Board Member and Treasurer for the Fremont Service Committee, a ministry that provides vehicles and vehicle repairs in Newaygo County through the cooperative efforts of local churches, social service agencies, and the Fremont Area Community Foundation.

Dennis Adama

Dennis Adama is an entrepreneur, former elite collegiate athlete, and community advocate. Raised in Newaygo, Michigan, he earned a track scholarship and went on to become a six-time Big Ten Champion and six-time All-American—accomplishments that reflect the discipline and competitive drive he later brought into business. In 1992, Adama founded Compliance Systems, Inc. in Grand Rapids, Michigan, serving as CEO and leading the company's growth into a trusted provider of compliance documentation and technology solutions for financial institutions nationwide. Under his leadership, the company served more than 1,500 financial institutions, helping banks and lenders navigate complex regulatory environments through practical, scalable systems. After retiring in 2020, Adama shifted his focus to giving back. Over the past several years, he has been actively involved in nonprofit work, with a strong emphasis on supporting initiatives in his home county of Newaygo, Michigan. He continues to apply his leadership experience to strengthen local organizations and communities.

Greg VanBoxel

Greg VanBoxel is the CEO of AeroVision International based in Muskegon. AeroVision specializes in airframe component, engine component, whole engine, and APU sales to an international customer base.

THURSDAY, MAY 28

DAY ONE



11:00 a.m. REGISTRATION

- **Location:** Heritage Museum of Newaygo County, 12 Quarterline St, Newaygo, MI 49337
- **Lunch Provided**

12:00 p.m. WELCOME, OPENING SESSION, AND KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- **Location:** Heritage Museum of Newaygo County, 12 Quarterline St, Newaygo, MI 49337
- **Keynote:** Tourism Trends & Local Success: How Small Businesses Adapt, Innovate, and Thrive in a Tourism Economy

1:00 p.m. TRAVEL BREAK/ DISCOVER DOWNTOWN (30 minutes)

1:30-2:30 p.m. BREAKOUT SESSION

TOPIC	LOCATION
The Dragon: From Concept to Construction and Beyond	The Sportsman Bar
MSU Extension Tourism Resources for Entrepreneurial Communities	The Stream - Lecture Room
SCORE & SBDC West Michigan Regional Office	37 North
Building Small Town and Rural Capacity with Fellows and Interns	Heavenflow Coffee
Understanding Michigan's Agricultural Impact: How It Drives Your Local Economies	Newaygo City Hall

2:30 p.m. TRAVEL BREAK / DISCOVER DOWNTOWN (30 minutes)

3:00-4:00 p.m. BREAKOUT SESSION

TOPIC	LOCATION
Summer Camps-An Untapped Community Development Resource	The Stream - Classroom
REMAX and Dragon Adventures Base Camp	Newaygo City Hall
Short-Term Rental (STR) Policy Options for Local Communities	The Stream - Lecture Room
Empowering the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs	Heritage Museum of Newaygo County

4:00 p.m. TRAVEL BREAK / DISCOVER DOWNTOWN (30 minutes)

4:30-5:30 p.m. BREAKOUT SESSION

TOPIC	LOCATION
Cultivating Leadership in Rural Communities	Newaygo City Hall
Building History for the Future	Heritage Museum of Newaygo County
Building the Builders: Supporting Emerging Real Estate Entrepreneurs	The Stream - Lecture Room
Beyond Ready: How 4-H Builds Skills for Work and Life in Michigan Youth	The Stream - Classroom
Agritourism: Navigating the Intersection of RTF/ GAAMPs and Local Building and Zoning	Newaygo Brewing

5:30-7:30 p.m. NETWORKING EVENT & RECEPTION

- **YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKET**
- **Location:** Downtown Newaygo Social District “The Outback”

FRIDAY, MAY 29

DAY TWO



8:45-9:30 a.m. BREAKOUT SESSION

TOPIC	LOCATION
Oceana County: Low Population Communities... Huge Impacts	Sinfully Sweet Bakery
From Vacant to Alive: How Unassuming Places Become Entrepreneurial Engines	Fremont Public Library
Growing Minds & Cultivating Community	The Arts Place
From Vacant to Vibrant: Key Steps to Transform Empty Spaces into Vital Ventures	City of Fremont Court Room
From Kitchen to Community: How Stakeholders Can Foster a Thriving Local Food Ecosystem	Fremont Chamber Office

9:30-45 a.m. TRAVEL BREAK / DISCOVER DOWNTOWN (15 minutes)

9:45-10:30 a.m. BREAKOUT SESSION

TOPIC	LOCATION
Building Small Town and Rural Capacity with Fellows and Interns	Sinfully Sweet Bakery
Creating Community Strength While Growing Your Small Business	Terry Wantz Center
How Rural Communities Can Lead Michigan's Next Wave of Tech-Driven Growth	The Arts Place
Building a Local Hub for Food, Business, and Opportunity	Fremont Public Library
Portrait of a Graduate: A Countywide Vision for Workforce-Ready Students	Fremont Chamber Office

10:30 a.m. TRAVEL BREAK / DISCOVER DOWNTOWN (15 minutes)

10:45-11:30 a.m. KEYNOTE PANEL & CLOSING SESSION

- **LOCATION:** Fremont Community Recreation Center, 201 E Maple St, Fremont, MI 49412
- **Keynote Panel:** The Partnership Effect: Collaborating for Community Driven Impact

11:30 a.m. 30 IDEAS IN 30 MINUTES

12:00 p.m. Final wrap-up, evaluations, announcements, thanks.

SHOP & EAT!

**PLEASE SUPPORT LOCAL
BUSINESSES USING CHAMBER CHECKS
BEFORE YOU LEAVE TOWN!**

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NEWAYGO & FREMONT, MI

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