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MAY 21-23, 2019
TRAVERSE CITY, MI



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SPRING 2019 NEWSLETTER
ENVIRONMENT ECONOMY COMMUNITY

INCUBATION STATION



When I was a kid I grew up just a few blocks from the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago—and every year we’d go there on a school field trip. Rather than explore the museum like the teachers wanted me to, I just stood there at the incubator watching those persistent chicks pecking their way out of the eggs. Those fancy exhibits didn’t interest me. But the drama of those chicks ... I just couldn’t get enough.

At Groundwork, we’ve put a considerable amount of time and energy into the notion of incubation since we launched this organization almost 25 years ago. Incubating ideas. Incubating new initiatives. Partnering with committed people, setting goals, and building the wherewithal to achieve them. It’s a core component of what Groundwork is all about.

Taste the Local Difference has been our best example. For 14 years, we nurtured TLD to help farmers and food entrepreneurs market their goods. Today it is a powerhouse local food marketing company working across the state. Late last year, we made the big move of launching TLD to become a fully independent company. The excitement of this transition was a testament to many hands who built TLD over the years, to Tricia Phelps’s savvy leadership, and to the willingness of Casey Cowell and his partners at Boomerang Catapult to step in and support TLD’s expansion. It was a great moment of celebration. Our TLD chick has hatched!

Hans Voss Groundwork
Executive Director

TLD TAKES FLIGHT

Back in the early aughts when Taste the Local Difference was born, the idea of a business that would serve as a marketing agency for farmers and local food producers was a remarkably prescient thing. Back then, there was barely a local food movement at all, let alone people who understood that local food participants would need a marketing agency if they stood any chance of succeeding against Big Food or in changing America’s food culture.

In the years since, the strength of that original concept has withstood the test of time and market pressure, and meanwhile the local food movement has surged not only in northwest Michigan (thanks in no small part to TLD), but also across the state and nation.

Those two conditions—the proof of TLD concept and the great growth in market potential—led the Groundwork board and leadership team to find an investor to purchase TLD and fund it for expansion as a for-profit venture.

“Groundwork is great at starting things and moving them forward,” says Casey Cowell, Founder of Boomerang Catapult, which purchased TLD. “It’s very effective at that, and they started up TLD, but now the concept is proven, and the next step is determining how to scale.” Helping companies rapidly expand is precisely Boomerang’s expertise. TLD CEO Tricia Phelps has stayed on to grow the company.

Read more about the sale of Taste the Local Difference at GroundworkCenter.org/TLDflight



Tricia Phelps,
TLD CEO





CHAIRMAN ROGER NEWTON BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Roger Newton signed on as a new board chair October 1, 2018, after having had a connection with Groundwork since the early 2000s. That connection began at a meeting with Groundwork Executive Director Hans Voss and then-Chair Reg Bird. “The enthusiasm they had for their work was contagious,” Newton says.

Newton is a biotech entrepreneur, and is “always wanting to be involved in something that’s bringing about incremental or exponential change,” he says. He saw that same desire among the people he met at Groundwork, and it drew him in.

“For me, my career is about working with people who are passionate about what they do and who want to make a difference. And it’s about finding people I resonate with. You can create a tapestry of people and backgrounds to create a knowledge base and an experience base to really accomplish something.”

Newton has been involved in starting up many projects as a biotech investor; notably, he was a lead developer of Lipitor. And in Groundwork he recognized kindred spirits in the startup, incubator culture. “I absolutely saw that spirit. It’s the joy that comes from success. It’s also the joy of the voyage, the joy of the journey we are on.” In Groundwork’s diverse program mix, Newton perceived an unwillingness to be confined by narrow definitions of nonprofit mission, a willingness to think big and, more important, to act and carry out meaningful missions.

Read an interview with Roger Newton, at groundworkcenter.org/rogernewton.

PROGRAM UPDATES

FOOD & FARMING

CREATING HEALTHY FOOD CONNECTIONS IN PANTRIES & SCHOOLS

In school, if a child learns about the benefits of healthy, high-quality local food, but then goes home to a family that is unable to afford that food, or whose food pantry does not stock that kind of food ... what then? A local food life is not a realistic outcome for that child.

Groundwork’s Food & Farming Program Director Meghan McDermott had that realization one day while teaching local food education in an elementary school class. It became evident that one of the students shopped at a food pantry, but she knew that that local food was scarce at food pantries. McDermott made it her mission to increase the availability of local food in pantries and to connect the education her team was doing in schools with local food education for adult customers at food pantries.

McDermott is a devotee of systems change analysis, and she saw that a few tweaks of the system could improve the health quality of meals for this population. Since then, McDermott, her Groundwork team, and partners have worked to bring local food to pantries. They discuss health benefits with food pantry customers and create information with similar messages for both schools and food pantries. The coordinated messaging amplifies the impact, increasing the likelihood that a family will choose something healthy and fresh. That is starting cultural change!

CLEAN ENERGY

SOLARISE

In our autumn edition we shared news that Groundwork was about to launch a crowdfunding platform, SolaRISE, to help schools, churches and nonprofits raise money to invest in solar arrays and other renewable infrastructure. Well, we are pleased to announce that the Glen Lakes Schools’ Envirothon team signed on to be the first client to try SolaRISE, and even better, Glen Lake reached its fundraising goal within its desired deadline despite a very imperfect schedule!

Glen Lake announced it’s SolaRISE campaign just two days before the school emptied for a two-week Christmas vacation, and when the kids and staff returned they had just one week till the deadline they’d chosen! Glen Lake’s success reveals not only that SolaRISE can be an effective part of renewables fundraising, but also that communities see the bright future of clean energy and want their students to be prepared for the rapidly expanding job market it represents. Glen Lake’s solar array will be an essential and inspiring piece of the science curriculum.

Word travels fast. Schools from near the Mackinac Straits to Ann Arbor have since inquired about how SolaRISE can help them meet their goals. The SolaRISE team offers technical and communications support. As we went to press: Ann Arbor’s K–8 school STEAM at Northside confirmed as a SolaRISE client! Stay tuned!
Contact Ric Evans, ric@groundworkcenter.org.

CITIES & TOWNS

THE T.C. MOBILITY LAB

Groundwork is in the launch phase of an initiative named T.C. Mobility Lab, which is changing how we think about getting around in northern Michigan. Its goal is to modernize Traverse City’s transportation system in a way that maintains our quality of life and builds a healthier and more livable community.

The T.C. Mobility Lab has traffic reduction as its goal. We will work with community partners, like employers, local governments and individuals, to evaluate and incubate new transportation strategies for Traverse City.

Early technologies and services we are assessing include: carpool software, modeled after services like Uber, that enable carpoolers to arrange rides on demand—no daily schedule needed; van commuter shuttles that would bring people in from outlying towns to work at a large employer; and a bike share service that would enable people to grab bikes available all over town.

These are best practices found in select towns across the country that could be adapted and implemented in coordination with our partners. As we develop new ideas, let us know what you think!



SAVE THE DATE!

Michigan Clean Energy
Conference
Traverse City, MI
MICleanEnergyConference.org
MAY 21–23, 2019

Farms, Food & Health
Conference
Traverse City, MI
FarmsFoodHealth.org
SEPTEMBER 26–29, 2019

Groundwork’s Harvest
at the Commons
Traverse City, MI
OCTOBER 12, 2019

SPRING MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

Like the spring chicks Hans mentioned in his letter, we, too, are launching exciting initiatives this spring. Our Farm, Food & Health conferences and related programs are gaining great momentum as we elevate the importance of local food in our communities. Meanwhile the 10 Cents a Meal program, which we started here, has achieved national renown and is expanding into new areas of the state. Starting new projects and injecting new momentum into existing programs is how we fulfill our mission. Be it a project that promotes leading edge culinary medicine methods, improves the nutrition quality of food pantry items, or gets healthier food into schools, Groundwork takes the lead. We prove solutions that build resilience and unify our communities. Become a member today, and in the words of new board chair Roger Newton’s, join us in “the joy of the journey we are on.”

