



WEST MICHIGAN:

A DESIGN-CENTRIC REGION

The economic future of West Michigan will depend on many factors. It's a future that hinges, in part, on the results of key investments from business and industry, which will be measured in jobs created, the number of startup companies and the amount of corporate reinvestment. But other drivers aren't as easily quantified.

Most certainly, one of those intangible regional economic assets is design. It's no surprise that West Michigan has benefitted from innovative design thinkers in the past, those people who realized how to craft world-class furniture from blocks of locally sourced wood or how to shape metal into the machines that drove the industrial age to new heights. It's a similar multi-faceted, problem-solving process that drives the region's successes today and that will help West Michigan excel into the future.

Design in this region is diverse. West Michigan is much more than a furniture design hub, although it certainly is known for that expertise. Working among us are industrial designers coming up with creative new products or medical devices, fashion designers working on trendsetting shoes and clothing, packaging specialists crafting meaningful new displays for food or other products while creating less waste, landscape architects creating green and efficient new spaces, building architects and interior designers employing leading-edge technology and the best products for lasting built environments, and communications designers building graphical and technological solutions for clients, among others. The companies these designers work for serve not only local interests, but also a national base of clientele. Their presence in West Michigan helps create wealth, attract and retain young talent, and position the region to innovate in preparation for changing economic realities.

While companies across the region thrived in part because of a strong legacy of design, it needn't be an exclusive concept. Thanks to an infusion of new educational possibilities, all businesses and individuals

have the opportunity to learn and implement design thinking for their own benefit. The programs profiled herein offer learning opportunities for all designers and non-designers in all levels, from college students to professionals to business leaders looking to add design to their corporate infrastructure.

While West Michigan has design-related industries and advocacy groups and centers of learning and has been recognized around the world for its design efforts, no one had outlined the role of design in regional economic development. Just what defines a design-centric region? Fortunately, Design West Michigan tackled that question and came up with a nationally recognized definition for the term, which will serve as a benchmark, a point of measurement for this region and others.

Without knowing how West Michigan stacks up to that definition, the creators set about to get a better understanding of the role of design in business through education and advocacy efforts. Through this exploration of those activities, *MiBiz* and its key partners want to help explain the role of design in economic development.

This supplement fortifies our commitment to an ongoing discussion about design, a long-term dialogue about what makes the region design-centric and a hotbed for design innovation. Look for future conversations to be presented in *MiDesign*, a new section on *MiBiz.com*, as well as in *MiBiz* and its family of publications. Prepare for an interesting journey.

— Joe Boomgaard,
Managing Editor, *MiBiz*

DESIGN WEST MICHIGAN DEFINED A DESIGN-CENTRIC REGION AS:

- involving the design disciplines in problem solving situations in public and private activities
- being eco-focused with sustainability and environmental policies leading the national norm
- featuring companies with over \$3 million in sales that have a titled design executive in a strategic, influential position
- selecting designers to companies' boards of directors
- offering undergraduate and graduate level programs in design, design thinking, design and innovation management
- having frequent media reporting on the economic results of good design, as well as reporters asking businesses design-based questions
- representing design in the permanent collections of regional art associations and museums
- highlighting a history of accomplished designs that have had significant national or international influence
- winning a significant number of national design awards across the region's companies
- fostering communication among the different design disciplines with periodic opportunities for socializing and gatherings
- retaining a collective population of designers higher than the national average
- celebrating true diversity, encouraged with a full recognition of a "Creative Class"
- for local designers, serving both regional companies and organizations outside the region
- holding a large number of design patents at regional companies and garnering national press attention for having these characteristics

WITH KENDALL'S M.B.A. CERTIFICATE IN DESIGN AND INNOVATION MANAGEMENT, DESIGN TALKS BUSINESS

While Ben Smith, design and marketing associate at Haworth Inc. in Holland, Mich., observes the term “design thinking” currently garners a trendy status, he thinks soon enough it will simply describe the way companies do business.

Smith, a graphic designer who helps develop sales support communications for the contract furniture manufacturer, first encountered the concept of design thinking at a conference he attended with his marketing communications team. Roger Martin, dean of the



Max Shangle, dean of Kendall College of Art and Design and an instructor of some of the M.B.A. courses, says students usually come to the revelation early on in the program about what design thinking means in the process of business innovation.

Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and a leading proponent of applying design methods to managerial problems, was the keynote speaker.

“His speech really resonated with me,” Smith recalls. “He wasn’t a designer or a businessman, but he was thinking about all the things that I think about.”

When Smith learned that design-thinking principles formed the core of a new M.B.A. program offered by Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University, he signed up.

Currently a student in the last of four classes that compose the M.B.A. Certificate in Design and Innovation Management, Smith says the program has helped him “communicate better with more stakeholders in the organization – to be able to listen better, to understand what their problems are, what they need help with.”

“I was a designer who needed to be educated about business,” says Smith. “It goes both ways. It’s imperative that businesspeople understand the design point of view. But designers are also accountable, responsible for educating business leaders about the value that we can bring to the table.”

“As a designer, this program has armed me with the knowledge, the resources, the vocabulary and communication skills to talk with marketing managers and business leaders – to speak their language a little more and help them understand how design can help solve their problems.”

Max Shangle, dean of Kendall College of Art and Design and a collaborator in the development of the M.B.A. Certificate in Design and Innovation, has guided three classes of students through the program in which he also teaches.

“The more I learned about design thinking, the more I saw how it creates positive, authentic relationships between businesses and their users and how it puts us on track to building a better world for both parties.”

— Jake Himmelspach, M.B.A. Certificate in Design and Innovation Management graduate; associate consultant, NewEdge

“At some point during the introductory course, Design and Innovation Process Management, students inevitably experience a certain ‘ah-ha’ moment that goes something like this,” Shangle explains. “They’re sitting in a meeting and realize that other people at the table are using the same words but with different meanings. ‘I knew what I was talking about, they knew what they were talking about, but we didn’t know what we were talking about. No wonder we couldn’t agree!’”

Created to expose businesspeople to the process of design thinking and to teach designers “how to talk business,” the program can be pursued as a stand-alone certificate or as part of a Ferris State University M.B.A. The four classes, which can be taken over the course of two semesters, each begin and end with on-campus weekend sessions led by outside experts – industry leaders who assign and critique a collaborative project. The rest of the coursework is online, taught by Kendall faculty.

The new program continues a culture of educational innovation of both Kendall College of Art and Design and Ferris State University, says Ferris State University President David L. Eisler. “Kendall has seen enrollment triple in the past decade and the college has launched some truly ground-breaking degree programs. Specifically, the M.B.A. in Innovation and Design aligns with the needs of the marketplace in West Michigan, and more broadly, aligns with the manufacturing sector as it searches for new ideas and strategies for success.”

The flexible learning structure caters to business and design professionals who are already pursuing careers in area businesses. “We have a diverse student population,” says Shangle. “Insurance company managers, accountants, business owners, engineers, freelance designers – all in the same room, learning about design thinking.” Collaborative teams within the courses are assigned with an eye to mixing it up. “Just like in the real world, you don’t get to choose who you work with.”



The flexible learning structure of Kendall’s M.B.A. program caters to business and design professionals who are already pursuing careers in area businesses as well as traditional age students looking for an advanced degree prior to entering the workforce.

Shangle is especially proud of faculty efforts to keep the courses current. “Our assigned readings include up-to-the-minute articles and texts,” he says. “There is no recycled content.” Class materials often make their way back to students’ workplaces.

“I’m always showing people things that I’ve seen in the classes or sharing articles or books that pertain to something I’ve had a discussion with someone about,” says Ben Smith. “I’ll be able to find something in the huge library I have now, from these classes, and say: ‘Look, here’s an approach that another company used, and this explains how they did it. Maybe this will help you.’”

“Recently I copied a page out of a book we read in class and gave it to a colleague at work and said, ‘I think this might be something you’d find valuable.’ She just said, ‘OK, thanks.’ But two days later she came back, shaking the page in front of me, saying, ‘Where’s this book? I need this book – that is exactly what I’m dealing with!’”

“West Michigan is well on the way to being recognized as a design-centric community,” says Ben Bennett, and he should know. A Grand Rapids resident who’s fiercely active in that community, Bennett teaches as an adjunct in graphic design at Kendall, sits on the board of the American Advertising Federation of West Michigan, acts as an advisor to Design West Michigan, and runs his own freelance business. All this is in addition to his full-time job with Gordon Food Service, where he does in-house graphic design and photography.

“Having the background that we do in this area, and with the furniture design industry and advocacy of design in general from groups like Design West Michigan, executive leadership is already requiring design thinking over traditional business thinking,” says Bennett. Area businesses are looking for “problem-solvers, new ways, new approaches,” and the M.B.A. Certificate in Design and Innovation Management prepares students to participate in that environment. Beginning his third course in the sequence this fall, Bennett finds that the program “fits exactly what I want to do right now, and I think it will be even more beneficial to me in the future.”

Still undecided about whether he will pursue the full M.B.A., Bennett says he appreciates the flexibility he has to choose down the line. “What this allows me to do is to start the master’s step, since these are master’s level courses in what would be my focus if I did decide to pursue the M.B.A. Meanwhile, I’m working toward this certificate that’s going to help me career-wise. And I can take what I’m learning and apply it in my day-to-day job.”

Fellow student Jake Himmelspach recently found himself applying his design-thinking skills to land a position with NewEdge, a Chicago-based business strategy, innovation, and design firm. “During the interview, I was able to sit in on a few projects and felt strangely at home. I attribute this comfort to my experience in Kendall’s Design and Innovation program. I have never had an educational experience translate so directly to an employment opportunity.”

Himmelspach completed the Design and Innovation Management portion of the degree earlier this year and expects to graduate from the master’s program next summer. “I decided to go for an M.B.A. because I wanted to advance my career and felt that a business degree would be a sound balance to my creative writing undergrad,” he says. “The more I heard about the impact design thinking has in the business world, the more I was drawn to the Design and Innovation Management Certificate.”

The Kendall experience not only gave him the tools to systematically apply “a fresh approach to problem solving,” Himmelspach says, it also led him to “an incredible sense of my own personal beliefs and values. The last class in the program focuses on leadership and pushes you to find your personal truth. As you gain an understanding of your beliefs and values, they begin to direct how you respond to opportunities or confrontations in your professional life.”

“But the reason I am so passionate about the program is because the learning applies to your personal life just as much as your professional life. It is rare to have an educational experience that positively impacts both sides of your life.”

More information about the M.B.A. Certificate program is available at www.kcad.edu.

WHY IS DESIGN IMPORTANT TO WEST MICHIGAN?

“I was very excited to hear about the WIRED initiative. I’m equally excited by the quality of members proposed for the advisory groups. I firmly believe that design is as essential as accounting, engineering and marketing in achieving positive business results and may even supersede its functional counterparts as we compete on a global scale. Thanks for supporting the design profession in general and in particular the West Michigan contingent. Did I mention I was excited?”

— JEFF REUSCHEL, GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF DESIGN, HAWORTH

“We’ve heard that Lakeshore Advantage along with The Right Place Inc. supports the development of a design focused organization (Design West Michigan) as part of the WIRED initiative. Herman Miller is also supportive of this idea. The greater West Michigan area has been an unrecognized ‘hub’ of design and innovation activity for decades. Our ability as a region to continue to attract and retain the companies and individuals who practice good design, and the myriad professions that are necessary to support the design process, are vital to our collective future. We hope that this effort can develop and grow for the mutual benefit of all.”

— DON GOEMAN, VP OF RESEARCH, DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT, HERMAN MILLER

“I firmly believe that good design doesn’t happen in a vacuum – I’ve always relied on a team for inspiration and collaboration. Being better together is an essential part of my design philosophy. With this mindset it is easy to be excited about the WIRED opportunity. Joining with other designers to develop the design community in West Michigan will only help raise understanding and awareness of design and assist in recruiting top designers to the area.”

— JAMES LUDWIG, DIRECTOR OF DESIGN, STEELCASE

“You all are on top of it. Then again, in that part of Michigan I should have known. It is a design hotbed...”

— BRADFORD MCKEE, EDITOR IN CHIEF, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT MAGAZINE



NewNorth Center for Design in Business President Nate Young leads a discussion of Innovation Methods Certificate candidates at the organization's Holland headquarters.

NEWNORTH CENTER FOR DESIGN IN BUSINESS: HELPING COMPANIES REALIZE THE POWER OF DESIGN

“West Michigan is doing what other regions no doubt will be doing soon: Developing design education for business people who aren’t designers. Because so many of the problems we face today – from climate change to health care to economic development itself – are design problems, only design thinking will get us out of our rut and onto a brighter path.”

Daniel Pink, Author of “A Whole New Mind,” “The Adventures of Johnny Bunko” and “Drive”

West Michigan isn’t about to sit back and wait for things to get better. It wasn’t brought up that way. With its strong work ethic, diversity of businesses, history of innovation, and culture of design, the region has always managed to move ahead, even as other areas of the state have fallen behind.

“We’ve gone through some real economic challenges, but business leaders in West Michigan agree that we have something special here and it’s worth fighting for,” says Randy Thelen, president, Lakeshore Advantage.

But what’s worked in the past doesn’t necessarily work today. Sometimes, working hard isn’t enough. Neither is hunkering down when tough times pose serious threats.

“Companies that fail often fail to change,” says Rande Somma, chairman of the NewNorth board and a member of the task force that led to its formation. “When things get tight, they put aside investing in the future or developing new competencies.”

NewNorth Board member Craig Hall, also a member of the original task force, says that “our past success can lessen risk-taking and blind us to the need to move forward. Just because we’ve done things a certain way in the past is no reason to continue in that direction.”

That’s especially relevant today because, as Jim Brooks, NewNorth Board member and founder of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance, says, “The world has changed. West Michigan manufacturers can no longer compete with countries like China and India to produce products with high labor and low transportation content. To compete in the global marketplace, our companies must innovate to offer products and services at a higher level on the value scale.”

West Michigan has shown it can go to that higher level. “Over the past 20 years, West Michigan has built a deep core of talent for implementing lean manufacturing practices,” says Randy Thelen, task force member

and president of Lakeshore Advantage, which helped fund the NewNorth initiative. “This region is recognized for these efforts. Now we need to apply the same kind of energy toward creativity, innovation, and new design – and not rely on mature products or services.”

And that’s what the nonprofit NewNorth Center is designed to help companies do.

“The nexus of what we are trying to accomplish is to say to companies in West Michigan that we deeply respect all the logical systems they’ve embedded into themselves,” says Young. “The quality, procurement, manufacturing, and lean systems that they’ve learned over the past 20 years have served them well. They’ve optimized themselves extremely well. But you can’t optimize yourself to a future. You can only optimize what you have in your current vision.”

Helping companies learn how to expand that vision in the pursuit of lasting, sustainable growth is at the heart of NewNorth’s mission.

“We help companies develop repeatable, value-based creative systems to lay alongside their logical systems,” says Young. To do so, he says, requires thinking in new

ways – learning to use creative systems and tools that unlock an organization’s potential and strengthen its ability to evolve and change.

The need to develop both logical and creative systems is symbolized by NewNorth’s logo: half an apple (representing logical left-brain thinking) merged with half an orange (representing creative right-brain thinking). “When both halves are working together, you have what Daniel Pink calls ‘whole-mind thinking,’” says Young. “We have a t-shirt statement that reads, ‘Why would you run your company on half a brain?’ Very simply, we’re trying to put those two sides together for companies.”

He calls the ability to draw upon both left- and right-brain thinking “toggling.”

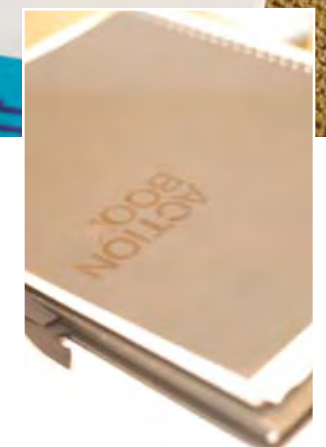
“You need to be able to toggle between the two. That ability is one of the most undervalued business notions that I’ve ever run across. I hate the argument that one type of thinking is better than the other. That doesn’t answer anything.”

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NEWNORTH PHOTOS BY JOE BOOMGAARD



Participants in NewNorth’s certificate program work on many projects designed to help them understand how right-brain and left-brain thinking come together in the innovation process. Pictured are some of their projects and some of the idea cues they use to come to a better understanding of the design process.



A GOOD PLACE TO BE

In 2007, when Nate Young was first asked to head the fledgling NewNorth Center, no one had to sell him on the area and its business community. Young had already co-founded a successful product design firm in Holland, Mich., and had spent 13 years in key design-related positions at Prince Corporation (later Johnson Controls).

“The work ethic here is amazing,” says Young, who more recently served as provost of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif. “People are unusually dedicated to their companies. They see them more like partnerships, and you don’t get that in a lot of major metropolitan areas.”



There’s something else that he says differentiates West Michigan. “The people who have generated wealth here have kept it here. They put it back into the community

because they believe in the community. They invest in culture, in neighborhoods, in social and civic causes. This has helped build the quality of life here.”

NEWNORTH

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Young says that many companies aren't leveraging right-brain, creative thinking – what IDEO President Tim Brown calls “design thinking” – enough, or even at all. “Everyone and every organization has a creative capacity. If you marginalize the creative side because you're afraid it may affect what you've established as your system, then shame on you.”

NewNorth Board Chairman Somma, former president of Johnson Controls and a member of the Gentex Board of Directors, says that whole-mind thinking can help create businesses where one plus one equals more than two. “When there's right and left brain synergy, you can look through a different prism and open your mind to ideas you wouldn't otherwise think of. When you see what you couldn't see before, you'll be astonished. At NewNorth, we're passionate about helping companies discover this.”

“It's through harnessing such creative energy that innovation is born. “And innovation isn't just about product, although the popular press makes it seem so,” says Young. “Innovation is a process, and it should be in every corner of a business. Finance, maintenance, communications, human resources – everything should be innovative.”

“At NewNorth we've gathered practitioners, call them adjunct faculty, who come in and help us lead this journey to understanding innovation and innovative systems. The big ‘ah-ha’ of the graduates of our recent class in Innovation Methods – designers, business owners, CEOs, product developers, educators – is that innovation is a process. It's not magic.”

“We serve many different sizes and types of organizations,” says Forrest Large, who, as program navigator at NewNorth, helps participants set up and coordinate their educational experiences. “Our programs are for anyone, not just designers. Often, one or two members of an organization sign up together. We also offer programs for groups of four to as many as 15 from the same company.”

NewNorth instructors represent an array of expertise and experience. “We attract people, both locally and nationally, who bring with them various perspectives and proven competence,” says Large.

“Design West Michigan has been a good resource for us,” says Young. “It gives us access to a community of creative people and great instructors.”

“As a nonprofit organization, we sustain ourselves through students,” says Young. “You can go to our website, newnorthcenter.org, to see classes and workshops. In addition to established businesses, we're encouraging entrepreneurs who have just one or two employees to participate. If they can learn these systems now, before they're big and hard to change, it's a real advantage for them.”

NEWNORTH CENTER FOR DESIGN IN BUSINESS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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STUDENTS GAIN FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON INNOVATION

“Whirlpool has a strong history in developing great products, but as our industry continues to globalize, it is very clear we need to be even more innovative to remain the market leader. It's so important for companies to understand that innovation relies on the ability to use both rational and creative thinking. My challenge is to become a leader in the company showing how to access both those sides of the brain to develop innovative products. The Innovation Methods Certification has given me methodologies and communication tools to do this more effectively. There's a great quote by Einstein that says, ‘Imagination is more important than knowledge.’ He's saying you need to use the creative side of the brain, too – not just rely on metrics, formulas or Excel spreadsheets.”

— Jim Doan, design lead for fabric care in global consumer design, Whirlpool Corporation



Learning about design innovation requires a collaborative process at NewNorth Center for Design in Business. Participants are encouraged to interact with one another, as well as faculty members. The sessions offer a mix of listening, discussing and active participation.

“Gentex has always had a culture of innovation. As we continue to grow, the challenge will be to integrate new talent into that culture. The NewNorth experience gave me fresh perspective on innovation within Gentex and how to assimilate others into our culture.”

— Ethan Lee, research manager, Gentex Corporation

“I need to provide innovation and participate in new product decisions at Tiara Yachts. NewNorth is providing me with insights and tools that will help the Tiara organization win. There is an energy at NewNorth that you want to be a part of. Nate has assembled a highly capable staff. It's truly unique.”

— Andrew Bartlett, designer, Tiara Yachts

“NewNorth's Innovation Methods course has given me clarity and definition about the constraints typically associated with the early product-development process. With the class consisting of an even mix of creative leaders and business leaders, the environment at NewNorth provides a great place to fuse and balance these two distinct lines of thinking.”

— Ryan Bradley, lead industrial designer, Whirlpool Corporation

Nate Young, NewNorth's president, applies his years of experience in industry and academia to provide a rounded, comprehensive view of design thinking and how it can be implemented by any type of company to better put to use the intellect of its employees and managers.

KENDALL DEVELOPS NEW B.F.A. IN DESIGN COLLABORATION

“The challenge for a practice-based program such as design is preparing students to participate in a professional world that can change very quickly. The successful people will be those who can define how those changes will happen, who have a broad base of knowledge, and are able to move beyond their own discipline and collaborate with people in other fields.”

Oliver Evans, president, Kendall College of Art and Design

That's why Kendall College of Art and Design is developing an undergraduate degree in Design Collaboration. And it's why one of the pilot offerings being considered for the new B.F.A. is a class called “Improvisation and Design Thinking.”

“Yes and” describes a basic principle of improvisational theatre. The rule is you take whatever a team member puts out there and you add to it. You never say, “no,” you always say, “yes and.” In the larger world, this process is known as collaboration, its end result is innovation, and smart business leaders are hungry for it.

“Improvisers agree on a series of default behaviors known to help them be effective, playful problem-solvers,” says Mary Jane Pories, who designed and plans to teach the course. She maintains that learning and practicing these behaviors will help design students increase their ability to communicate and “problem-solve in the moment, to quickly grasp what this one moment is about, define and accept the relevant parameters, have a keen awareness of the opportunities.”

An alumna of The Second City improvisational troupe in Chicago, Pories heads the Grand Rapids-based Fishladder Inc., which uses improvisational tools to create and facilitate corporate training programs. She is pleased to be included as an adjunct faculty member in the new degree program and “excited to see West Michigan moving in this direction.”

The improv course is one of several class descriptions initially outlined

for the program by Design West Michigan Executive Director John Berry, serving in his role as special assistant to the Kendall president for Academic Initiatives.

“One of the great benefits this degree brings is the connection with business and industry,” says President Evans. “The college is looking at design education as it currently exists to see what kind of expectations there are for designers as they enter the workforce.”

Beginning with what Berry calls “the generally recognized need for an educational experience that develops well-rounded design thinkers,” he and Kendall administration met with corporate leaders, design principals, and Roger Martin, dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, to better understand and “confirm the need for such ‘general/flexible’ design thinkers.”

Based on this input and interactions with design friends, magazine editors, and business acquaintances, Berry and his team of Kendall design faculty collaborated to design a B.F.A. in Collaborative Design.

“The design collaboration degree really builds on strengths we already have,” says Kendall Dean Max Shangle. “Our Collaborative Design classes have been running for going on 10 years, with projects involving everything from pediatric cancer to Habitat for Humanity. But up until now, the best a student could do was minor in Collaborative Design. With



Ferris State University President David Eisler, left, and Kendall College of Art and Design President Oliver Evans, right, have worked to equip Kendall with the resources needed to pursue innovative new degree programs, including the college's new B.F.A. in Design Collaboration, a degree developed with industry insight. PHOTO: JEFF HUYCK

this new degree, we can offer more classes, like a Design Ethics course that's available to anyone who wants to take it, but is supported by this major.”

Shangle expects the B.F.A. in Collaborative Design will attract a new type of student and also prove satisfying to certain Kendall students already enrolled in other disciplines. “There are generalist thinkers out there, and they're different from the ones who were born to be an industrial or interior designer,” he says. “Now we've got something to offer both types of design students.”

The new degree will require majors to have a studio minor, so students will bring strong backgrounds in diverse disciplines to their Collaborative Design classes and carry learnings from courses like Design Ethics, Improv, and Materials Science back into other art and design disciplines.

“It raises the possibilities for all of the disciplines when you have that kind of a student, that kind of an education experience taking place here,” says Shangle. “It's a department *and* it's an institutional support that is very cool for Kendall and distinguishes it from most other design schools in the country.”

Offering the new degree program is key in shaping the future regional economy in West Michigan, says Ferris State University President David L. Eisler, as the university looked to expand opportunities in West Michigan through Kendall College's continued success.

“Kendall is furthering educational opportunities for its students with the creation of a B.F.A.,” says President Eisler. “These learning opportunities are a direct link to the rewarding and successful careers of its graduates. The vitality and growth of Ferris' Kendall College of Art and Design is paramount to shaping West Michigan's business environment. A college with the caliber of students Kendall attracts means there are many more young people in downtown Grand Rapids fueling the city's economic and cultural life. Kendall graduates are the new generation of designers and innovators who will be crucial players in shaping a vital and sustainable economy.”

President Evans is pleased with the outcome of his directive and eager to see the new degree program become a reality. “In conjunction with the work we will be doing with the Federal Building, bringing this program online and finding a director for it will be among the most important things that we do this year,” says Evans.

“We'll have a program that is collaboratively based and that will provide students with solid prep in a discipline but also a broad, broad understanding across disciplines. It's a program where the students are prepared not only to do the jobs that are available to them today, but can really play active roles in defining what will go on tomorrow. In that way, design becomes an instrument of economic development, helping to define what will be.”

KENDALL TO HOST PERMANENT MATERIALS LIBRARY DISPLAY

Kendall expects to house the new B.F.A. in Collaborative Design in the renovated Federal Building, which will also provide space for a unique materials library curated by Material ConneXion, a global materials consultancy.

The library of rotating material samples selected to support the college's art and design curricula will give students hands-on access to advanced, innovative, and sustainable materials and processes.

“Many businesses draw on Material ConneXion's archive,” says Kendall President Oliver Evans, “but we will be one of the few academic institutions to have our own materials library. It will be a great resource for our design programs, of course, but also for our programs in the fine arts, because the types of materials available are often inspirational to fine arts students as well.”

DESIGN WEST MICHIGAN: MAKING CONNECTIONS

"We have a legacy of design here. It has shaped our environment, driven our economy, and fostered world-class innovation. We want design to be even more of an economic building block for the region and others to know that. We want that legacy to be an ongoing, living part of our identity."

John Berry, executive director, Design West Michigan

In West Michigan, design is like a jewel waiting to be mined. It's right there, just under the surface, but it needs to see the light of day to be appreciated. And it needs a little polishing.

Design West Michigan exists to make that happen. It's an advocate and a catalyst, a promoter and a publicist. It's an educator, advisor, connector and encourager. In the process, it's gaining a lot of attention and many followers.

"We want West Michigan to be known for design," says John O'Neill, communication director at Design West Michigan. "We want to show that West Michigan, with its talent, resources, and design savvy, is a great place to have a business."

DWM Executive Director John Berry puts it this way: "Our intention is to brand West Michigan as a 'design-centric' community." That's a term he uses to describe a region where design disciplines and the results of good design are recognized for the value they add to the economy and the overall quality of life.

A design-centric presence is evident in an area's businesses and boards, colleges and universities, art associations and museums; in its heritage of design, its design awards, and the media coverage it garners; in its collective population of designers, its communication networks among them, and its recognition of a "creative class."

"West Michigan is a design-centric region that functions well because design and business play well together here," says Peter Jacob, Design West Michigan's education director. "Many businesses here are design-centered. It's been that way for years."

Kevin Budelmann, advisor to Design West Michigan, is president of one of those design-centered businesses, People Design in Grand Rapids. "For a midsize area, there's an elevated design consciousness here," he says. "There's a high caliber of design and a rich pool of design talent – great foundational

resources for businesses to tap into. We openly talk about the value of design in business. Design plays an important role in our value systems."

O'Neill, principal of Conduit Studios and graduate of Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids, says that "it's great to be a designer right now in West Michigan. It really feels like there's a community, and it's here now, and it's growing."

Jacob, a furniture designer and also a Kendall graduate, sees and feels a growing optimism in the area. "It's more fun to be here than it was 10 years ago because there's so much support for design and the arts. There's a new kind of spirit among younger designers. Design West Michigan is one way to take hold of that spirit and do something with it. That's why I'm part of it."

Design West Michigan was formed three years ago with funding help from a federal economic development initiative called Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development. Other important early help – professional involvement and guidance – came from the regional advisory group of more than 50 volunteer designers from 43 companies.

The founders also established a national advisory group, a composition of business and design heavyweights from MOMA, the Corporate Design Foundation, Nike, design periodicals, and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif. – that would be Nate Young, now president of the NewNorth Center for Design in Business in Holland, Mich. This advisory group defined specific objectives and tactics. With Berry leading the way, Design West Michigan was launched without a lot of fanfare, but with plenty of reasons to feel positive about its future.

"There was immediate support from business leaders, economic developers, designers, educators – people who understand and appreciate the value of design and design thinking to business and the community in general," says Berry.

Especially important is the alliance that has been developed with Kendall College of Art and Design, where Design West Michigan has its office. "It's wonderful that we have support from the faculty and staff of an institution like Kendall," says Jacob, who serves as president of Kendall's Alumni Board of Directors and also teaches there.

"Kendall is a hub of design," says O'Neill. "They really make Design West Michigan possible, and we're infinitely grateful for their support. We assist them by providing a network that helps them place their graduates in good positions in the area. We're also looking at ways to help K-12 design curriculum development and are in discussions with such groups as IDEO."

With growing support and increasing community involvement – over 600 "members" have signed up on the website, www.designwestmichigan.com – Design West Michigan has also been pursuing another of its major objectives: serving as a catalyst for establishing a regional network connecting people from all design disciplines.

"Design West Michigan is unique in its promoting the cross-pollination of design in a regionally focused effort," says Budelmann. "Other design organizations have a broader umbrella or only serve a slice of the design world. It's also unique in getting design groups together who don't typically talk with each other. That's easier to do here than in a large metropolitan area because people live in closer proximity to each other. They're more easily connected."

Not that it's necessarily easy to get designers talking. "Designers can be non-joiners," says O'Neill. "We tend to stay on our own islands." Design West Michigan works on getting them off their "islands" and into the broader design community by holding events that bring together people from various fields of design – interior, graphic, architecture, landscape, furniture, color theory – "to communicate with each other and to be inspired."



Design West Michigan has offered members a host of free Designers Gatherings hinged on a speaker or panel of speakers talking about design or design thinking, as well as networking opportunities with fellow local designers. Past gatherings have included, top, a discussion with Peter Lawrence, chair of the Corporate Design Foundation; Nancy Miller, a senior editor at WIRED magazine; and Julie Lasky, editor-in-chief of I.D. magazine and, bottom, a presentation by Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO and author of *Change by Design*.

"Designers today are being asked to do more, to have broader knowledge," says Jeff Reuschel, advisor to Design West Michigan and global design director at Haworth in Holland, Mich. "Designers often need to work together on complex projects, so we need to know more than just our own discipline. We need to understand our common challenges. We need to connect and learn from each other – and realize how much is going on."

"We have a critical mass of people who are interested in getting together and talking," says O'Neill. "It feels like we're colleagues, even though we might bid against each other on projects."

"The progressive design world is increasingly interconnected," says Budelmann. "Design West Michigan is helping make that happen here."

But it's not just designers that Design West Michigan seeks to reach. Developing design and design-thinking awareness programs for non-designers is also an important objective, and one that complements the work of the NewNorth Center for Design in Business. "Businesses need to understand how effective design-thinking problem solving can be," says Jacob.

Design West Michigan is enabling interaction and design-thinking appreciation through an ongoing and growing program of events. West Michigan's first-ever gathering of

people from all the design disciplines attracted 250 participants in 2008. The second-ever gathering, which hosted editors of national publications, drew over 300. The third event, also drawing over 300 people, featured American Institute of Graphic Arts Executive Director Ric Grefe talking about the U.S. National Design Policy Initiative. And the fourth event drew over 400 people to IDEO President Tim Brown's presentation on using design thinking in consulting with businesses.

"We're bringing in speakers whose messages are intended to help start conversations that wouldn't have happened otherwise among participants and within businesses," says Jacob, DWM's education director. "We encourage people to bring friends, not just other designers, but entrepreneurs, artists, anyone with an interest in design."

What's next? Design West Michigan is awaiting the results of new regional research, conducted by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, a project aimed at defining the economic value of design – the correlation between design and profitability.

More and more, Design West Michigan is making its presence felt and appreciated. "We're confident that Design West Michigan will continue to grow," says Jacob. "It's an easy concept to grasp. People who hear about it are immediately inspired."