

2024 FALL EXTENSION CONFERENCE



LISTENING, LEARNING AND LEADING

CONFERENCE AGENDA

GRAND RAPIDS | OCTOBER 15-17, 2024

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

Extension

CONTENTS

Welcome to the 2024 Fall Extension Conference.	2
Fall Extension Conference Mobile App.	3
MSU Extension Celebration	3
2024 Service Project	4
Recharge Room.	4
Professional Headshots	5
Social Activities.	5
Tell Us What You Think	5
Conference Schedule	6
Preconference: Tuesday, October 15	6
Conference Day 1: Wednesday, October 16	7
Conference Day 2: Thursday, October 17.	10
DeVos Place Map	12
Amway Grand Hotel Map	14
Grand Rapids Map	16
Key Partner Awards	17
Epsilon Sigma Phi State Friend of Extension Award	23

ALLERGY ALERT

Several conference attendees have severe airborne allergies related to bananas, corn, eucalyptus, latex, menthol, mint, peanuts, and tree nuts. Please be mindful of these allergies by not bringing, using, or consuming any of these items during Fall Extension Conference. Thank you for being considerate of our colleagues and partners.

WELCOME TO THE 2024 FALL EXTENSION CONFERENCE

Dear Extension Professional,

Welcome to the 2024 Fall Extension Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan!

We are thrilled to have you join us for what promises to be an enriching week of learning, networking, and celebrating the great work that Extension is doing across Michigan. This year's theme—Listening, Learning, and Leading—reflects our commitment to fostering growth through shared values and experiences and collaborative dialogue.

The conference planning committee has worked diligently to create a dynamic program with your engagement and satisfaction in mind. The backdrop for our conference is beautiful Grand Rapids, which CNN placed at Number 8 in “American's Best Towns to Visit in 2024” earlier this year.* We encourage you to explore this vibrant downtown during your free time. The workshops on the move will offer you a glimpse into some Grand Rapids highlights, and we hope you take the opportunity to enjoy all the city has to offer.

I am excited about the possibilities that lie ahead for us as an organization and for you as an Extension professional. I look forward to connecting with you over the coming days. Let's make the most of this opportunity to collaborate, share, and grow together.

Sincerely,



Quentin R. Tyler, PhD
Director, MSU Extension
Senior Associate Dean of Outreach and Engagement
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

* America's Best Towns to Visit in 2024 (<https://www.cnn.com/travel/best-towns-america-2024-intro/index.html>). (2024, June 24). Marnie Hunter & Forrest Brown, CNN.

FALL EXTENSION CONFERENCE MOBILE APP

We will use Whova, an award-winning event and conference mobile app, to give you easy access to the information you'll need and help you connect with other attendees throughout the conference.

The app brings information about the conference directly to your fingertips—from program descriptions and speaker biographies to facility maps and discussion boards. Whova lets you create a personalized schedule and give immediate feedback on the breakout sessions and workshops on the move.

For the best conference experience:

1. Install the Whova mobile app (if you haven't already done so) on your internet-enabled Apple or Android smartphone or tablet.
2. Open Whova and find and download the Fall Extension Conference 2024 information by typing in the event invitation code: **8ikz24n3a6**.
3. Explore the app! You can check out information about the conference, connect with other attendees, set up a personalized schedule, and more.

If for some reason you can't or don't want to install the Whova app on your device, you can also view the web app at https://whova.com/portal/webapp/falle1_202410/sign_in or visit the Fall Extension Conference website at <https://www.canr.msu.edu/fec/index>.

MSU EXTENSION CELEBRATION

Help celebrate our partnerships and accomplishments of the past year by attending the 2024 MSU Extension Celebration. The event will be held in Ballroom B at DeVos Place beginning at 4 p.m. with the presentation of the 2024 MSU Extension Key Partner Award winners and the 2024 Epsilon Sigma Phi State Friend of Extension Award.

The award presentations will be followed by a networking reception and intern poster presentations. Take this opportunity to connect with one another and learn more about this year's interns.

Dress for the evening activities is business casual.

2024 SERVICE PROJECT

You can participate in the 2024 service project by donating your time, talent, or goods to two local agencies: Kids' Food Basket and Arbor Circle.

Healthy food is a right, not a privilege. Kids' Food Basket is committed to ensuring that everyone in the community enjoys that right—not just today, but for generations to come. The program started in 2002 providing meals to 125 students at three schools in Kent County. Today, the organization serves thousands of children and families every day in Allegan, Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa counties.

You can contribute to the service project with your:

- » **Time**—Participate in the Nourishing Futures: A Volunteer Day With Kids Food Basket workshop on the move. The workshop will include an afternoon of hands-on service prepping food and meals for the organization's sack suppers.
- » **Talent**—Decorate the paper bags that will carry Kids' Food Basket sack suppers. Bags and decorating materials will be available on the tables during the Welcome and Director's Update and in the Recharge Room throughout the conference. So be sure to grab a bag or two and draw your favorite shapes, animals, and pets, write an inspirational message, or simply doodle. Our goal is to donate 1,855 bags we have decorated during FEC.
- » **Goods**—Donate handwarmers or purchased or handmade hats, scarves, gloves, and mittens for adults and children. Bring your items to donate to the Service Project table in the Ballroom BCD Pre-Function area any time from the start of the conference through lunch on Thursday, October 17. The donated items will be distributed throughout the Greater Grand Rapids Community by Arbor Circle, a West Michigan organization that offers counseling, substance use treatment, and family services.

Learn about the Kids' Food Basket at <https://kidsfoodbasket.org> and about Arbor Circle at <https://arborcircle.org>.

RECHARGE ROOM

Although conferences and other gatherings can be exciting and inspirational, they can also be overwhelming and draining. If you need a moment to recharge your batteries or to just enjoy some quiet time, visit the Recharge Room in the DeVos Place Business Center. There you will find fidget toys, coloring pages, puzzles, other mindfulness activities, and paper bags and decorating supplies for the Kids' Food Basket bag decorating project. You're also welcome to sit quietly to meditate, reflect, or just be.

This quiet space is open at all times from the start to the end of the conference. Taking moments of reflection, no matter how you view your conference time, is refreshing and allows your body and brain to recharge.

PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOTS

Need to have a professional headshot taken? Perhaps it's been a while since your last one was taken or you just don't like how your current headshot turned out. Now is your chance to have an updated professional photo taken. The photographer will be available on Wednesday, October 16.

Please sign-up at the FEC registration table.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Join your colleagues for some informal social time on Wednesday evening in the Gallery Overlook B-E rooms in DeVos Place. Love games? Bring your favorite board or card game. Love to color? Bring a coloring book and colored pencils or markers and chat with colleagues while you unwind. Just want to hang out? Drop in and enjoy the company of your colleagues during this unstructured time. Decks of playing cards will be provided.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

We truly value your input, so please complete the evaluation survey you will receive after the conference. Additionally, you can share feedback on each breakout session or workshop on the move via the FEC24 mobile app. Your insights are crucial as we strive to make each conference better than the last. We review and use your Fall Extension Conference evaluation in building the next conference.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

PRECONFERENCE: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
8:30–11:30 a.m.	THRIVE Model Training	Gallery Overlook F
8:30 a.m.–Noon	Team Nutrition: Local School Wellness Policy Training	Gallery Overlook E
8:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	MSU Extension Leadership Team Meeting	Gallery Overlook C
10–11:30 a.m.	MEAFCS Meeting	Gallery Overlook G
10:30–11:30 a.m.	CNRDA Meeting	Gallery Overlook D
Various	Workshops on the Move	All Workshop on the Move participants will meet in the Grand Gallery of DeVos Place. From there, groups will either board buses or start their tours on foot.
11:30 a.m.–5 p.m.	Turkey Tales & Dairy Delights: Value-Added Agriculture	
12:30–5 p.m.	Brewed Awakenings: A Taste of Grand Rapids' Craft Beer & Cider Scene	
12:45–4 p.m.	Innovations in Human Health: A Journey Through the Grand Rapids Medical Mile	
1–4 p.m.	Waste Wonders: A Deep Dive Into Recycling & Waste Management	
1–5 p.m.	The Ins & Outs of Organic Certification at Green Wagon Farm	
1–5 p.m.	Nourishing Futures: A Volunteer Day With Kids' Food Basket	
1–5 p.m.	Sculpted Serenity: Exploring Art & Nature at Meijer Gardens	
6:30–8:30 p.m.	MAEA Meeting & Dinner	Ballroom C

CONFERENCE DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
7 a.m.	General Breakfast	Ballroom B
7:15 a.m.	ESP Meeting & Breakfast	Ballroom C
8:30–10 a.m.	Welcome, Director's Update & Awards Presentation <i>Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Impact Award; Emerging Issues Rapid Response Team Award; Gordon Guyer Collaborative Programming Award; Innovative Technology Award; Institute Team Award; MCEA John Hannah Award for Program Excellence; Meritorious Service Award; MSU Extension Director's Award of Distinction; MSU Distinguished Academic Staff Award; Shared Values Award; Promotion; & Milestone Years of Service</i>	Ballroom B
10–10:30 a.m.	Transition Time	NA
10:30–11:30 a.m.	Breakout Session #1 » The Amazing Race to Team Building & Education » The Art of Networking & Building Strategic Partnerships » Calling In, Calling On, Calling Out » Communicating Across Generations » Exploring Edible Forest Programming » Evaluation 101 » Laughter Is the Best Medicine » Learn the Art & Science of Social Media Video: Engage, Educate, & Inspire » Learning Spanish 101 » Non-Escalation Tips for Customer Service & Community Engagement » Off the Shelf Learning About the <i>MSU Extension Program Planning & Management Guide</i> to Improve Your 4-H Program	<i>See individual breakout sessions that follow.</i> » Gallery Overlook A » River Overlook E » Gallery Overlook B » River Overlook B » River Overlook A » River Overlook F » River Overlook D » Gallery Overlook H » Gallery Overlook C » Gallery Overlook D » Gallery Overlook E

CONFERENCE DAY 1 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reviving Your Lesson Plans: Bringing Nutrition to Life! » Set It & Forget It! Using Automated Email Courses in Your Work » Unleashing the Power of AI: A Practical Introduction for MSU Extension Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gallery Overlook F » Gallery Overlook G » River Overlook C
11:30–Noon	Transition Time	NA
Noon–2 p.m.	Lunch & Keynote Presentation Help! I'm Human & a High Performer: Inspiration + Strategy for Modern-Day Difference Makers <i>Shannon Cohen</i>	Ballroom B
2–2:30 p.m.	Transition Time	NA
2:30–3:30 p.m.	Breakout Session #2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Applying Health Equity in Extension: Cross-Institute Examples From Our Peers » The Art of Writing Survey Questions » Build What You Dream: A Musical Reflection Starring You! » Building Inclusive Learning Environments: Embracing Identity, Reciprocity, & Universal Design for Learning » Climate Adaptation » Communicating Through Conflict » Ed Tech Tools 4 U: Facilitation, Collaboration, Engagement » Influence Without Authority » Land Acknowledgement Conversation Through an Indigenous Lens » Let's Get Physical! How to Include Physical Activities in Your Programs 	<i>See individual breakout sessions that follow.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gallery Overlook A » River Overlook F » Gallery Overlook B » Gallery Overlook G » River Overlook B » Gallery Overlook E » River Overlook C » Gallery Overlook H » River Overlook E » Gallery Overlook F

CONFERENCE DAY 1 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Living Off the Land: Extension Programming Across Institutes That Supports Homesteading Practices in Michigan » New Resources, New Tools » Partnership Playbook: Strategies for Effective Collaboration » Telling Your Public Value Story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » River Overlook A » River Overlook D » Gallery Overlook C » Gallery Overlook D
3:30–4 p.m.	Transition Time	NA
4–5:30 p.m.	MSU Extension Celebration <i>Key Partner Award, ESP State Friend of Extension Award, Networking Reception, & Intern Poster Presentations</i>	Ballroom B
5:30–7:30 p.m. <i>(right after the MSU Extension Celebration)</i>	Recruit, Refresh, & Revitalize: Join the Facilitative Leadership Team—Enjoy Fun, Food, & Opportunities for Growth! (Optional)	Gallery Overlook A
5:30–9 p.m. <i>(right after the MSU Extension Celebration)</i>	Social Activities (Optional)	Gallery Overlook B-E

CONFERENCE DAY 2: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17

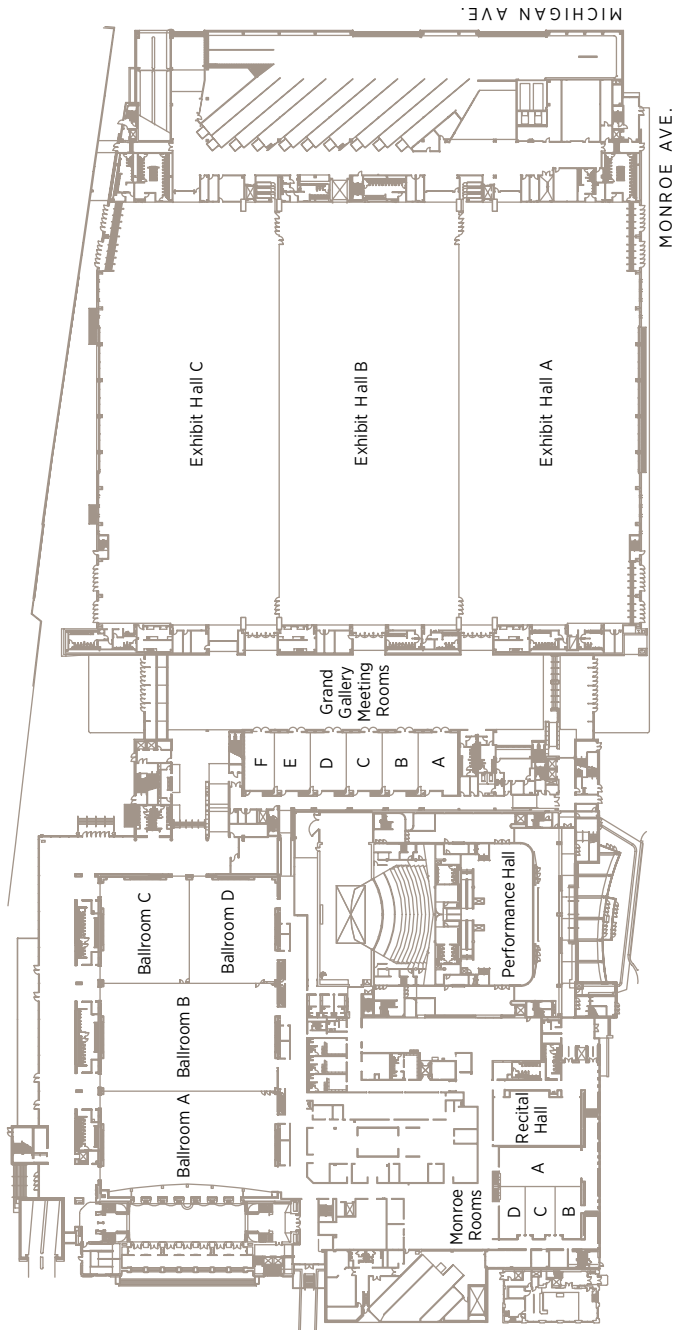
TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
7–8:45 a.m.	General Breakfast	Ballroom B
7:30–8:30 a.m.	Shared Values Award Winners Breakfast	Gallery Overlook F
7:30–8:45 a.m.	MAE4-HYS Meeting & Breakfast	Gallery Overlook CD
9 a.m.–Noon	<p>Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Agriculture & Agribusiness Institute » Children & Youth Institute » Community, Food, & Environment Institute » District & County Support Staff » Health & Nutrition Institute » Tribal Colleagues 	<p><i>See individual meetings that follow.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gallery Overlook AB » Ballroom C » Ballroom D » Gallery Overlook H » Ballroom B » Gallery Overlook G
Noon–1:30 p.m.	<p>Lunch <i>Apple Crunch</i></p>	Ballroom B
1:30–2 p.m.	Transition Time	NA
2–3 p.m.	<p>Breakout Session #3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Create Inclusive & Affirming Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Youth » Empowering Volunteers: Effective Training & Support Strategies (Part 1) » Fostering Cross-Institute Collaboration Concerning Water Quality in Michigan » Literacy Ally Training (Part 1) » Michigan Natural Features Inventory: Which Natural Feature Is Best? » MSU Retirement Benefits » Navigating the Election With Mindfulness » The Power of Facilitation: An Innovative New Program From LeadNet & the Facilitative Leadership Team 	<p><i>See individual breakout sessions that follow.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gallery Overlook G » Gallery Overlook F » River Overlook B » Gallery Overlook B » River Overlook A » Gallery Overlook CD » River Overlook E » River Overlook D

CONFERENCE DAY 2 (CONTINUED)

TIME	SESSION OR EVENT	LOCATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reconnection With Extension: The Role Extension Plays in Addressing the Loneliness Crisis (Part 1) » Removing the Noise & Telling a Story With Data Visualization » Together We Can: Co-Parenting (Part 1) » Using Innovative Programming to Reach a Diverse Audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gallery Overlook A » River Overlook F » Gallery Overlook E » River Overlook C
3–3:15 p.m.	Transition Time	NA
3:15–4:15 p.m.	<p>Breakout Session #4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Becoming a Good Gatekeeper of Your Own Nervous System » Community Collaborators » Demystifying Grants: An Overview of the Essential Steps & Strategies » Empowering Volunteers: Effective Training & Support Strategies (Part 2) » Engaging the Hesitant Learner » Ethical Storytelling: Tips for Sharing Success » Literacy Ally Training (Part 2) » MSU Benefits Overview » MSU Libraries Digital Resources— Accessible to YOU » Reconnection With Extension: The Role Extension Plays in Addressing the Loneliness Crisis (Part 2) » Rediscovering the Power of the Icebreaker » Together We Can: Co-Parenting (Part 2) » Welcome Refugees & Immigrants to Michigan 	<p><i>See individual breakout sessions that follow.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » River Overlook E » Gallery Overlook G » Gallery Overlook H » Gallery Overlook F » River Overlook B » River Overlook F » Gallery Overlook B » Gallery Overlook CD » River Overlook A » Gallery Overlook A » River Overlook D » Gallery Overlook E » River Overlook C
4:15 p.m.	Conference Concludes Safe travels to everyone!	On the road again . . .

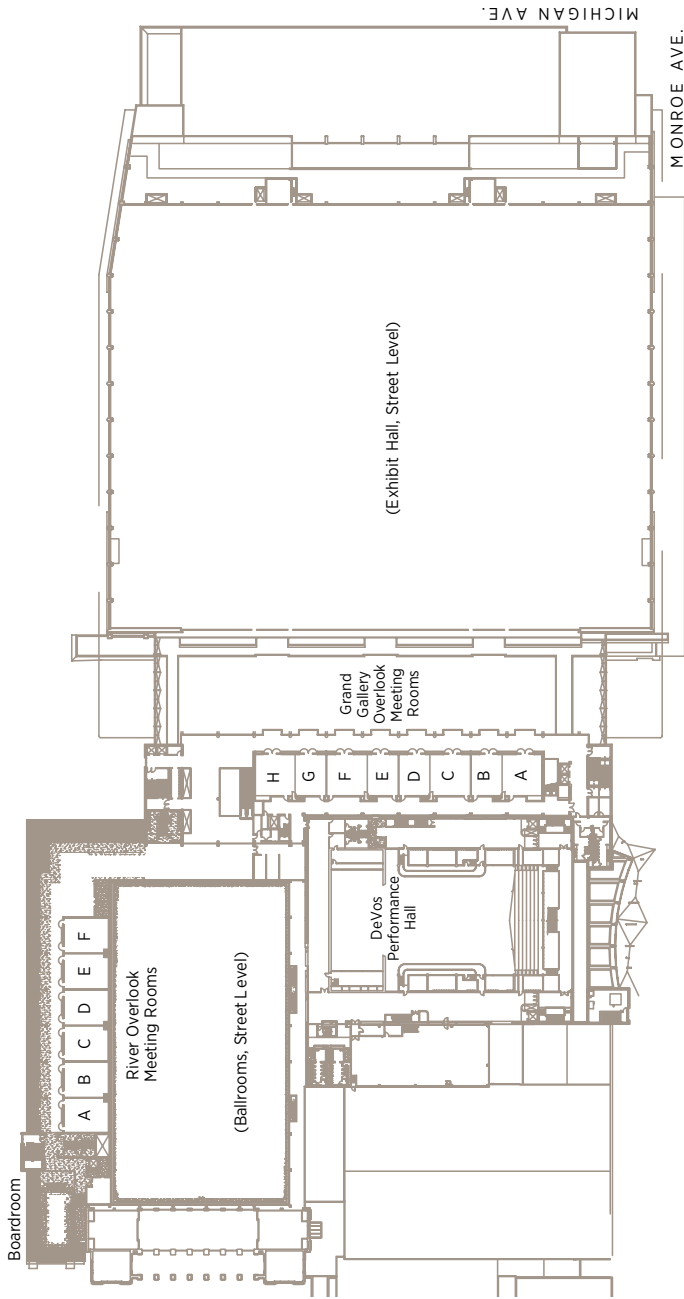
DEVOS PLACE: STREET LEVEL

MAIN LEVEL



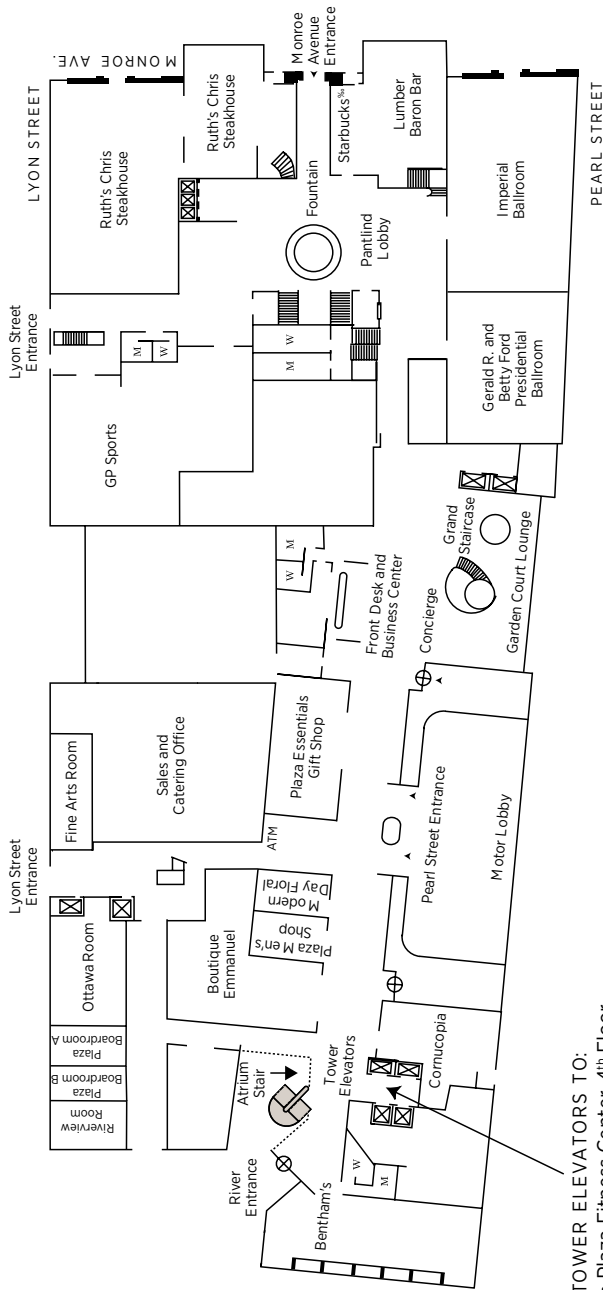
DEVOS PLACE: OVERLOOK LEVEL

OVERLOOK MEETING ROOM



AMWAY GRAND HOTEL: LOBBY LEVEL

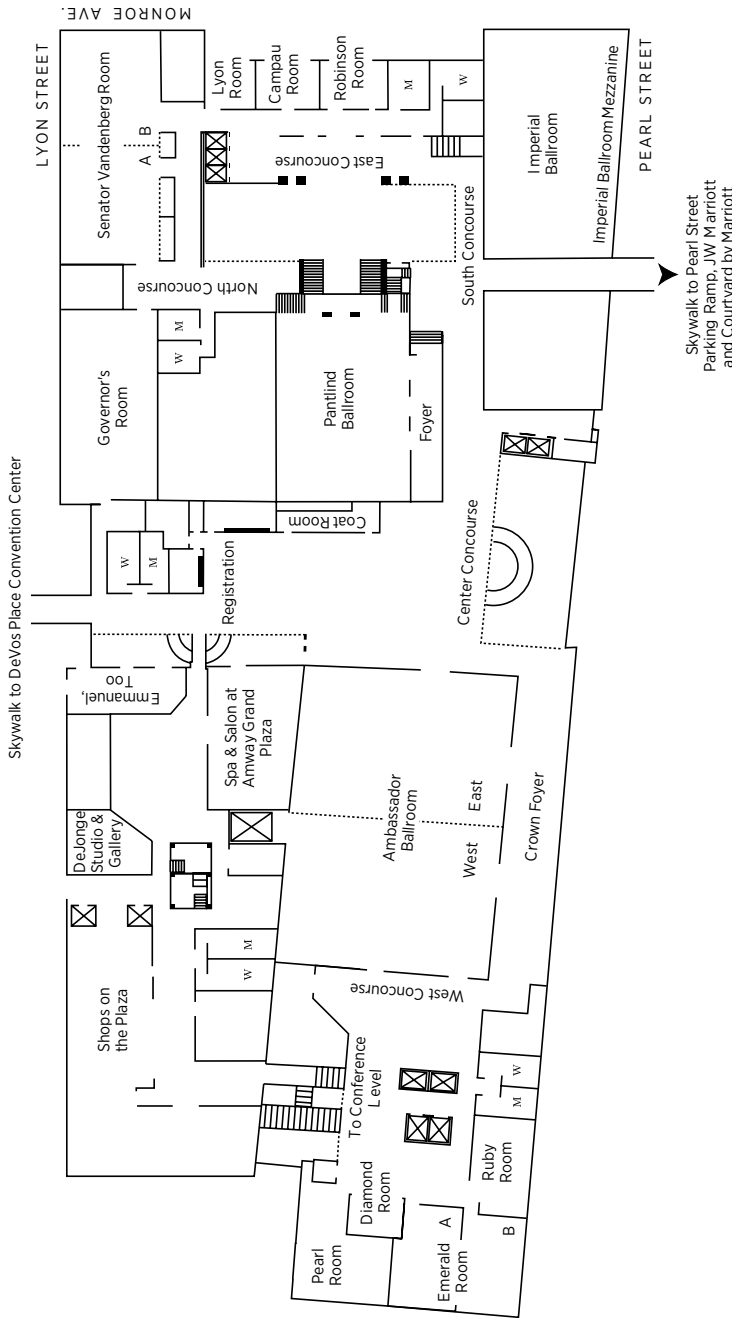
LOBBY LEVEL — 1ST FLOOR



- TOWER ELEVATORS TO:**
- Plaza Fitness Center, 4th Floor
 - Tower Club, 25th Floor
 - Cygnus 27, 27th Floor
 - Sky I & II, Private Dining Rooms, 28th Floor
 - Pinnacle Room, Take to 28th Floor

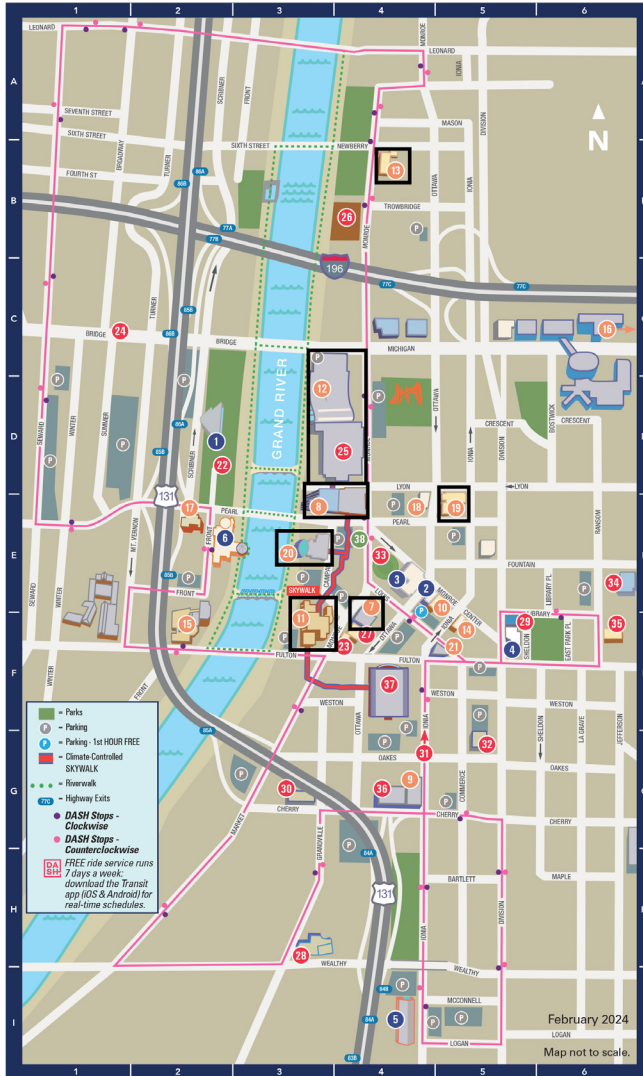
AMWAY GRAND HOTEL: CONCOURSE LEVEL

CONCOURSE LEVEL—2ND FLOOR



DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS

DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS



Attractions

- 1 Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum D2
- 2 Grand Rapids African American Museum & Archives E4
- 3 Grand Rapids Art Museum E4
- 4 Grand Rapids Children's Museum F5
- 5 Grand Rapids Downtown Market I4
- 6 Grand Rapids Public Museum E2

Hotels/Meeting Spaces

- 7 AC Hotel by Marriott E4
- 8 Amway Grand Plaza, Curio Collection by Hilton E3
- 9 Canopy by Hilton G4
- 10 CityFlatsHotel E5
- 11 Courtyard by Marriott F3
- 12 DeVos Place Convention Center D3
- 13 Embassy Suites B4
- 14 The Emley Hotel F5
- 15 GVSU Eberhard Center F2
- 16 Hampton Inn & Suites C6
- 17 Holiday Inn Downtown E2
- 18 Homewood Suites by Hilton E4
- 19 Hyatt Place E5
- 20 JW Marriott Grand Rapids E3
- 21 Residence Inn by Marriott F5

Entertainment

- 22 Al-Nab-Aven Park D2
- 23 The D.O.B. F4
- 24 Bridge Street Nightlife C1
- 25 DeVos Performance Hall D4
- 26 Downtown Skate Park B4
- 27 GLC Live at 20 Monroe F4
- 28 Grand Rapids Ballet H3
- 29 Grand Rapids Civic Theatre F5
- 30 The Intersection G3
- 31 Isola Ave Nightlife F4
- 32 Pyramid Scheme G5
- 33 Rosa Parks Circle E4
- 34 Spectrum Theater E6
- 35 St. Cecilia Music Center F6
- 36 Studio Park G4
- 37 Van Andel Arena F4

Information

- 38 Experience Grand Rapids E4



February 2024

Map not to scale.

KEY PARTNER AWARDS

The MSU Extension Key Partner award recognizes those who have made significant contributions to creating, improving, supporting, or promoting MSU Extension programs. This award is open to individuals, organizations, businesses, media, special MSU programs, and government officials.

APPLE COMMUNITY EDUCATION INITIATIVE TRACEY WARD

Apple's Community Education Initiative has partnered with MSU Extension on the 4-H Clovers CODE (Creating Opportunity Designed for Everyone) program, which provides resources, tools, and opportunities to enhance the digital literacy and coding skills of people of all ages and backgrounds.

The 4-H program helps young people learn to create app content—from graphics to video to design—and teach robots to follow commands. The Apple initiative has provided teaching and learning materials, iPads and MacBooks, scholarships, and training. The initiative emphasizes inclusion, aiming to narrow the digital divide and prepare young people for success in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Young people in the program use the Apple technology and curriculum to develop technical, creative, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. They gain confidence and problem-solving skills and learn to express themselves and prepare for the future.

In addition to hardware and educational resources, Apple generously provided financial support and access to an amazing team of Apple experts who work side by side with MSU Extension's 4-H professionals and volunteers to enhance student learning with technology. The program began in the Southeast Michigan counties of Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne in 2021. In year two, it expanded north into the Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan with the goal of reaching underserved rural communities and young people from tribal families.

Apple's generous partnership with MSU Extension has demonstrated their unwavering dedication to supporting youth in their educational experiences and empowering the next generation of creators and leaders in their vocational pursuits.

REP. JULIE BRIXIE, MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Rep. Julie Brixie serves the 73rd Michigan House District, which includes the campus of Michigan State University. As chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture and Rural Development and Natural Resources, Julie has championed funding for MSU Extension's and MSU AgBioResearch's Agricultural Climate Resiliency Program.

The program is a partnership of MSU, the Michigan Plant Coalition, and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and is administered by AgBioResearch and Extension. It aims to benefit Michigan plant agriculture in addressing the long-term challenges of climate change and water quality related to pests and pathogens and developing early warning systems for weather events.

In 2024, the initiative received \$1 million in recurring state funding and a one-time investment of \$5 for a competitive grant program. The recurring funding supported the hiring of six faculty researchers, each with 40% Extension appointments, and two Extension educators.

An MSU alum, Julie earned a master's degree in crop and soil sciences with a specialization in environmental toxicology. She served on Meridian Township's Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Commission in 1998 and 1999, then was elected to the Township Board, serving two terms as a trustee and three terms as township treasurer. Julie is committed to improving Michigan communities by fighting for policies that protect the environment, ensure equitable access to education opportunities, and fix Michigan's crumbling roads and infrastructure.

Julie's unwavering support for MSU, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, MSU Extension, and MSU AgBioResearch make her a key partner in our success.

MICHIGAN PORK PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

The Michigan Pork Producers Association (MPPA) has partnered with Michigan State University Extension for decades. The organizations work together to identify significant and emerging issues and develop and deliver educational events for Michigan pork farmers.

For more than 30 years, MPPA has provided space in the Michigan Pork Magazine for MSU Extension educational articles and for the Pork Quarterly, a quarterly insert developed and produced by MSU Extension faculty and educators.

MPPA and MSU Extension collaborate on disease identification and management, preparedness for outbreaks of foreign animal diseases, precision livestock farming, and support of beginning and small farms. They work together to create awareness, build resources, and develop educational opportunities that support the state's pork industry.

If not properly contained, a disease outbreak could decimate the pork industry, forcing many family farms into bankruptcy. This is tough and sensitive work and MPPA has been a critical thought partner and catalyst to keep the preparedness effort moving forward.

MPPA has been a champion for the Emergency Response to Accidents Involving Livestock program since it was created. MPPA was the first and primary ERAIL supporter, securing funding from the National Pork Board at a critical stage of ERAIL's development and helping frame the program's goals and direction. MPPA has been a great advocate for ERAIL and an important ally in discussing the program across the animal agriculture industry.

The Michigan Pork Producers Association is a key partner to MSU Extension in every possible way and greatly deserving of this award.

ST. CLAIR COUNTY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

Since 1937, the 18-member St. Clair County Agricultural Society has led the St. Clair County 4-H and Youth Fair—and been a valued partner of Michigan State University Extension. The positive and supportive working relationship between these two organizations has been described as a model for other counties.

The fair board has worked with all MSU Extension programming areas to help people learn about agriculture and build healthier families, communities, and children empowered for success. In 2022, they worked with MSU Extension's First Impressions Tourism Team to adapt the existing FIT framework to work with a fair, then piloted the Michigan Fairs and Festivals FIT assessment and analysis. They now draw on the extensive data and analysis in the FIT report to guide fair improvements.

Fair attendance reached 145,000 in 2023, making it the largest public event in the county.

Examples of joint educational opportunities and activities held during and outside of the fair include the Spartan Spectacular tent showcasing all facets of MSU Extension programming, the 4-H Kids Zone, a 4-H branded trailer and 30-second promotional video to help with 4-H recruitment efforts, a lactation space for breastfeeding fairgoers, the weeklong Eat Your Ag—from Dirt to Dinner event, and 4-H spin clubs reaching more than 500 students in six elementary schools.

The St. Clair County Agricultural Society is a critical partner in the work of MSU Extension and is well deserving of this honor.

BOB SUTHERLAND, CHERRY REPUBLIC

Bob Sutherland is the founder and president of Cherry Republic, a Michigan business based in Glen Arbor that sells more than 250 cherry-based products in stores and online. Bob has a deep commitment to delighting consumers with products featuring Michigan tart cherries; to supporting environmental conservation, community, and farmer well-being; and to supporting Michigan State University Extension.

Bob's civic engagement includes leadership roles in organizations like the Michigan Land Use Institute and the Michigan League of Conservation Voters. He has played a pivotal role in supporting the ongoing work at the Northwest Michigan Horticulture Research Center. Bob's most significant contribution to MSU Extension is his unwavering support for mental health initiatives in Michigan's agricultural community. By funding counseling services, hosting morale-boosting events during tough seasons, and establishing the Love Thy Farmer campaign, Bob has made a tangible difference in addressing farm stress and promoting mental health awareness in the agricultural community.

What truly sets Bob apart is his genuine concern for the well-being of farmers and farm families. His support for the MSU Extension Farm Stress Project underscores his compassion and understanding of the challenges they face. Cherry Republic's generous donation—through its Love Thy Farmer program—of 2% of all proceeds in February 2024 to the Farm Stress Project exemplifies Bob's commitment to behavioral health awareness within the agricultural community.

Bob Sutherland's dedication, generosity, and unwavering support for mental health awareness and the agricultural community have left an enduring mark, making him a deserving recipient of this accolade.

THUMB FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Since it began as a Michigan State University Extension demonstration project in 2018, the Thumb Food Policy Council has worked in the five-county Thumb region of Michigan to provide food-related education, access, and policies. The council's priorities are getting food to people by helping overcome transportation barriers; helping food pantries build on their assets, ensuring greater access to affordable, safe, and diverse food; developing awareness and knowledge of agriculture; and building food literacy in the community.

The council, MSU Extension professionals, and 4-H'ers convened stakeholders at two food summits in 2019. In 2020, the council and MSU Extension organized the gleaning of blue Hubbard squash that otherwise would have been left in the field. The council distributed the squash and MSU Extension fact sheets and recipes to several local food pantries.

In 2023, the council, with help from MSU Extension, applied for and was awarded a \$1.6 million grant to set up a food hub and distribution system called "The Last Food Mile" in the heart of the Thumb. The hub is based out of an Amish farm cooperative that grows, stores, and packages produce in 3-lb bags. In summer 2023, an average of 1,500 produce bags a week were distributed to low-income seniors and families around the Thumb.

The council has been a valuable partner of MSU Extension in enhancing food security in Michigan's Thumb.

EPSILON SIGMA PHI STATE FRIEND OF EXTENSION AWARD

The Epsilon Sigma Phi State Friend of Extension Award recognizes individuals who have been true friends of MSU Extension. These friends may have helped promote programs, represented MSU Extension as lay leaders, served as key program developers or collaborators, or supported MSU Extension in other ways. This award is open to individuals from nonprofit organizations, businesses, government agencies, media outlets, MSU units, and elsewhere.

MELISSA FITZGERALD

Melissa FitzGerald is the director of the Otsego County Animal Control and Shelter. She has supported MSU Extension's Emergency Response to Accidents Involving Livestock, or ERAIL, team since 2019, when she attended her first ERAIL training.

After completing the course, Melissa worked with the ERAIL team to outfit an ERAIL response trailer for Otsego County. Today her office has mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties to expand access to this needed and valuable resource.

Melissa shares the value of the ERAIL program with stakeholders and funding organizations, explaining how the program has helped her as a first responder. She also brings the Otsego County ERAIL trailer to training events so other first responders can discover the benefits of having a stocked response trailer onsite in an emergency involving livestock.

First responders and animal control officers are new audiences for MSU Extension. As secretary of the Michigan Association of Animal Control Officers (MAACO), Melissa has been a critical connection for the ERAIL team with this community. She has collaborated with the team in offering hands-on and classroom ERAIL training at MAACO's annual conferences, and has organized and hosted ERAIL training open to all first responders in northern Michigan.

As a strong advocate for the ERAIL team's work to improve the safety of animals transported on Michigan roads and of first responders and the traveling public, Melissa FitzGerald is a true friend of MSU Extension.



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