

# PEOPLE POWER

*Resilience is the quality that will attract talent to Michigan*



I've been thinking a lot about resilience – what are the factors that contribute to resiliency and where does Michigan rank?

An experience that sparked my interest occurred several years ago when my husband Jim and I attended the Urban Land Institute's annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia. One of the sessions we attended was by the Grosvenor Group, a 340-year-old global property management company with \$36.7 billion in assets under management, headquartered in London, U.K.

They presented a report that ranked the overall resilience of the world's top 50 cities. Perhaps not entirely coincidental, the top three-ranked cities named were Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary.

But what surprised us was that our flagship city, Detroit, ranked 15th in the world, ahead of London (18) and was 8th in the U.S., between New York City and San Francisco.

This led us to think about the attributes that contribute to Detroit and Michigan's resiliency and the implications for our future.

As our planet warms and weather-related events like rising sea levels, violent storms, fires and droughts put communities and industries in peril, will northerly locations and natural resources be more resilient?

Could Michigan have strategic advantages in an era of climate change that put us in a sweet spot based on quality of life and economic opportunity?

According to Parag Khanna in his latest book, "Move: The Forces Uprooting Us," the answer is yes.

Khanna examines how climate change is already triggering global migration, particularly from areas most affected by extreme drought and rising sea levels to

areas that are more habitable (primarily in northern regions or higher elevations; i.e. where it's cooler!)

He asserts the regions that gain population as a result of climate migration will experience new job creation and economic growth.

Why are we a good candidate to attract climate migrants who can help fill our talent pipeline and drive economic growth?

It starts with geography. We are located in the northern midsection of North America, defined by two beautiful peninsulas and surrounded by 20% of the world's fresh water.

Visionaries like Traverse City environmental attorney Jim Olson have long advocated for protection of our fresh water, recognizing that it will become an ever-more precious resource as many regions literally dry up. Traverse City-based FLOW (For the Love of Water), led by Liz Kirkwood, champions protection and stewardship of the Great Lakes Basin waters as a common and highly valued resource.

We have the longest freshwater coast line in the U.S. (3,288 miles) and, though some fluctuation in the lakes' levels occur, significant sea level change is not expected to be a major risk. Being surrounded by the Great Lakes also helps to moderate our climate from extreme cold and heat.

We have abundant land-based natural resources, including forests covering 50% of our land, and agriculture, with the nation's second-most diverse crop base. As the planet warms, agricultural yields may increase, thanks to longer growing seasons, and further diversification of our crop base.

Michigan is a multi-modal international transportation and distribution hub, and is enhancing that advantage with investments such as modernization of the Soo Locks

and construction of the Gordie Howe International Bridge.

We are a maker state with advanced technology, testing and manufacturing capacity, particularly in the mobility innovation space. Two recently enacted programs – the Strategic Site Readiness Program and the Critical Industry Program – provide important economic tools aimed at increasing the number of advanced mobility manufacturing and supply chain sector jobs in Michigan.

Locally, Traverse Connect sponsors the Creative Coast, a talent attraction initiative that showcases our region as a place to live and pursue a career; incubator 20Fathoms helps healthcare and technology business start-ups.

Another important resource-based asset that contributes to our resiliency is a diverse, four-season portfolio of healthy lifestyle outdoor recreation options.

These resources and places, like Crystal Mountain, contribute not only to quality of life, but also to our economy, with a \$9.5 billion economic impact and support for more than 108,000 jobs.

But the relevance of our magnificent outdoor playground extends beyond economic impact. It has the power to help people reimagine Michigan from being a Rust Belt, old technology place to one with the cool factor, including access to year-round outdoor recreation.

Despite these attributes, including prestigious educational institutions offering knowledge-based degrees, Michigan's stats for attracting and retaining talent are not great.

During the last 10 years, the total U.S. population increased at a rate three times that of Michigan (7.4% nationally versus Michigan at 2%), which resulted in the loss of a Congressional seat.

Our population is aging: 30% of Michiganders are older than 55; we rank sixth in the nation in outbound migration of high school and college graduates.

If we consider resilience as a three-legged stool, two of our three legs – natural resources and geography – are strong. But our third leg – successfully competing for global talent – is weak.

Developing, attracting and retaining talent is a key to filling the high-wage, knowledge-based jobs that drive economic growth. According to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg "talent attracts capital far more effectively and consistently than capital attracts talent."

So are we in the sweet spot? Perhaps the answer is: We CAN be.

We have many of the basic ingredients: geography, resources and we are both innovators and makers.

But to thrive we need to reverse the talent drain. We need a laser-focused strategy for developing, attracting and retaining talent with knowledge-based skills that will support investment and drive job-creating innovations, including critical areas like clean energy deployment and mobility electrification.

We need to send a message that Michigan has the cool factor, is safe and welcoming, and has best-in-class social and physical infrastructure to support healthy lifestyles and healthy communities.

Michigan is poised to be in the sweet spot. But we have some work to do to seize this opportunity.

*Chris MacInnes is president of Crystal Mountain. In 1985, she and her husband Jim moved from California to join this business and together have led its evolution. She is also active in state, local and industry organizations.*

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