



Northern Lakes
ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



Our Mission

NLEA serves as the lead economic development organization for the region of Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, and Emmet counties.

Our mission is to drive economic resiliency by ensuring the resources, infrastructure, and policies exist to fuel business growth and community prosperity.

Our Vision

The NLEA region will be a thriving and resilient economy with a robust business environment that provides a diversity of family-sustaining career opportunities; an abundance of natural beauty; and an exceptional quality of life that allows all residents and future generations to prosper.

President & CEO Payton Heins

My first year as the NLEA's president has been an exhilarating one; it has been a time for exciting progress in the region as well as within our organization. Our team has continued to drive economic resiliency in the region by supporting the expansion of businesses; hosting another successful Economic Symposium; and advancing transformational development projects that are adding much needed workforce housing, enhancing infrastructure, and supporting the vibrancy that retains and attracts talent and business to our region. I am excited to celebrate the team's many successes in 2024 in this report and thrilled to lead as we build momentum and strategically focus our efforts to ensure economic resiliency now and into the future for our region.



Board Chair Carlin Smith

Maybe it's my day job, but I've always had a passion for energy—especially the kind of positive momentum we're seeing at the NLEA right now. With a bold new strategic plan developed in 2024, the organization is well-positioned to navigate the future with purpose.

Our dedicated staff and board are deeply committed to creating and expanding economic opportunities across the four counties we serve. The NLEA continues to focus on the local and regional challenges that affect our business communities, addressing them head-on with the same determination and forward-thinking approach that has always defined our work.

It has been a true honor to serve as board chair in 2023 and 2024. I'm proud of all that the NLEA has accomplished over the past year. A heartfelt thank you to our investors and partners—your support makes this work possible and your belief in our mission fuels our progress.



2024 Impacts

\$38,375,919

generated in new direct private investment
through NLEA projects

\$2,888,997

secured in new state and federal grants for
local projects through NLEA grant assistance

132

new and retained
family-sustaining jobs through
NLEA projects

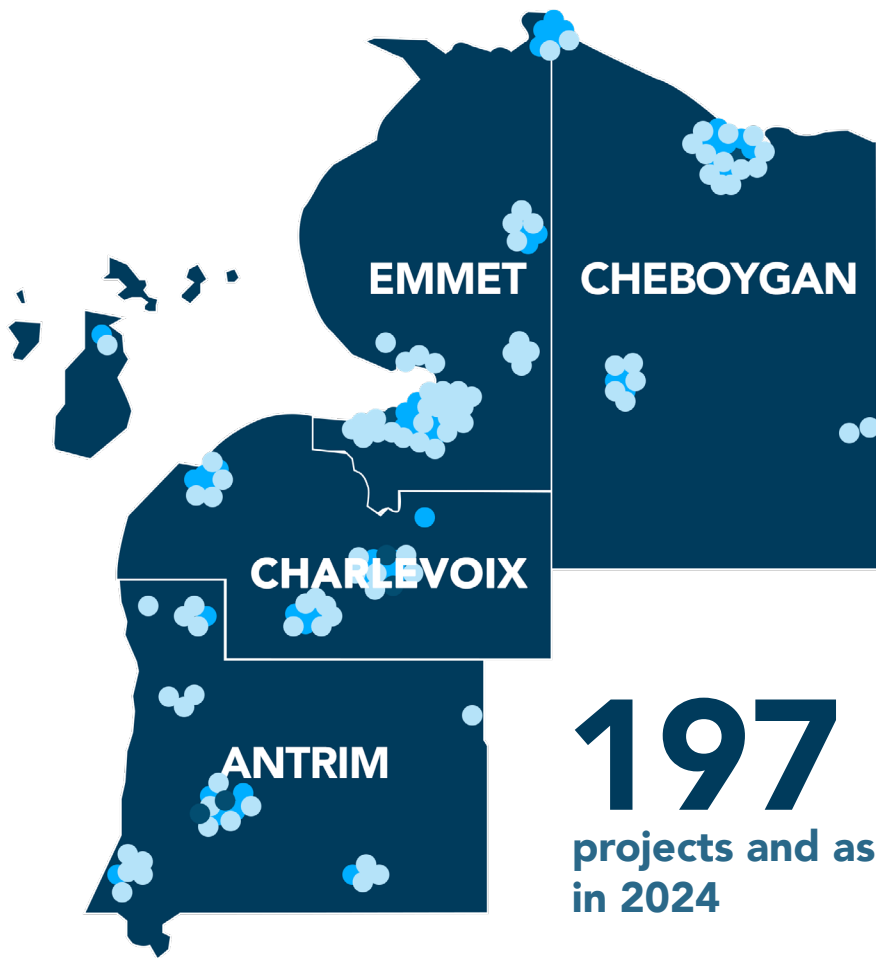
630

community and business
leaders engaged through NLEA
educational programming

MORE THAN

\$91

returned in direct investment to
the region for every \$1 invested
in the NLEA.



197

projects and assists
in 2024

107

Business Assists

78

Community Assists

12

Training and Events



35.2% of the population is 60 or older
in 2022

17.5% of the population is under 18
in 2022

2,630 fewer workers
in 2023 than in 2010

Education and Engagement

In 2024, the NLEA increased its educational efforts, serving as the go-to resource for economic development strategies and economic data. NLEA staff delivered more than 12 educational opportunities, either as an invited presenter or a host, reaching more than 630 community members. The highlight of our educational programming continues to be the annual Economic Symposium in May which brings together over 275 leaders from across the region and state to tackle complex challenges, make strategic connections, and celebrate the many successes of our communities and businesses in Northern Michigan.

12

*educational
opportunities*

630

*community
members reached*

Project Snapshot: Economic Development Training

NLEA staff were excited to continue supporting our Chamber of Commerce partners across the region through Economy Day trainings for Leadership Charlevoix County, Leadership Cheboygan, and Leadership Little Traverse. These personal and professional development programs cultivate the next generation of leaders in the region. Presentations from our staff focused on economic development strategies, pressing economic and demographic trends, and critical resources that NLEA provides. Additionally, NLEA hosted Economic Development training sessions for local units of government, spanning all four counties in our service area. The topics included local economic trends, economic development tools, and resources to promote economic prosperity in the region. These trainings helped equip leaders from county, township, city, and tribal government with tools and strategies to advance economic development in their communities.

Annual Economic Symposium

The annual Economic Symposium returned to Boyne Mountain Resort in 2024. The event focused on innovation in the region with decorated speakers such as Brian Britton, CEO of Kilwins, and Jake Manthei, President of Aster Brands. We examined innovation in the outdoor recreation industry, housing production, craft beverage industry, and talent attraction in addition to other topics. The event's award program also recognized individuals and organizations promoting economic and community prosperity in the region. The Community of Cheboygan received the Guts and Grit award; Manthei Wood Products received the Project of the Year Award; and Ed Grice of Boyne Mountain received the Lifetime Achievement Award.





Hauke Havenstein

Site Leader & GM
Moeller Aerospace



Jake Huntman

Sales Director
Preston Feather



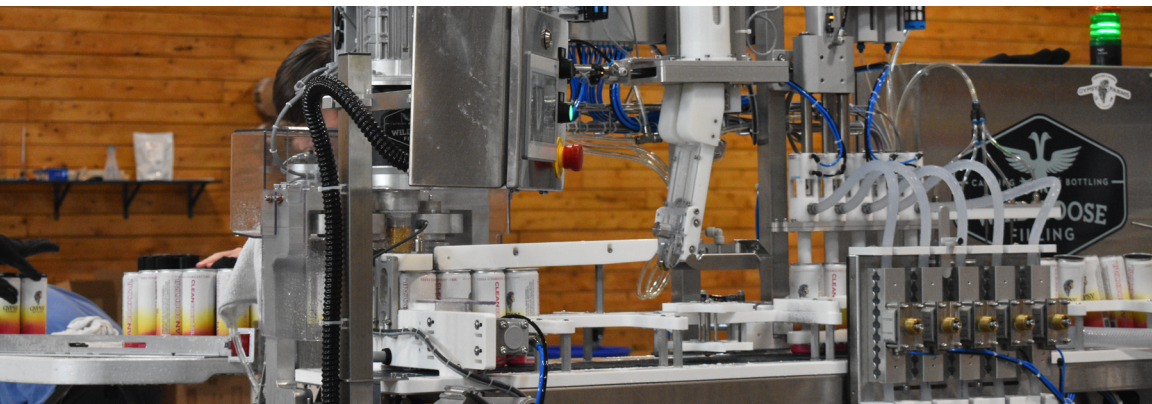
Bill Marshall

Vice President
Preston Bank



Business Growth

In 2024, NLEA staff delivered assistance to 107 businesses in our service region. Assistance included packaging and administering grants; securing tax abatements for business expansion; supporting site selection; navigating multi-jurisdictional land and infrastructure issues; providing business intelligence; and delivering educational training. Our services to employers aim to break down barriers that impede their success and growth, as well as help them seize significant opportunities.



Project Snapshot: Aster Brands Expansion

In 2024, NLEA had the opportunity to support Aster Brands, a division of Manthei Group, which specializes in sales, marketing, and intellectual property to grow opportunities for concrete manufacturers globally. Aster Brands' continued growth and innovation required a larger facility to accommodate its team, equipment, and operations. To support their expansion in the region, NLEA assisted the company with successfully securing a \$750,000 grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. As a result, this project will reactivate and improve a vacant industrial site in Emmet County, resulting in:

15 **56** **\$7M+**

jobs created *jobs retained* *in private investment*



Regional Small Business Outlook

In November, NLEA co-hosted a Regional Small Business Outlook event at Gypsy Distillery with the Charlevoix Area Chamber of Commerce and Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce. Attendees had the chance to hear from the Michigan Business Network and local business leaders representing diverse sectors across Northern Michigan. Panelists expressed a generally positive economic outlook for their sector but acknowledged ongoing constraints related to attracting, training, and retaining talent. Panelists further stressed the need for more workforce housing units to overcome workforce constraints.





Thriving Communities

In 2024, NLEA staff delivered direct assistance to communities in our service area on 78 occasions. Our team of economic and community development professionals provided support in the following areas: grant writing and administration, local development finance incentive training, data analysis, educational programming, and policy development. These services help communities cultivate local and attract new employers who provide year-round, family-sustaining jobs as well as create vibrant places to retain and attract talent.

Supporting Grants for Downtown Development

NLEA staff supported two downtown redevelopment projects in 2023 and 2024 through our grant writing and administration services, the 100 Van Pelt Place development in Charlevoix and City Park Grill renovation in Petoskey. Both projects were awarded Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Revitalization and Placemaking grants totaling \$350,000 for a \$1.4M investment and \$566,170 for a \$2.18M investment respectively. Together, the two projects will reactivate vacant downtown spaces and add eight new housing units.

Project Snapshot: Establishing Incentives to Support Business Growth and Redevelopment

NLEA staff helped Tuscarora Township in Cheboygan County establish a Commercial Rehabilitation District which offers property owners the opportunity to apply for a tax abatement incentive for up to 10 years. NLEA provided community training on tax abatements and helped the Township navigate establishing the district. Within three months of establishment, two businesses were approved for rehabilitation and expansion projects, resulting in:



31

new jobs

56

*temporary
construction
jobs*

\$7M+

in private investment



Mike Allison
President
Village of
Mancelona

"From grant writing, informational seminars, answering questions, guidance, and encouragement, the NLEA has assisted the village immensely over the years. Thank you again for all you have done and look forward to our future together."





Setting Strategic Priorities

2024 marked NLEA's 40th year as an economic development organization as we embarked on a six-month strategic planning process to guide the organization's structure, services, and development over the next three years. NLEA brought on Lake Superior Community Partnership (LSCP) to facilitate public engagement, ensuring the strategic plan was informed by NLEA's partners and the region's varied communities.

With LSCP's support, NLEA gathered input through an initial impressions survey, community workshops, business roundtables, a Chamber of Commerce Directors roundtable, NLEA Board of Directors surveys and workshops, individual stakeholder interviews, and a comprehensive public survey with specific sections for residents/employees, businesses, local officials, and developers. In total, more than 250 community leaders, business leaders, and residents engaged in the process.

To read the full strategic plan, visit northernlakes.net/strategic-plan

2025-2027 Strategic Framework

LEADERSHIP

Lead a comprehensive economic development strategy that builds greater economic resiliency for the region.

OPPORTUNITY

Grow diverse and year-round economic opportunity through targeted business retention, growth, and attraction efforts.

PLACE

Advance infrastructure and development efforts that support the current and future diverse needs of our region's workforce and employers.

PEOPLE

Elevate regional opportunities and implement new initiatives to attract and retain talent.

MEASURING IMPACT

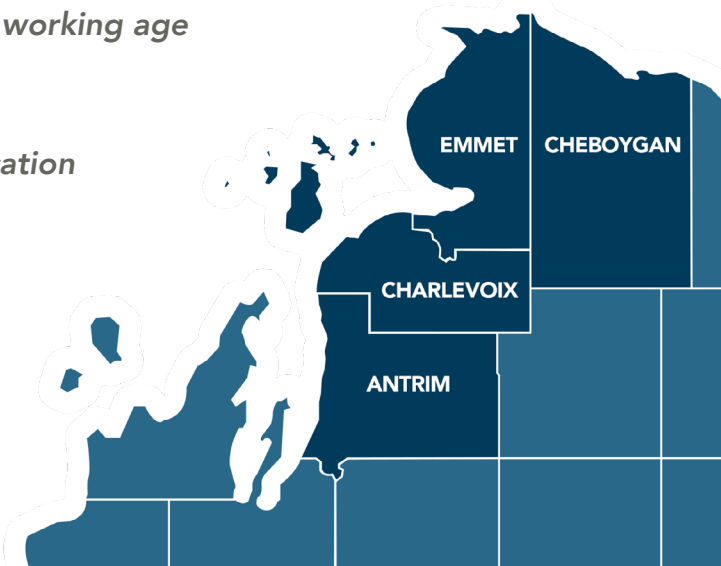
Progress will be measured by gains in:

- Current and future working age population
- Median earnings
- GDP per employee
- Economic diversification
- Capital investment
- Shared prosperity

"We envision a thriving regional economy with a robust business environment, diverse family-sustaining career opportunities, and an exceptional quality of life for all residents. Achieving this will require a concerted effort from all sectors - public and private alike - and we are committed to leading that charge alongside our partners."



Payton Heins
President/CEO
NLEA





Board of Directors

Dave Cluley, Board Chair

Emmet County Resident

Jeff Lawson, Secretary

Cheboygan County Administrator

Dave Boyer

Emmet County Administrator

Mark Heydlauff

Charlevoix City Manager

Sharen Lange

Cheboygan County Economic
Development Coordinator

Jim Rummer

Char-Em ISD

Kevin Shepard

Charlevoix County Administrator

Terry VanAlstine

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Dayton Anchor Lamina

Tom Eustice

Cheboygan County Resident

Robert Jess

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Bill Marshall

Huntington National Bank

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Shooks Farm Co. and Cellar 1914

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Dawn Bodnar

Awakon Federal Credit Union

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DTE Energy

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Extension

David Roland Finley, PhD

North Central Michigan College

Jeremy Scott

Antrim County Administrator

Nathan Swailes

Ellsworth Farmers Exchange

Dave White

Emmet County Commissioner

NLEA Staff



Payton Heins, CEcD
President/CEO



Dave Kronberg
Director of Business
Growth



Chris Bauer, AICP
Senior Special Projects
Officer



Jessica Lovay
Senior Program Manager



Sam Bailey
Strategic Initiatives
Manager



Tommy Reid
Marketing and
Events Coordinator

2024 Investors and Partners

Antrim County
Charlevoix County
Cheboygan County
Emmet County
Michigan State University Extension
Networks Northwest
Char-Em ISD
DTE Energy
Northeast Michigan Council of Governments
Baker College
Citizens National Bank
City of Cheboygan
City of Petoskey
Consumers Energy
Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation
Charlevoix Township
Cheboygan County Community Foundation
City of Boyne City
City of Charlevoix

EJ, Inc.
4Front Credit Union
Great Lakes Energy
Huntington National Bank
ITC Holdings Corporation
North Central Michigan College
Resort Township
Straits Area Federal Credit Union
Tuscarora Township
Village of Mackinaw City
Awakon Federal Credit Union
Banks Township
Beaver Island Boat Company
Charlevoix State Bank
City of East Jordan
Link Industries
Village of Central Lake
Village of Elk Rapids
Village of Pellston



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