



IMPACT

REPORT 2025

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Letter From Joe Thiel

Destination Setter & CEO

Over the past year, the Marquette innovation ecosystem has grown in both impact and visibility, thanks to the extraordinary work of our partners, collaborators, and community. I want to express my deepest gratitude to my incredible team, our Board, the Michigan Economic Development Cooperation (MEDC), the City of Marquette, the Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA), and the State of Michigan. The momentum we've created is a testament to the deep, aligned partnerships across the region, and your invaluable contributions have been instrumental in this journey.

We're thankful for collaborations with InvestUP on the Outdoor Innovation Fund, Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD) on the Outdoor Recreation Innovation Action Network (ORIAN) initiative, Northern Michigan University on Peak25 and Invent@NMU. We're grateful to Accelerate UP and Lake Superior Community Partnership (LSCP) for their vital role in the Michigan Small Business Support Hubs program and to U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA) and Economic Development Administration (EDA) for the Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) and Build to Scale grants, bringing nearly \$2M into our entrepreneurial ecosystem together. The Support Hub's program is adding nearly \$4M more, allowing us to catalyze new stages of growth.

We're building more than just companies and creating a future-ready economic system. We are shaping a next-generation network: an expansive service provider system to accelerate clients to revenue, a sophisticated angel fund platform, and a regional mentorship pipeline with national reach. This infrastructure, strategically forged through years of groundwork, positions Marquette as a magnet for tech entrepreneurs across the Midwest and beyond.

This year, we've supported startups like SwimSmart, Syncurrent, Myconaut, Invivus Technologies, Authsnap, Superior Genomics, TerraHike Outdoors, Quickie, United Way, and more companies that have grown locally with global ambition. We also see a surge of outdoor-focused innovation from teams like Electric Outdoors, Livaq, HSI Relax Release, and more. These ventures are proof of a broader truth: Marquette is not just participating in tech's future; we are actively shaping and defining it.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to building a region known for outdoor innovation, sustainable technology, and creative technology. The groundwork is laid, the signals are clear, and the vision we share is not just a dream, but a vibrant reality that inspires us all.

With humility and determination,

Joe Thiel
CEO, Innovate Marquette SmartZone



About Innovate Marquette

Innovate Marquette is an economic development organization that offers valuable resources to innovators, entrepreneurs, and business owners in the Marquette area. We support technology-based innovations, new business ventures, talent attraction and existing business expansion by leveraging our local and state-wide network to bring funding, workforce talent, and a collaborative mindset to the Marquette ecosystem and beyond.

SmartZones

Thanks to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the State of Michigan has designated twenty-one distinct tech hubs located all across the state, referred to as "SmartZones". These areas encourage collaborations between pillars of the community: universities, community organizations, municipalities, and public-private institutions.

A SmartZone includes access to a technology business accelerator like Innovate Marquette, which promotes collaboration between resource partners such as universities, industry and research organizations, state and government municipalities, and other innovators within the community. This creates access across the state to important entrepreneurial resources like funding, talent, and networking opportunities.

Michigan Economic Development Corporation and City of Marquette

Innovate Marquette is funded by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), the Local Development Financing Act, and the City of Marquette.

A local Marquette Tax Increment Funding (TIF) capture has been implemented and is managed by the Local Development Fund Authority (LDFA). The capture designates a portion of the State of Michigan's property tax to stay in Marquette for local tech innovators to receive support.

The MEDC is an economic development organization that markets Michigan as the place to do business, assists businesses in growth strategies, and fosters the growth of vibrant communities across the state of Michigan.

Within the City of Marquette, Innovate Marquette aims to foster a collaborative entrepreneurial community that is based on equal opportunities for financial funding, accessibility, sustainability, and creativity for entrepreneurs, business owners, startups, and innovators who call Marquette home. Learn more at marquettemi.gov. and michiganbusiness.org



Our Values

Purpose Statement

Our purpose is to cultivate a supportive environment for local innovators by reducing entrepreneurial barriers and increasing opportunity by providing a sustainable talent pipeline and economic development in the Marquette region.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to strengthen Marquette's economy by providing innovators access to critical resources, mentorship, business services, talent, funding, and network collaboration. We aim to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem with an emphasis on ventures in outdoor innovation, creative technology, and sustainable technology; where all founders feel welcome.

Core Values

The Innovate Marquette team takes pride in upholding our core values through transparency and honesty, as we believe them to be non-negotiable when making decisions not only for our internal team but for the clients and community we serve.

Our company culture is the set of behaviors and practices that have evolved from these values and our mission, reflecting how leaders and employees act even when no one is watching.

Authenticity - striving for honesty and transparency in everything we do

Collaboration - connecting skill sets and partnerships for a resilient ecosystem

Innovation - utilizing creative ideas and technology to pioneer new pathways

Belonging - fostering a welcoming environment

Adaptability - embracing opportunities as they come

Our Team



AUBRY HEALY
Outreach & Engagement
Manager



AVA LARSON
Outreach and Engagement
Coordinator



CALEB SANTER
Project Coordinator



EMILY NOBLES
Operations Coordinator



ERIC PRUE
Design Manager



JAIMI CAWLEY
Controller



JOE THIEL
Chief Executive Officer



LILLY SMITH
Outreach and Engagement
Coordinator



MARI SHELAFOE
Operations Manager



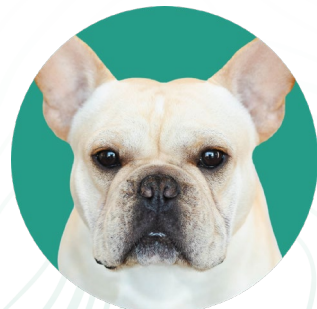
NICK HERRIFF
Project Manager



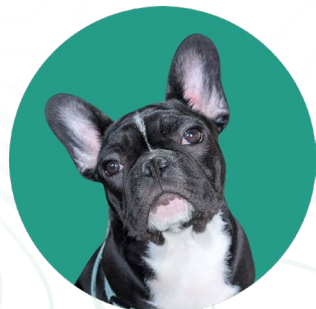
PAULETTE PERTTUNEN
Chief Operating Officer



VINCE NYSTROM
Entrepreneur in Residence

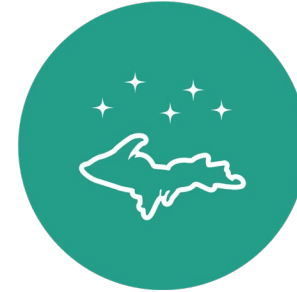


DUNCAN
Chief Snuggle Officer



BERNIE
Intern

Our Focus Areas



Outdoor Innovation

The growing outdoor recreation industry continues to provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to change and improve the way we interact with the outdoors—which we call *outdoor innovation*. Outdoor innovation focuses on developing products and services related to outdoor activities and experiences, as well as creating products designed for mobility and accessibility so that outdoor enthusiasts of all physical abilities can lead the adventure.



Sustainable Technology

With growing awareness of environmental issues, there's a surge in sustainable and eco-friendly businesses. Entrepreneurs are creating businesses that focus on renewable energy, zero or low-waste products, ethical fashion, and catering to environmentally-conscious customers. Ventures in sustainable technology play a critical role in driving the transition to a more environmentally-conscious and sustainable future by providing solutions that address environmental challenges. Sustainable ventures aim to reduce environmental and ecological risks while creating a sustainable product.



Creative Technology

The emerging creative technology and tech art industry as a startup and small business segment encompasses ventures that blend technology with artistic creativity to develop innovative products and experiences. Creative technology thrives on the fusion of artistry and technology, offering unique and often interactive experiences that appeal to both tech-savvy and art-appreciative audiences. Businesses in creative technology leverage innovation to create captivating digital and physical artworks, installations, and experiences that push the boundaries of creativity.

Board of Trustees



KAREN KOVACS
Chair
City Manager, City of Marquette



DAVID NYBERG
Vice Chairperson
Executive Director, Business Engagement & Economic Development, Northern Michigan University



SPENCER STANG
Vice Chairperson
CEO, Stang Decision Systems



NANCY LYONS
Secretary
Founder, Clockwork and Tempo, Speaker, Author



DALE DEXTER
Treasurer
Director of Financial Planning and Analysis, JM Longyear



LESLIE HARTMAN
Trustee
Chairperson, LDFA Board



Alison Todak
Trustee
VP of Entrepreneurship & Innovation Michigan Economic Development Corp



SCOTT MACINNES
Trustee
President, MacInnes Consulting



FRED MOLNAR
Trustee
Retired Senior Vice President of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation



ELIZABETH BERNHARD
Trustee
Executive Director, South Haven Business Hub



JESS JONES
Trustee
Executive Director, Optimization and Northern Experience, Northern Michigan University



BORIS MARTYSZ
Trustee
SVP Commercial Banking Manager, Nicolet Bank



JASON GEORGE
Trustee
Product Designer, KPMG Studio



WES SRAMEK
Trustee
Director of Quality Control, Core Engineering, & New Product Introduction, Resolve Surgical Technologies



Gavin Leach
Trustee
Executive VP for Finance & Administration Northern Michigan University



JOE THIEL
Trustee
CEO, Innovate Marquette SmartZone

Year at a Glance

2025 Economic Impact



2025

11 New Businesses

21 New Clients

53 Jobs Created

All-Time

93
New
Businesses

518
New
Clients

197
Jobs
Created

Revenue and Expenses

Revenue	
LDFA TIF Revenue	\$2,270,385
State Grant Revenue	\$100,000
Federal Grant Revenue	\$73,449
Program Service Revenue	\$13,639
Other Revenue	\$20,626
Total Revenue	\$2,478,100
Expenses	
Program Services	\$1,572,995
Management and General Expenses	\$673,684
Fundraising	\$107,144
Total Expenses	\$2,353,823

% of Total Expenses ● Program Services ● MGT & General ● Fundraising



Assets	
Current Assets	\$1,110,188
Fixed Assets	\$425,587
Other Assets	\$1,073,267
Total Assets	\$2,609,042

Liabilities and Equity	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	\$239,355
Long Term Liabilities	\$1,099,406
Total Liabilities	\$1,338,760
Equity	
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$1,133,118
Net Income	\$137,164
Total Equity	\$1,270,281
Total Liabilities and Equity	\$2,609,042

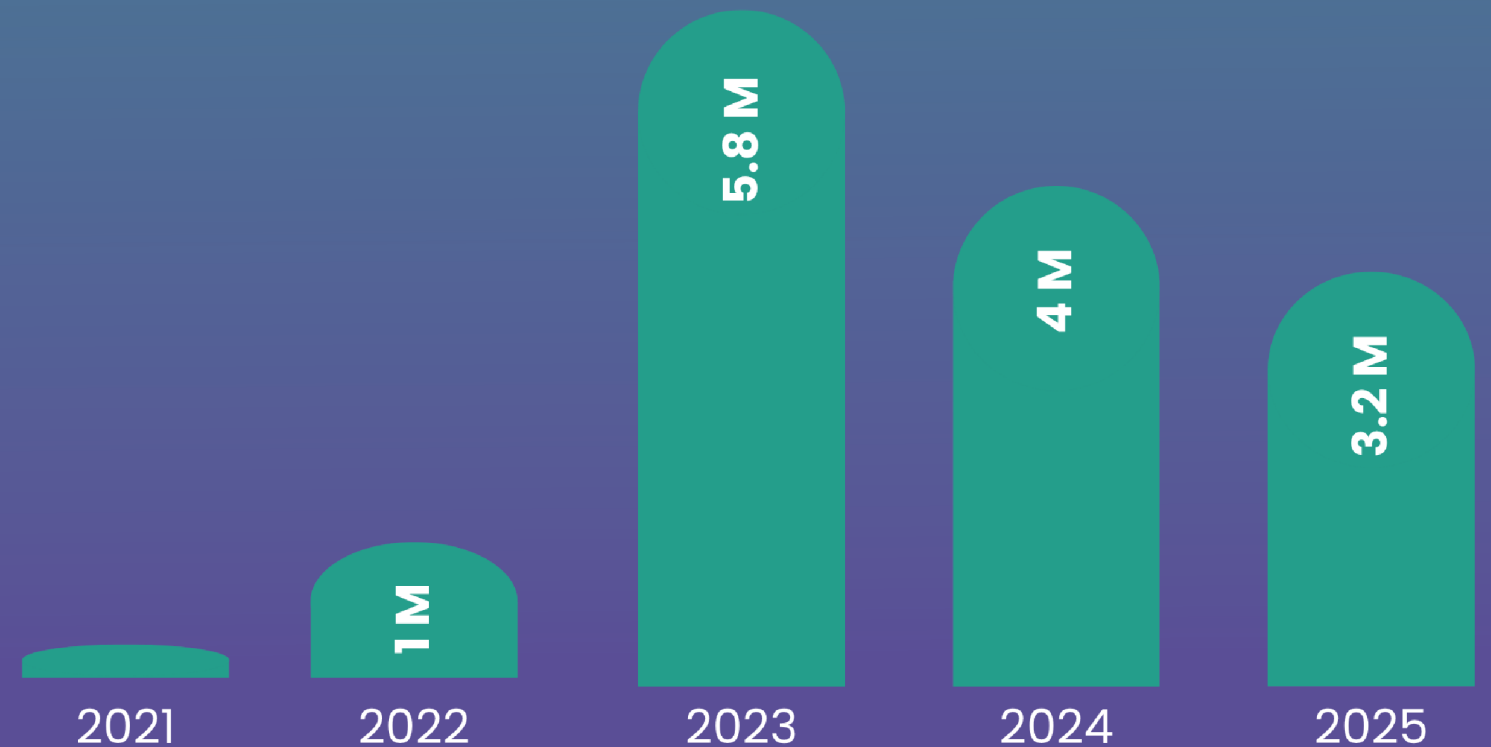
Community Partnerships

Innovate Marquette thrives on collaboration with our entrepreneurial ecosystem partners. We know that our ecosystem is stronger when we work together to share resources, expertise, and create meaningful partnerships. Below are just a few of our dedicated partners.

- 20 Fathoms
- AccelerateUP
- AirDev
- Aaron Peterson Studios
- Bennett Media Group
- Boost
- Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)
- Central Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD)
- Centropolis Accelerator
- City of Ishpeming
- City of Marquette
- City of Marquette Office of Arts & Culture
- City of Negaunee
- Eco Smart Home Pros
- Economic Club of Marquette County
- Economic Development Authority (EDA)
- Eau Claire Outdoors
- Eleks
- Enhance C-Suite
- Fresh Coast Film Festival
- Gogebic Community College
- Headwaters North SmartZone
- InvestUP
- Keweenaw Bay Indian Community
- Kendricks Bordeau
- Lake Superior Community Partnership
- Lake Superior State University
- Leppanen Anker Arquitectura
- Lyon Quality Assurance
- Marquette County
- Mich Auto
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation
- Michigan Office of Future Mobility & Electrification
- Michigan Outdoor Innovation Industry Office
- Michigan Outdoor Recreation Industry Office
- Michigan Technological University
- MTEC SmartZone
- NMU College of Business
- NMU Sustainability Hub for Innovation & Environment (SHINE)
- Northern Initiatives
- Northern Michigan University (NMU)
- NMU Engineering Technology
- Ore Dock Brewing Co.
- Outdoor Recreation Innovation Action Network (ORIAN)
- Rotary Club of Marquette
- SISU: The Innovation Institute at NMU
- Siren Strategy
- Stone Hearth Consulting
- Superior Forge
- Superior Watershed Partnership
- The Michigan Forest Biomaterials Institute
- Travel Marquette
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Economic Development Administration (USDA)
- Upper Peninsula Michigan Works!
- Veridea Group
- Ward Law
- Warners Norcross + Judd
- Writeup Lab

Follow-on Funding

Once a company is established and raises initial funds to continue operations, research, development, or other expenses, follow-on funding is the process of securing additional investment to continue the venture. Follow on Funding includes MEDC funding (BAF and other state programs), Federal funding, VC funding, Angel investment, Loan funding, friends and family, and grants. Through partnerships with angel investors, grant funding, and community resources, we've raised more than \$3 million in follow-on funding in fiscal year 2025 to support our clients.



Our Clients

- **AAI**
- **AdCinch**
- **Authsnap**
- **BodyPNCH**
- **Chimney Heat Capture**
- **Connex**
- **Cross General Contracting**
- **Dark Horse**
- **Electric Outdoors Inc.**
- **Earthly After**
- **Foresite Manager**
- **Growth Finder**
- **HSI Relax Release**
- **Invivus Technologies**
- **Ishpeming Ski Club**
- **Kall Morris Inc. (KMI)**
- **KrapSak**
- **Kimberlite Tech**
- **KytherID**
- **Measurite**
- **Myconaut**
- **Northern Boys**
- **Nutree**
- **Nxst**
- **Quickie**
- **Superior Genomics**
- **SwimSmart**
- **Syncurrent**
- **Trek-Tent**
- **United Way**
- **Zera Techbridge**

We Have Supported

518

Clients Since 2018



Syncurrent

Dhruv C. Patel and Matthew Jaquez
Founder Success Stories



Syncurrent

Dhruv C. Patel & Matthew Jaquez
Founder Success Stories

Syncurrent is the funding tool for local and tribal governments. Local and tribal governments, often referred to as “small governments”, need funding beyond their taxable constituency to support critical infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals). There are over 90,000 small governments across the United States, a disproportionate majority of them are unable to secure funding that’s meant for them. This problem originates because these small governments are often unable to fill positions that would otherwise contribute to capacity in seeking and pursuing funding. According to an analysis from the United States Department of Treasury, there are over 100 technology systems, databases, grant management systems and reporting systems that small governments are forced to navigate between in order to apply and manage funding. With this tremendous problem at hand, co-founders Dhruv and Matthew decided to build Syncurrent.

Syncurrent reduces the time it takes governments to identify, qualify, and pursue funding from a months-long process down to a few minutes. Syncurrent goes as far as to not only

identify and filter relevant opportunities for small governments but also elevate all relevant paperwork and administrative tasks associated with the opportunity. By organizing the entire funding journey for small governments in one spot, they’re attacking the problem at its most important juncture.

Dhruv and Matthew have since expanded their team of two, to a team of seven. The team expansion reflects the growing momentum of the Syncurrent platform, which in the past year went from 30 governments using the platform to over 200 governments across the United States. Syncurrent’s tribal market and adoption rate skyrocketed this previous year jumping from a handful of federally recognized tribal nations adopting the technology to 95 tribes, nearly one-sixth of the entire tribal market. Syncurrent additionally closed two key distribution channels through the Massachusetts Municipal Association and the Michigan Municipal League. The Michigan Municipal League (MML) partnership further cemented Syncurrent as the funding tool for local government through their recent MIFundinghub (MFH) announcement. The MIFundinghub is a joint venture platform between MML and The State of Michigan’s Office of Labor and Economic Opportunity (MI-LEO). The MFH tool is a public database of all funding opportunities available in Michigan and at the federal level. Syncurrent was chosen as the exclusive vendor of this joint-venture to supply all funding data. Municipalities, schools, and nonprofits are all eligible to use the MFH platform at zero cost.

Later in the spring of 2025, Syncurrent was selected as a “top 50 government technology operator” from a nationally contested pool. The award, from the Center For Public Sector AI, placed Syncurrent among the top operators in the nation working on public sector artificial intelligence. Finally, Syncurrent successfully raised over half a million in venture capital funding.

“The best piece of advice I could give this year is focus,” says CEO Dhruv Patel. “You’re not focusing enough, focus more and you’ll be better.”

Learn more at syncurrent.com



Authsnap
Gretchen Heinen & Wael Khouli
Founder Success Stories



Authsnap

Gretchen Heinen & Wael Khouli

Founder Success Stories

Authsnap, founded by Gretchen Heinen and Wael Khouli, is a healthcare technology company focused on improving one of the most frustrating and time-consuming parts of the healthcare system: insurance claim denials and prior authorizations. Built by a team of healthcare professionals, physicians, nurses, and technology experts, Authsnap combines AI-powered software with clinical expertise to help hospitals and healthcare providers recover lost revenue while reducing the administrative burden placed on care teams. Their platform streamlines the appeals process by identifying the clinical evidence needed to challenge denied claims, helping providers spend less time on paperwork and more time focused on patient care.

The company was created out of firsthand experience navigating the inefficiencies of healthcare administration and seeing the impact claim denials can have on both providers and patients. By automating portions of the appeals and authorization process, Authsnap aims to improve healthcare access while helping organizations operate more efficiently. The team is focused on building tools that are practical, scalable, and easy for healthcare systems to integrate into existing workflows, making a complicated process simpler for everyone involved.

In 2025, Authsnap won the Center on Rural Innovation’s (CORI) Small Towns Big Ideas Rural Pitch Competition, highlighting the powerful healthcare innovation emerging from rural communities.

Since joining Innovate Marquette, Authsnap has continued to gain momentum. The company signed its first customers, launched a direct-to-consumer product focused on helping patients navigate prior authorizations for weight loss medications, and is preparing to begin four new pilot programs with healthcare partners.

With support from Innovate Marquette and Spartan Innovations, the team is also in discussions with Michigan State University about future implementation opportunities within one of the region’s leading academic health systems. Wael and Gretchen are proud to continue building Authsnap in the Upper Peninsula while developing technology that helps both providers and patients navigate an increasingly complex healthcare system.

Learn more at authsnap.ai



SwimSmart

Jacob Soter & Dr. Andrew Barnhard
Founder Success Stories



SwimSmart

Jacob Soter, Dr. Andrew Barnhard
Founder Success Stories

Beach safety has always been a topic of concern for coastal communities. Flag and sign-based warning systems, life rings on wood posts, and lifeguards have been the standard for decades. SwimSmart Technology, a local startup is transforming beachfront safety through innovative safety towers equipped with lifesaving technology.

SwimSmart, founded by Jacob Soter and Dr. Andrew Barnhard, was established as we know it today in 2020 and since then has been dedicated to its mission to make a discernible impact on drowning reduction in any way possible. SwimSmart's flagship product is a comprehensive smart beachfront safety tower that provides real-time alerts to beachgoers and comes equipped with a triggered electronic life ring cabinet. Instead of relying on human

intervention to change flags, SwimSmart's system utilizes color-coded lights (red, yellow, green) that automatically adjust based on National Weather Service forecasts and real-time data from coastal sensors. This innovation addresses the issues that plagued the old flag system, providing a much faster and more accurate alert system for water safety.

Since its creation in 2020, SwimSmart has had to overcome a number of challenges that threatened the success of the company. Most often these challenges surrounded navigating government contracts, product development, and manufacturing partnerships. Thanks to support from Innovate Marquette and MTEC SmartZone, SwimSmart has been able to face these challenges head on and come up with solutions that keep the company moving forward.

Over the past year, SwimSmart has hit significant milestones and received several awards honoring its commitment to creating safer beachfronts by way of innovative technology. Most notably, SwimSmart's debut of its new all-in-one rescue tower in May 2024 at Grand Haven State park marked a significant achievement for the startup and the public safety sector as a whole. SwimSmart's growth has been fueled by its ability to innovate and build credibility in the water safety industry. The company has earned several prestigious awards this year, including the Michigan Celebrates Small Business – SmartZone Best Small Business and Great Lakes Water Safety Consortium – Superhero of the Year Award.

If you are as inspired by SwimSmart's journey as we are, consider supporting their mission by spreading awareness or partnering with them to bring life-saving technology to beaches across the country.

Learn more at swimsmarttech.com



Invivus Technologies

Justin Carlson & Mikey Tabak Ph.D.
Founder Success Stories



Invivus Technologies

Justin Carlson, Mikey Tabak
Founder Success Stories

Invivus Technologies is a health technology company focused on developing solutions to prevent chronic and environmental illnesses. Founded by Justin Carlson alongside Co-Founder and Lead Engineer Mikey Tabak, PhD, the company's flagship product, Moldmap, is the world's first community-powered healthy indoor air platform. Moldmap combines community insights, crowdsourced data, and artificial intelligence to help people make more informed housing and travel decisions based on indoor air quality. The platform was inspired by Justin's own health journey after becoming seriously ill from airborne environmental toxins in 2020. During his recovery,

he realized that access to information and community support played a critical role in healing, inspiring him to create tools that could help others facing similar challenges.

More than 50% of U.S. homes contain toxic mold, which can significantly impact individuals with conditions such as asthma, CIRS, MCAS, and other sensitivities. Moldmap aims to make indoor air quality information more accessible while raising awareness around the long-term health impacts of environmental toxins. The company recently welcomed Mikey Tabak, PhD, as Co-Founder and Lead Engineer after serving as an advisor for the past two years. Mikey now leads software development and data modeling for the platform as the company continues to expand its technology offerings.

Over the past year, Invivus Technologies has continued building momentum with the launch of the Moldmap minimum viable product, now live at Moldmap.io, along with the development of Moldmap Safe™ AI, a hotel analyzer that ranks hotels based on indoor air quality insights pulled from public reviews. The company's online community has also grown rapidly, with hundreds of members joining conversations around chronic illness, mold exposure, and healthy living environments. With iOS and Android applications currently in development, the team is focused on continuing to scale Moldmap's reach while helping people make healthier decisions about where they live, work, and travel.

Learn more at moldmap.io

Founder Updates



Myconaut

Ryan Iacovacci & Joe Lane

Myconaut is a bioremediation and environmental biotech company based in Marquette, dedicated to restoring polluted landscapes using fungi, microbes, and regenerative ecology. In 2024, Myconaut was awarded a National Science Foundation SBIR Phase I grant, validating its novel approach to PFAS and hydrocarbon remediation in contaminated soils. The company has since expanded its contract research and service model, supporting a scalable path to revenue through partnerships with engineering firms, municipalities, and landowners. Central to Myconaut’s innovation is its trademarked Biorecurrent

Selection Process™, a proprietary platform that integrates biological field data with AI/ML modeling tools developed through the NVIDIA Inception program to generate prescriptive, site-specific bioremediation strategies. In summer of 2024, Myconaut launched a field-scale pilot at Grostic Farm in Brighton, MI, deploying a multi-phase bioremediation protocol using King Stropharia-inoculated wood chips, indigenous microorganisms (IMO), and regenerative cover crop. In 2025, Myconaut is expanding this pilot to incorporate industrial hemp with broad collaborations, including a partnership with Belgian biotech firm C-Biotech, focused on co-developing phytoremediation solutions for PFAS-impacted soils across U.S. and EU test sites. As Myconaut continues to scale, it remains rooted in the Upper Peninsula while positioning itself at the forefront of ecological restoration, circular bioeconomy, and biologically intelligent infrastructure.

Learn more at myconaut.space



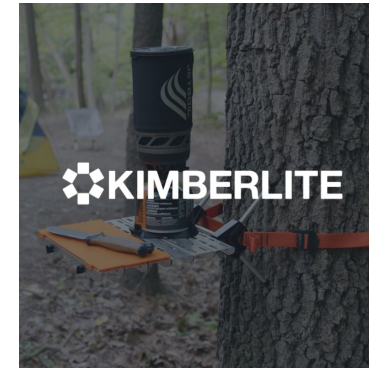
Electric Outdoors

Josef Hjelmaker

Detroit-based startup Electric Outdoors builds integrated, off-grid infrastructure that enables sustainable development without the need for grid connection or utilities. By combining renewable energy, water generation, and zero-waste systems into a deployable platform, EO helps partners unlock new revenue from underutilized land while reducing environmental impact. The modular, software-enabled platform—dubbed the EO Canopy—supports outdoor hospitality, emergency response, and mission-critical field operations.

In 2025, Electric Outdoors made a pivotal transition from pilots to production, deploying its first batch of commercial EO Canopy units. These units include significant improvements in system design, layout, reliability, and user experience compared to the initial pilot and prototype units. Upcoming commercial deployments are planned for the Upper Peninsula and other strategic locations in Michigan and beyond. Additionally in 2025, EO moved its operations to a full-scale manufacturing facility in downtown Detroit, embracing the city’s deep industrial and hardtech legacy.

Learn more at electricoutdoors.com



Kimberlite Tech

Casey McKellar

Kimberlite is a Michigan-based company developing lightweight, modular outdoor gear designed to improve organization and efficiency in outdoor settings. Its flagship product, the Tree Table, is a compact, one-pound platform that attaches to a tree at working height, keeping gear clean, organized, and off the ground while supporting up to 20 pounds. The system is designed to expand through a growing line of proprietary accessories, allowing users to customize it for a variety of outdoor activities. Over the past year, Kimberlite secured a pending patent for the Tree Table and its accessory system, won the Start Garden 100 competition, and launched a Kickstarter campaign that

exceeded its funding goal. The company has finalized its manufacturing network and is preparing for a full public launch in May.

Learn more at kimberlitech.com



Kall Morris Inc.

Adam Kall, Austin Morris, Troy Morris

Last year was a year of turning bold ideas into tangible progress at Kall Morris Inc. (KMI). From demonstrations on the International Space Station to refining mission-ready operations, the team navigated complex challenges, including an extended government shutdown, with focus and determination. In the final months of the year, the company strengthened National Security efforts, advanced commercial partnerships, and built a financial runway that positions KMI for bold new opportunities. With a strengthened leadership team and a clear technical roadmap, KMI enters 2026 ready to translate innovation

into impact and bring safer, more capable space operations closer to reality.

The beginning of 2025 saw the KMI technology, REACCH, aboard the International Space Station. After the space station demonstrations of REACCH wrapped up, it was safely returned back to Earth and returned to Marquette on the 4th of July, 2025. REACCH spent over 200 days in space, operated six sessions with astronauts, and completed 172 capture cycles to investigate how REACCH interacted with objects in zero gravity. Among the accolades of this mission, KMI became the first private company to capture objects repeatedly in space. Shortly after REACCH returned to Marquette, the KMI team hosted KMI advisor and former astronaut, Dr. Anna Fisher, and then-astronaut Suni Williams with events across Marquette, including Suni Williams and KMI team jumping off Blackrocks.

While REACCH was busy making advances in space logistics, KMI continued progressing across areas of focus. Acceptance into the Orbital Edge Accelerator and a showcase at the Orbital Edge Accelerator Demo Day further supported the Asteria product, moving it closer to an in-space demonstration. Members of KMI team presented at many national and global conferences, contributed to industry-recognized reports and papers, supported the education of Yoopers from fifth grade through the college levels, and were featured on several podcasts, not to mention being filmed for feature on the upcoming season of Meet the Drapers. Locally, KMI co-founders contributed to the community with CSO Adam Kall participating in the NMU Alumni Panel Discussion as part of the 2-day conference hosted by SISU: The Innovation Institute at NMU & Innovate Marquette SmartZone, CTO Austin Morris presenting alongside KMI engineers to the Negaunee High School Technical Writing Class, while CEO Troy M. Morris testified before the State of Michigan House Appropriations Subcommittee in Lansing to share on NMU’s positive impact. The KMI team continues moving technologies forward and actively engaging in shaping the growing and global aerospace industry, starting right here in Marquette, for Keeping Space Clear For All.

Learn more at kmi.space



TerraHike Outdoors

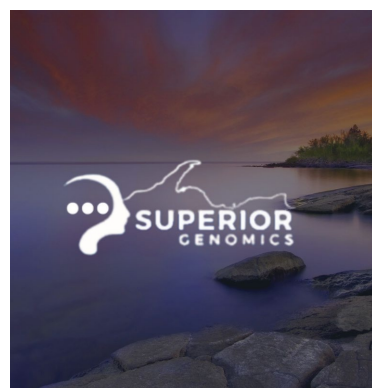
Evan BeVier

TerraHike Outdoors is a Michigan based outdoor gear company on a mission to make nature more accessible through simple, intuitive design. The company's flagship product, the Trek-Tent, is the first hiking staff that fully transforms into a freestanding tent. It offers a fast setup designed to help people get outside more often without the hassle of complex gear.

TerraHike Outdoors was founded by Evan BeVier, an NMU graduate in Mechanical Engineering Technology and a past Invent@NMU student.

In early 2025, TerraHike successfully launched its first Kickstarter campaign and exceeded its funding goal. The company partnered with Tentsile as its manufacturing partner to produce and fulfill the initial Kickstarter orders, which have now been successfully completed. With product in market and fulfillment underway, TerraHike is focused on ramping up marketing efforts to continue driving sales through its ecommerce platform, where the Trek-Tent and compatible accessories are available for purchase. The company is excited for the next phase of growth and remains grateful for the continued support from the Marquette community.

Learn more at terraoutdoors.com



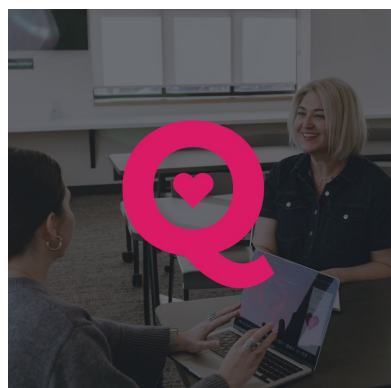
Superior Genomics, Inc.

David Van Holla

Superior Genomics, Inc., based in Norway, Michigan, is advancing mental health diagnostics through the development of objective, gene expression-based tests designed to improve diagnostic accuracy and patient outcomes. In collaboration with Paradise Genomics, the company has identified biomarkers that distinguish between Bipolar Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder—two conditions that often present with similar symptoms—and holds exclusive rights to commercialize this innovation as a clinical essay. Led by founder and psychiatrist Dr. David B. Van Holla, Superior Genomics is currently focused on completing development, securing CLIA certification, and preparing for market launch, with the

long-term goal of expanding objective diagnostic tools across a range of psychiatric conditions.

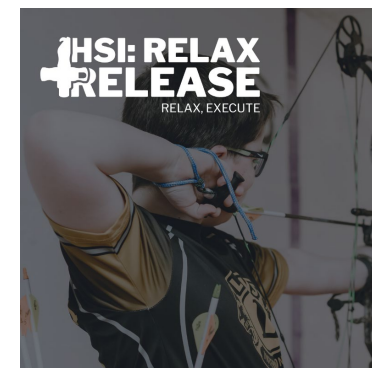
Learn more at superiorgenomics.com



Quickie Tech

Jennifer Gorton

Quickie is a relationship wellness app designed to help couples strengthen emotional and physical intimacy through small, meaningful moments. They're currently partnering with AirDev to update the demo app based on customer feedback, including the addition of supportive push notifications and a thoughtful levels-and-badges system to encourage ongoing connection. These updates are focused on making intimacy feel accessible, engaging, and sustainable for busy couples. By blending expert-informed guidance with user-centered design, Quickie continues to evolve as a modern, approachable tool for lasting connection.



North River Fabrication

Brian Marvin

North River Fabrication's product HSI Relax Release is an innovative archery release aid designed to improve shooting accuracy through a unique relaxation-based method. Unlike traditional mechanical release aids that rely on trigger activation and tension, the HSI Relax Release allows archers to execute a "surprise release" by relaxing the forearm and hand, helping promote consistency and a calmer shooting process. The simple three-component design—consisting of a head, hook, and rod—connects to the wrist with a strap or rope and is intended to help archers of all skill levels improve

accuracy and reduce common challenges such as target panic.

The product has been developed through multiple prototype iterations, including 3D-printed models produced with support from Innovate Marquette as well as machined acetal and aluminum versions. Approximately 70 prototypes have been produced and tested with archers of varying experience levels, with feedback informing several design refinements to improve comfort and reliability. Early demonstrations have generated strong interest within the archery community, including recognition at the Archery Trade Association Show in Indianapolis. Moving forward, the company plans to continue refining the design, pursue funding opportunities, and explore manufacturing partnerships to bring the product to a broader audience of archers and bowhunters.



Lectric Boil

Jarret Schlaff & Ryan Schlaff

Lectric Boil, founded by Jarret Schlaff, continues to build strong momentum as it advances toward product launch and investment milestones. The company is nearing the close of the first \$375K tranche of a \$750K pre-seed round, which will support the development of next-generation beta prototypes and help secure key vendor partnerships. This funding will also accelerate marketing efforts aimed at reaching 250 presales prior to production, an important step toward market launch. To support long-term growth and investment readiness, the company recently converted to Conservation Arc, Inc., with Lectric Boil as its flagship brand.

Over the past year, the company has also gained traction through grants and national exposure. Lectric Boil secured \$30,000 in product development funding from the TechTown Detroit Startup Fund and the Detroit Startup Fund. The team has also performed strongly in pitch competitions, winning Pitch & Pine in Traverse City and the Frances Ann Capital x Cap Table Nation Pitch Competition in Southwest Florida, while also appearing as a finalist in Pitch MI and the Big Bet Pitch Competition.

Learn more at lectricboil.com



Dark Horse

Matt Spear

Matt Spear, owner of Spear Strategic LLC, a training and consulting business that focuses on active shooter response training and firearms training has been working on developing a ballistic protection product named Dark Horse. Its goal is to provide affordable ballistic protection to Law Enforcement personnel, other first responders and any business or school that trains for active shooter response. Currently, it is patented pending and being tested for durability and use.

Innovation Journey

Quick Explore®

A brief conversation that introduces our services and familiarizes our team with your basic idea. There is no charge and we'll determine if we can discover a clear path forward together.

Validation

Confirming the value and ensuring your business concept aligns with one of our base camps.

Where's your Base Camp?

We're focused on high-tech scalable ventures or products along the following paths:

Outdoor Innovation

Does your venture provide new opportunities to explore the outdoors?

Creative Tech

Does your venture combine creative arts, design, engineering, and business?

Sustainable Tech

Does your venture address new ways of supporting ecological, human, and economic health and stability?

Trail Map

Our team meets you where you are on your journey to chart the shortest path to your destination

Trailheads

1 Viability and Desirability

2 Feasibility

3 Competitive Strategy

5 Marketing and Pitch

4 Partnerships

Safe Harbors

Legal and Regulatory Advisors

Industry and Technology Partners

Research Institutions and University Partners

Marketing and PR Partners

Investment Partners

The Innovation Journey

The Innovation Journey is Innovate Marquette's suite of business services carried out by Innovate Marquette, the Invent@NMU student team, and local industry experts that provide support to ventures in outdoor innovation, creative technology and sustainable technology, allowing new startups to launch and grow at a pace that matches the speed of their founders.

Our client types are new businesses, existing businesses looking to pivot to technology, or investors looking to get involved in early-stage startups. Read more to learn more about what resources and services our team offers to help you and your venture flourish.

QuickExplore®

By submitting your business or product idea on our website, innovatemarquette.org, we begin with a Quick Explore, a free kickoff meeting for our team to learn more about your idea and discover if we're the right fit to guide your on your innovation journey.

After the initial Quick Explore® meeting, we will reach out within 7-10 days to discuss the next steps.

Validation

Once you join our program, we begin the Validation process, where we work together to make a business profile and evaluate competition and market opportunity.

Base Camps

Base camps are which of our focus areas your venture best aligns with— outdoor innovation, creative technology, or sustainable technology, all of which we offer support for high-tech, scalable ventures.

Trail Map

Our team meets you where you are to chart the shortest path to your destination.

Trailheads

We operate under the notion that no two Innovation Journeys will look alike. With that in mind, our services are specially curated on an individual basis to serve the specific needs of rural innovators here in the Upper Peninsula.

Safe Harbors

Once a venture reaches the advanced services stage, we connect you to Safe Harbors— connections to experts that further establish your venture and maintain momentum.

The Trailheads



Viability and Desirability

This trailhead focuses on helping startups establish a strong foundation through the Lean Model Canvas and Customer Discovery. Founders outline their business model, receive feedback from IMQT staff, and conduct interviews with ~30 stakeholders to validate their ideas. The process ends with an Ideation Meeting to align on venture direction and may include entity formation support.



Feasibility

Founders begin developing their product through MVP definition, sketching, CAD modeling, and prototype creation. The IMQT team supports patentability searches, wireframes, and 3D printing as needed. Work varies by project but typically results in a proof of concept or working prototype. Clients may also be connected to service providers for provisional patent filings.



Competitive Strategy

This trailhead focuses on competitive strategy, legal considerations, certifications, trade secrets, and industry analysis. Founders work independently with IMQT consulting support to prepare their project for long-term viability and regulatory compliance before transitioning to advanced services.



Partnerships

Founders conduct research into manufacturing processes, capital strategy, board development, and team building. IMQT supports founders in identifying what resources, roles, and funding mechanisms are needed to scale their project and move it toward market launch.



Marketing and Pitch

This final trailhead prepares founders for public-facing engagement. The IMQT marketing team helps founders develop a brand style guide, logo, digital assets, photos/videos, and a complete pitch strategy. Deliverables include a pitch deck, executive summary, pro forma, and CAP table—everything needed to approach investors or partners.

The Protolab

At Innovate Marquette, we recognize the need for rural entrepreneurs to have access to advanced technology to quickly prototype and develop products. The Innovate Marquette Protolab is a specialized prototyping lab equipped with state-of-the-art 3D printing technologies that supports local entrepreneurs by helping to transform 2D designs into working concept models. We bring advanced capabilities like 3D printing, laser cutting, and 3D scanning to the Marquette area to help organizations and innovators turn ideas into real, tangible results.

We've been able to open the Protolab to the community and support a wide range of customers and projects from building a small-scale model of Negaunee that helped them win the 2025 Community Excellence Award, to creating medals for the Ishpeming Ski Club's 100th anniversary ski jumping competition.

The Protolab provides Innovate Marquette clients with access to cutting-edge technology to help advance their business ventures, supporting local entrepreneurs by helping to transform 2D designs into physical prototypes.

Thank you to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development for believing in the work we do to advance our entrepreneurial ecosystem and reach entrepreneurs in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Protolab is made possible by the USDA Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) grant.



Supporting Our Community Through Local Events

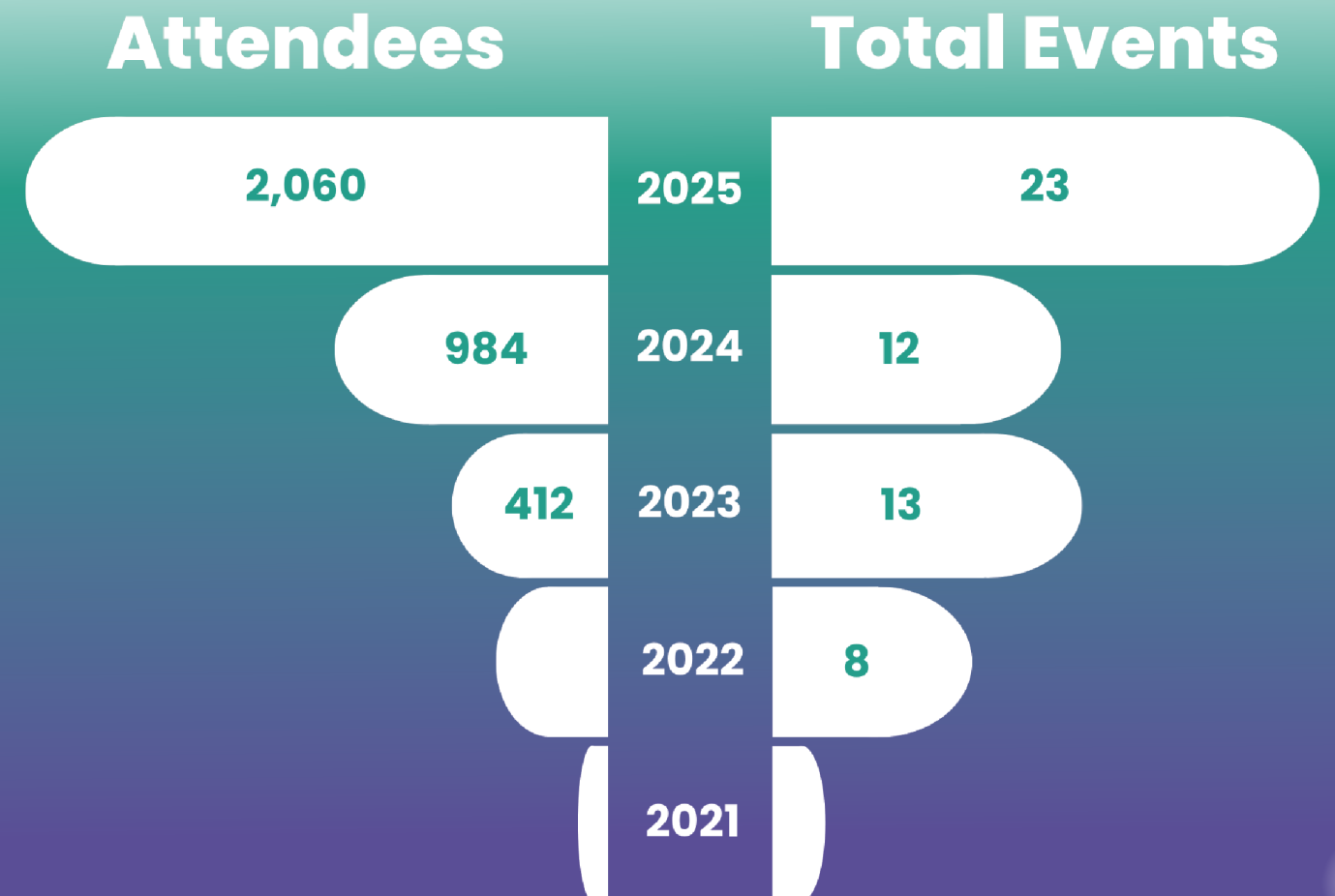
We invest in our community by sponsoring events that align with our mission and values. From creative industry gatherings to cultural festivals and longstanding local traditions, these events help strengthen regional identity, encourage innovation, and connect us with the broader community. Our sponsorships are a way to stay actively engaged while supporting initiatives that contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the Upper Peninsula.

- Marquette Monthly Tech Meetup
- Peak25 Conference
- City of Marquette Art Awards
- Fresh Coast Film Festival
- Revolve CC
- ORIAN U.P. Outdoor Summit
- Michigan Outdoor Summit
- Economic Club of Marquette County
- NMU/MSU InvestUP Tailgate
- ISC Annual Ski Jumping Competition
- Operation Action UP - EOS Talk
- Superior Watershed Partnership

\$87K

Investment in our Community

Hosted Events



PEAK | 25

Elevating Breakthroughs in Research, Entrepreneurship and Collaboration

Peak25 is a two-day professional development conference elevating breakthroughs in research, entrepreneurship, and collaboration. Formerly known as Innovation Week, this year was the first year under our new name and branding. Thanks to new partnerships with NMU's College of Graduate Studies, College of Business, and local businesses, community and student engagement trended upwards from last year's Innovation Week. This year's event featured internationally-recognized keynote speakers, three pitch competitions, Three Minute Thesis, and more.

265
Attended Day 1

254
Attended Day 2

428
Total Registrants

Women in Entrepreneurship

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY

Women in Entrepreneurship is an annual event created to celebrate and empower female founders, aspiring entrepreneurs, and tech enthusiasts. Whether you're a seasoned business owner, or just starting out, we hope to create a space for women to connect, grow, and share resources with this event. This year, we've expanded Women in Entrepreneurship to have more programming throughout the year. Join us for one of our quarterly Women in Entrepreneurship: Coffee & Conversation events. Learn more at innovatemarquette.org.

75

Attendees at Anti-Excellence with Lane Clark

35

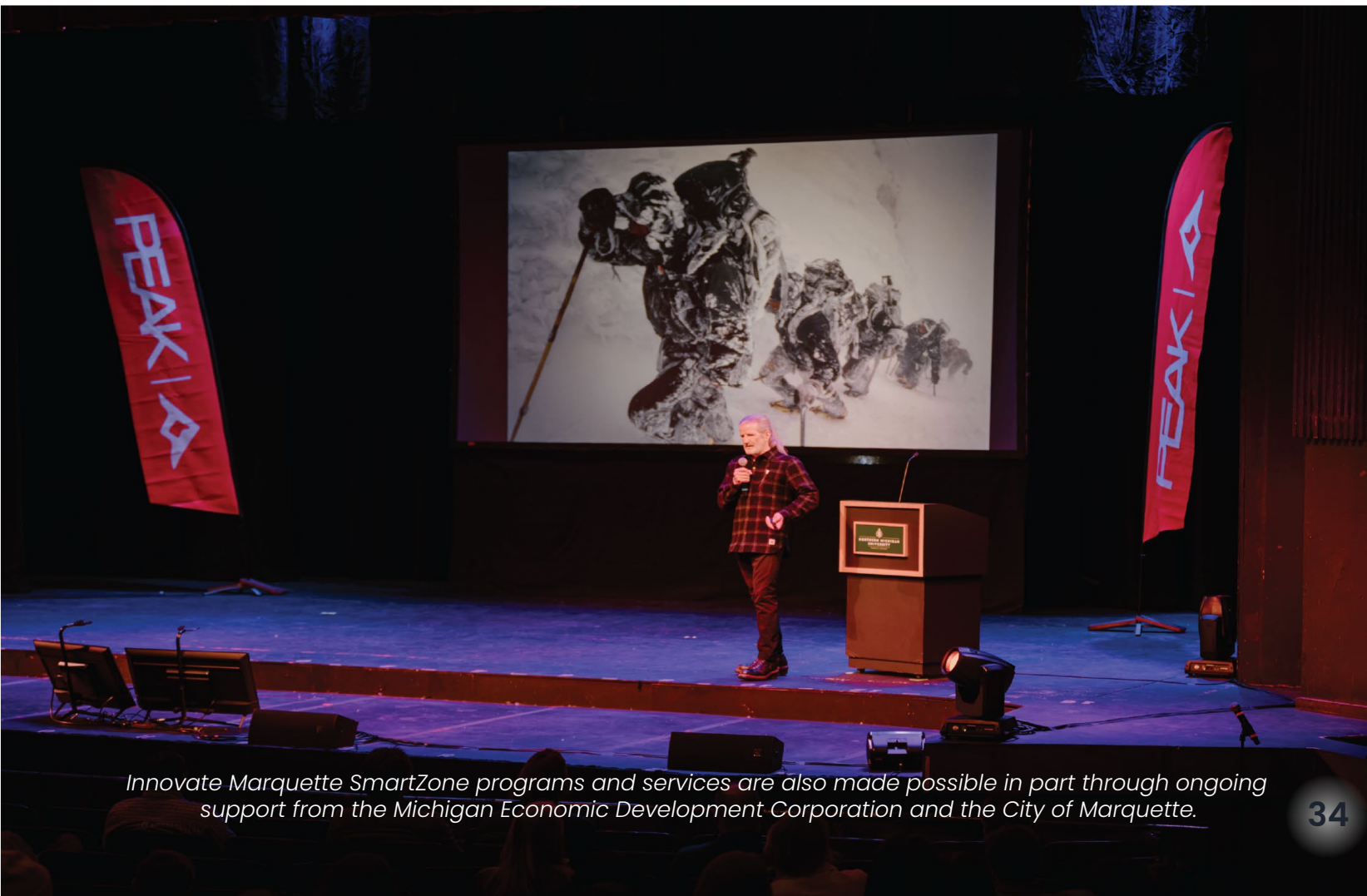
Attendees at Coffee & Conversation Q1

23

Attendees at Coffee & Conversation Q2

19

Attendees at Coffee & Conversation Q3



Innovate Marquette SmartZone programs and services are also made possible in part through ongoing support from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the City of Marquette.



Invent@NMU Program

In October of 2014, Northern Michigan University launched the Invent@NMU program, an experiential learning opportunity for students and local inventors, entrepreneurs, and business owners to establish a symbiotic partnership.

Known as the idea incubator® at Northern Michigan University, this unique program offers a variety of entrepreneurial support services, forging mutually beneficial partnerships between NMU students and local ideators and inventors, benefiting the local business community. Innovate Marquette is proud to manage this program in cooperation with the university.

Students are given the chance to take what they've learned in the classroom and apply it to real-life situations, while simultaneously contributing to the Upper Peninsula's growing entrepreneurial ecosystem and giving entrepreneurs with product and businesses ideas an opportunity to receive cost-effective support in bringing new ideas to life. Today, our unique team is composed of student employees from NMU led by expert business professionals from Innovate Marquette.

INVENT@NMU STUDENT TEAM



Lukas Hill
Human Centered Designer



Conner Rafferty
Client Onboarding Guide



Sam Hoffman
3D Printing Assistant



Sean Kellogg
3D Printing Assistant

Student Talent Pipeline

The Invent@NMU program has been a launchpad for student success after college. We've seen great results from our student-to-staff pipeline, with many Invent@NMU student employees going on to work at Innovate Marquette after graduation. The hands-on experience they gained while still in school helped shape them into well-rounded, capable professionals. It's been a privilege to continue working with so many of them in our office after they graduate.



Nick Herriff

Project Manager, Innovate Marquette

"Invent@NMU allowed me to develop skills that I wasn't able to develop in the classroom and allowed me to start a career path that I wasn't able to do before. It also gave me connections and a sense of community in Marquette"

Many Invent@NMU students continue to work with the Innovate Marquette team and clients, doing contractual work as service providers in their respective fields. Here are some recent examples of Invent@NMU student employee that have continued work with Innovate Marquette post-graduation:

- **Eric Prue**, *Product Design*
- **Taylor Warren**, *Client Services*
- **Kyleigh McCarthy**, *Graphic Design*
- **Eric Elliot**, *Client Services*
- **Henry Westlind**, *Client Services*
- **Kate Pouliot**, *Client Services*
- **Lauren Call**, *Events and Programming*
- **Ava Larson**, *Marketing and Content Creation*
- **Nick Herriff**, *Client Services*
- **Anna Vanderhoef**, *Graphic Design and Marketing*
- **Vaughn Rodriguez**, *Marketing and Public Relations*
- **Kate Cudney**, *Product Design and Prototyping*





MAKE IT MARQUETTE

The Make It Marquette brand launched in 2021 by Innovate Marquette as a talent attraction initiative, shining a spotlight on the unique and vibrant community and beauty of Marquette as a destination to relocate. To achieve this long term goal, Make It Marquette has since evolved into a multi-year campaign whose purpose is to attract and retain talent to contribute to a strong entrepreneurial tech ecosystem and vibrant economy for all— for the community already here, and those we haven't yet welcomed that have a desire to call Marquette home. A community that prospers long term is one where people feel they can thrive. This is the driving idea behind the Make It Marquette initiative. It won't happen overnight, and it won't happen without the folks who are already here. It's why the foundation of our initiative is built on what we've learned and experienced from our community—this insight is what will create change that lasts and makes an impact where it's needed.

For the first year of this refreshed approach in 2023, Make It Marquette sought out to gather the information critical to developing a thoughtful and effective strategy, including trainings, a year-long strategic communication plan to guide efforts, several community listening sessions to understand residents and their experiences living in Marquette, and restructuring relocation information from the original Make It Marquette to still be readily available. Year One also included storytelling initiatives such as People of Marquette, a portrait series at Marquette's 2024 Art Week, which served to highlight the community here and begin to introduce the community to the Make It Marquette initiative. In 2025, the campaign focused on curating events focused on hearing from our community and empowering Make it Marquette champions to advocate for making Marquette a vibrant and welcoming place for all who want to call it home.

As the next chapter of Make It Marquette begins, the mission toward a welcoming community where all can feel at home remains. Inspired by our own community, we seek to do so in partnership, working to bring other individuals and organizations aligned with our mission into this initiative with us because the greatest impact we can make is when we do it together. We're continuing to listen to our community to best learn from those here how to best move forward in the wake of change.



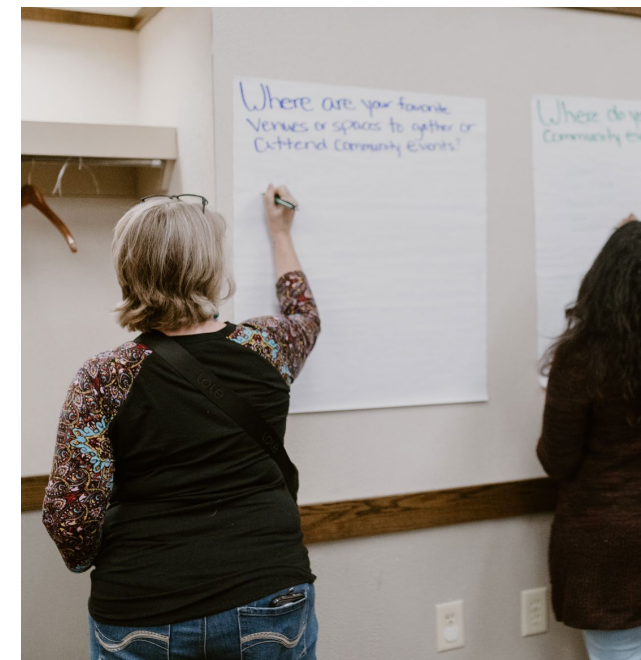
Make it Marquette Partners

Siren

Siren is a strategic communication firm located in Marquette who has been on the Make It Marquette journey since the beginning—assisting with defining what Make It Marquette is and aspires to be, as well as creating and guiding the strategy from a communications standpoint. As a woman-owned business who expanded their offices to Marquette in 2021, Siren brings a unique perspective to the Make It Marquette team as they themselves moved to the shores of Superior to call Marquette home. Their contributions so far and forthcoming have engaged public and private stakeholders to define Make It Marquette and thoughtfully introduce this initiative as an asset to our community—where Marquette is celebrated while honoring and uplifting the residents who have shaped the community into what it is today.

Stone Hearth Consulting

Stone Hearth Consulting was brought onto the Make It Marquette campaign in 2023 in order to aid in structuring the campaign to be inclusive of all of the Marquette area's vibrant residents. SHC's work is dedicated to partnering with organizations in order to build more inclusive, equitable, and diverse environments within workplaces and communities. Its founder has been in the community since 2010, first as a student activist, then a community member, then higher ed professional, and now as an Ishpeming resident working with organizations across the country. Stone Hearth Consulting aids in evaluating people driven data, community outreach, and benchmarking the campaign against exciting campaigns in the Midwest and beyond.



Advanced Services: Entrepreneur in Residence

Innovate Marquette's Entrepreneur in Residence, Vince Nystrom, who lends his expertise as a service provider to mentor founders, made significant strides in entrepreneurial support, funding acquisition, and ecosystem development. While some initiatives are pending external funding, strong progress and foundational work have positioned the program for accelerated growth in the next phase.

Business Accelerator Fund (BAF)

The Michigan Business Accelerator Fund (BAF) is a grant program designed to help early-stage, high-tech startups in Michigan to accelerate their path to commercialization by covering the costs of specialized, third-party services. It is administered by the Michigan Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in partnership with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).

Swimsmart: **\$49,000**
Syncurrent: **\$47,000**
Authsnap: **\$46,000**
Nukol: **\$11,132**
Nxst: **\$12,000**

2 BAF award proposals in progress

5 BAF proposals awarded in 2025

Looking ahead, the focus is on activating the foundations that have been built. The next phase will include submitting a new wave of BAF proposals, launching formal infrastructure for the Regional Angel and Mentorship Networks, and finalizing a service provider inventory to identify and fill regional resource gaps. In parallel, the Entrepreneur in Residence will continue providing direct support to early-stage companies, ensuring more startups are prepared to secure outside investment. Strengthening relationships with Michigan's innovation ecosystem remains a priority, with an emphasis on collaboration across the MEDC, SBDC, academic institutions, and seed fund partners to scale impact and unlock additional funding opportunities.

Advanced Services: Venture Capital Funding

Venture capital (VC) funding is a form of private equity where investors provide capital to startups and emerging companies with high growth potential.

\$1.4M

in venture capital funding secured for founders

Syncurrent recieved
\$500K

Authsnap recieved
\$400K

SwimSmart recieved
\$300K

Electric Outdoors recieved
\$250K



Grants

Michigan Economic Development Corporation Gateway Grant

The MEDC Gateway Grant was secured to support Innovation Marquette Enterprise Corporation (IMEC) three-year strategy of establishing a collaborative innovation ecosystem in Marquette County. This proposal outlines our efforts to support entrepreneurs and early-stage technology companies through March of 2026 and highlights our long-term vision for innovation within Marquette's SmartZone. Central to this strategy is the formation of a consortium that brings together public and private partners to assist local founders, entrepreneurs, and innovators. By streamlining access to partnerships, commercialization pathways, and growth resources, the initiative aims to accelerate business development. The ultimate goal is to foster scalable technology companies and create high-wage jobs throughout the region.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rise Grant

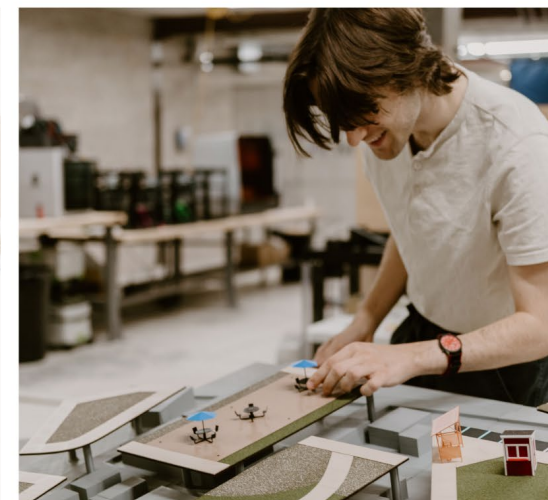
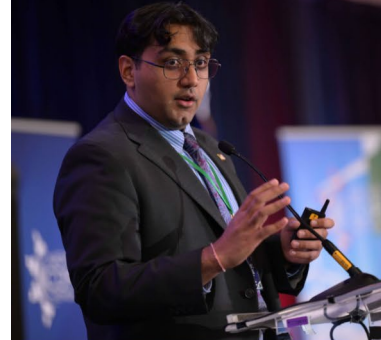
The USDA RISE grant supports Invent@NMU as a rural innovation hub, helping Northern Michigan University students and local entrepreneurs bring ideas to market. It focuses on hands-on commercialization support, workforce training, and rural business development. The funding covers staff, equipment, and programming to grow the regional innovation pipeline.

Economic Development Administration (EDA) Build to Scale Grant

Through the EDA Build to Scale Capital Grant, Innovate Marquette supported the growth of technology-based startups and entrepreneurship across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Over the three-year grant period (October 2021 – September 2024), Innovate Marquette built a collaborative innovation ecosystem by enhancing incubator and accelerator services, launching the Michigan Outdoor Innovation Fund, and developing new funding pathways for rural entrepreneurs. By the close of the grant, 27 new technology companies had been created, 91 new full-time jobs had been generated, and clients had secured over \$23.5 million in follow-on funding. These outcomes reflect Innovate Marquette's commitment to strengthening the Upper Peninsula's innovation economy and expanding opportunity for entrepreneurs across the region.

ORIAN – Outdoor Recreation Innovation Action Network

The Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD), in collaboration with Innovate Marquette, led a regional initiative to strengthen and expand the outdoor recreation economy in Michigan's Central Upper Peninsula. The initiative included the formation of the Outdoor Recreation Innovation Action Network (ORIAN), the development of a strategic Industry Growth Strategy Master Plan, and a feasibility study on integrating electrified trail systems throughout the region. A highlight of the grant was ORIAN's role in hosting the 2025 U.P. Outdoor Recreation Summit, bringing together outdoor industry leaders, business professionals, and recreation enthusiasts for a day of insights, innovation, and connection. The ORIAN grant concluded in September 2025, having laid important groundwork in positioning the Central Upper Peninsula as a hub for outdoor recreation-driven innovation and sustainable economic development.





IMPACT

REPORT 2025

