

# MICHIGAN COOL CITIES: HAVE THEY HELPED PROFESSIONAL WRITING?

Lindsey Brandvold  
Dave Crandall  
Katelyn Geiger

**November 2008**

## WHAT IS THE MICHIGAN COOL CITIES INITIATIVE?

The aim of Michigan's Cool Cities Initiative is "[to build] vibrant, energetic cities that attract jobs, people, and opportunity to our state." There are many participating cities, 101 in total. Four key cities that this report will be focusing on are Detroit, East Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo. The Cool Cities Initiative is made up of four stages, called The Michigan Approach: Listening, Planning, Acting, and Measuring. The Listening stage uses research, surveys, and focus groups to find out what individuals in a community want from their environment. The Planning stage works to find financial support to implement community desires found in the Listening stage. The Acting stage is the stage in which all plans are executed in the hopes of attracting diverse and creative people to take part in the community. The Measuring stage tracks

program progress, focusing on innovation, talent, diversity, and workforce. Each participating city chooses its own unique aspects to focus on.



**Figure 1: Cool Cities in Michigan**

## WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL WRITING?

Professional Writing is an art conducted through many media outlets; it is, essentially, capturing a particular audience's attention, holding it, and successfully communicating to them a particular purpose or persuasion. It is flexible and versatile. Professional writers are often overlooked, but their jobs are commonly the cornerstones of companies. Professional writers may be found detailing agricultural research at a university; editing a children's book for a publishing company; or reporting on the most recent presidential election. In addition to working in a variety of fields, professional writers are spread out

geographically based on the communities that best meet their needs.

## COOL CITIES AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING: AN OVERVIEW OF MICHIGAN

Professional writing is a multifaceted career, which offers a variety of positions. This career path is a part of the creative class, which is steadily growing in all parts of the country, including the state of Michigan. In 2004 Michigan's Governor Jennifer Granholm implemented The Cool Cities Initiative in response to the growing creative class's needs. The program aims to harness the skills of the creative class and improve the overall economy of the state. To better understand the Cool Cities Initiative and its effect on professional writers in Michigan, let's examine four major Michigan cities.



### **DETROIT**

As an active participant in the Cool Cities Initiative, Detroit is making strides to provide creative outlets for professional writers to express themselves and share with others. Detroit is working to enrich the area creatively through The Dudley Randall Center for Print Culture. Founded in October 2000, The Dudley Randall Center focuses on "the written word as a living art form,"<sup>1</sup> using it to enhance cultural relationships within the Detroit community.

"The philosophy of the Center is based on the elimination of the boundaries traditionally drawn in the field of publishing between electronic and print projects, and between academic, student, and community scholars and writers." In an effort to fully engage the Detroit community, The Dudley Randall Center embraces creative growth in professionals by providing internships for writing students, acting as a resource center for professional writers, and regularly hosting free writing workshops and events.



### **EAST LANSING**

The city of East Lansing is best known as the home to Michigan State University. Since there are over 45,000 students on campus, the Greater Lansing area is home to many young people ages 18 to 25. There are many organizations to be involved in and activities to participate in, but what about those of the post-college age?

The Grand River Connection is a program founded in 2005 and inspired by Governor Jennifer Granholm's Cool Cities Initiative. Grand River Connection member Matt Wiengarden says, "One of the problems of this area is that young professionals become very isolated. For the most part, we're working with people who are quite a bit older."<sup>2</sup> The main mission of the program is "seek[ing] to develop a stronger network to support Lansing and East Lansing's young and vital workforce. Our diverse, non-partisan group provides fun, social, and

professional connections that encourage economic growth and community involvement where we live, work, and play." Grand River Connection, located in downtown Lansing, is a great place to enjoy live music, grab something to eat or drink, and meet new people. They feature live jazz, karaoke, and DJs. Grand River Connection also hosts a variety of activities for members, such as bowling and golf outings, holiday parties, trips to art shows and symphony concerts, and much more. Grand River Connection makes it possible for young professionals of the creative class to meet other individuals with common interests and fascinations.



Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan, and is known for furniture and automobile manufacturing.

In an area just outside of Grand Rapids, a rural town named Fennville has attracted the creative class. Art galleries and cafes are springing up throughout the city, injecting the society with a youthful atmosphere that is openly accepted by the community. Many have credited the beginning of this revolution to a small restaurant named the Journeyman Cafe. Opening in 2003, this small coffee shop expanded to a full sit-down restaurant specializing in organic and locally grown artisan foods and prides itself on its low-volume, high quality services. Journeyman co-owner and executive chef

Matthew Millar says, "We have this kind of broken down old town here that hasn't had the greatest of reputations for a long time... we decided to take a chance on it and when we did, we started to see a little more clearly that there were a lot of people in the area who were doing a lot of cool things. We've got this weird little collection of misfits who have just been fantastic."<sup>4</sup>

Establishing themselves in a small community allowed Journeyman Cafe to grow in ways larger areas would not have allowed. It's success rubbed off on the community in a very positive way as well, changing the perspective of young creative workers in the eyes of their citizens. As Kristen Gebben put it, "I think a lot of young people who have a lot of really great ideas have decided to live here and are starting their own thing." Due to this success, the small town saw businesses like Peachbelt Studio and Gallery, the Gebben/Gray Gallery, and ThirdStone Gallery & Art Works establish themselves and find a way to thrive despite their location in a town previously not known for its creative culture. The town is truly evolving, and so are it's establishments. This could not have come about without the rising creative class and initiatives such as Cool Cities.



Staying true to the Cool Cities Initiative, Kalamazoo is working to harness the talents of its creative class through The Kalamazoo

Jaycees. "They are a collection of young people focused on professional development, personal growth and community service."<sup>5</sup> This diverse organization "runs a large number of fun activities and projects" focused on enhancing life in the Kalamazoo community for all residents. The Jaycees organize activities and events that aim to improve the personal and professional lives of its members: including holiday events from Easter Egg hunts to Christmas parties for Kalamazoo residents; and volunteer opportunities with Habitat for Humanity and Relay for Life.

The Kalamazoo Jaycees successfully changed the community's focus by actively listening to members and city residents, and providing the creative outlets desired.

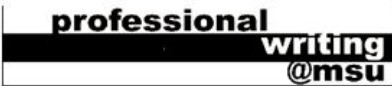
## HAVE THE COOL CITIES HELPED PROFESSIONAL WRITERS?

The Michigan Cool Cities Initiative helps professional writers in many aspects: the program raises awareness of the creative class's presence in Michigan; it encourages cities to harness the power of creative individuals in unique ways that best fit each community; and the program gives creative class members a voice in determining what direction the community moves in. Although the Cool Cities Initiative took a great step in advancing the creative class, it is up to individual cities to create programs

that continue this advancement, such as the ones covered in our report. Even though it is a young program, Cool Cities is doing a great deal to advance the creative class in Michigan. If promotions of the initiative such as the examples given in this report are used, the program will continue to grow and be successful in the future. By utilizing the Cool Cities Initiative, Michigan is taking a great step in reaching out to professional writers and better meeting their needs.

## REFERENCES


1. The Dudley Randall Center for Print Culture, <http://liberalarts.udmercy.edu/english/randall/>
2. The Grand River Connection, <http://www.grandriverconnection.com/>
3. The State News, "Making Connections," [http://www.statenews.com/index.php/article/2006/02/Making\\_connections](http://www.statenews.com/index.php/article/2006/02/Making_connections)
4. Rapid Growth, "Fennville: A haven for the Creative Class," <http://www.rapidgrowthmedia.com/features/fennville32.aspx>
5. Kalamazoo Jaycees, <http://www.kalamazoojaycees.org/>



**professional writing @msu**

This report is available for download and may be used according to the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 license.

<http://kairos.wide.msu.edu/~sue/townhall/town.html>



**11/11/2008**