







A DECADE OF CREATING OPPORTUNITY AND THE LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY.

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Ten years ago, as the wealth of a few cities skyrocketed from the tech economy, it seemed every region in the United States was rushing to claim a new tech identity—from constructing research parks to setting up venture funds. Everybody wanted to go narrow; to be the city for clean energy manufacturing or the hub for financial technology software.

As cities tried to build a fence around a particular technology, Start Garden's key insight was that entrepreneurship—in whatever form it takes—is the foundation of an economy. You could build the tallest research facility in the world, but if entrepreneurial people didn't see an opportunity to start in their own city, they would leave—and they had been leaving Grand Rapids.

We funded back-of-the-napkin ideas to profitability. We opened doors to anybody seeking an opportunity to walk through and take their best shot. We gave people a reason to start and we hoped we could give them a reason to stay and grow a new generation of wealth here. Wealth that would benefit everyone who calls West Michigan home.

The goal was not to build one startup, but a robust community of people that start things; a culture of entrepreneurship.

Here are 10 lessons that we learned over the years building a culture for entrepreneurship.

LESSONS





IT ALL STARTS WITH AN IDEA.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE DON'T KNOW.

We were going to plant a thousand seeds and not treat any one of them as precious. Rather, we'd let the community and the market decide. Our job is to get ideas out the door, not to identify a hugely successful startup or sector. We would create an entrepreneurial culture, and from that culture, we'd grow startups. "I walked into Start Garden with just an idea and walked out with a fast-paced growing business."

- Felisha Rodriguez, CurlCase by Wear Your Curls

Cast your vote for The 100 Text the correspondence of your tavorite business to help them y "The first \$5,000 allowed me to buy a computer, get legal services and get up and running. The team was so valuable in helping me develop my website, story, pitch and advertising."

1.

- Kirsten Morian Field, Kidscrafts





\$ 500,000,000+ NEW BUSINESS GROWTH

LESSON 2



REAL SOLUTIONS TO REAL PROBLEMS.

A GREAT IDEA REVEALS BOTH THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM AND THE OPPORTUNITY.

Our problem: People who call Grand Rapids home had lost the belief that great things start here. They believed big things happen in other places somewhere bigger, cooler, more well-known. There was the notion that somebody from somewhere else must know more, so we shouldn't go out on a limb.

We have all the talent we need; it just needs to be activated.





THE ONLY BEAN Kristine Yang & Brian Lai

Brian & Kristine set out to create innovative bean-based food products that are better for you and better for the planet. They launched their company with pasta made 100% from beans in 2017 and kickstarted their growth with \$20k from The 100 and \$5k from the 5x5 competition in 2018.

Since then, *The Only Bean* has gained nationwide distribution for their pasta products and launched a new line of crunchy roasted edamame snacks carried today in all Meijer Stores and gas stations, as well as Costco and Amazon. They continue to expand into new retail markets and have opened their own warehouse in Las Vegas to better serve western North America.

2018: \$20,000

\$5,000

TODAY: **OVER 1,000** RETAIL LOCATIONS





SIZE MATTERS.

WHETHER FOOD CART OR TECH COMPANY, THE TIME YOU GRIND IS THE SAME.

As an organization creating a culture, the size of your population of entrepreneurs is essential. A huge number of people all starting up at the same time creates a community. To scale individual companies, organizations like Start Garden have to scale the activities of their ecosystem as a whole.



Jeff first arrived at Start Garden in 2014 as a video editor who enjoyed spending his weekends hunting. Start Garden took a chance on *Sportsman Tracker* when they were still a young company establishing product-market fit. He received a \$5,000 investment to see if this unlikely idea for an app that recommends the best hunting and fishing spots could become something great.

After his prototype drew in more than 1,000 immediate downloads, he received more funding and never stopped growing the audience for his product.

Jeff Courter sportsman tracker

As *Sportsman Tracker* matured in its market, Start Garden partnered with them through multiple investment rounds and board leadership—constantly challenging and encouraging them. There were hard times and good times, but Jeff found success amidst the struggle. In 2021, he sold his company (now called *HuntWise*) to Kalkomey—a national outdoor recreation and safety brand. Andreeson Horowitz named *HuntWise* among the top 10 fastestgrowing companies in a vertical community.

"Find success in the struggle; there will always be another mountain, so learn to celebrate the small wins and always be grateful."

- Jeff Courter



\$5,000 + \$20,000

MILLIONS IN ANNUAL REVENUE

KIDS CRAFTS Kirsten Field

In 2013, Kirsten Field brought an idea to Start Garden that would help schools fundraise smarter. The Elf Factory (later Kids Crafts) got its start by providing crafts that kids could turn into adorable gifts for their parents at Christmastime.

While operating, Kirsten saw an opportunity to offer a similar service to large retailers and pivoted. This led to generating millions of dollars a year in revenue by providing crafts for big-box retailers, like Bass Pro Shops, seeking experiences for kids to enjoy while their parents were shopping.

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BLUE MEDORA Nathan Owen

Long-time tech entrepreneur Nathan Owen came to Start Garden in 2013. He saw an opportunity to carve out a niche for IT managers that would help them better understand the enormous amounts of data their enterprise software was tracking.

They sold their *Blue Medora* product to VMWare in 2020. Today, they're working on a new product to solve the same problem, but not tied to any one enterprise software. Rather than spending his time in the office day-to-day, Nathan now works as an angel investor with other startups.



COMPANY

GOSILI Stacey Feeley & Giuliana Schwab

In 2012, Stacey Feeley and Giuliana Schwab wanted a second chance at launching their silicone-based products for kids. Before losing their retail customers in the recession, they were getting traction with a new product line of silicone casings for glass bottles. With a \$5,000 grant from Start Garden, they were able to relaunch. By 2019, they were acquired by Evenflo and grew their placement with retailers throughout North America and 20 countries—making this garage startup with two moms a global enterprise.

Today, *GoSili* offers silicone cups, lids and straws for both kids and adults, and a line of tableware for babies and toddlers.

"Find some folks who dream as big as you and are doing what you do because they are going to be some of the few people on the planet while you're doing this that will truly understand you."

- Stacey Feeley





SMALL STEPS TO SUCCESS.

SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES AREN'T BUILT IN A DAY. RATHER, THEY'RE COMPRISED OF A MILLION LITTLE DECISIONS MADE DAILY.

There is a saying that *"every startup looks great the day you write the check."* It's impossible to predict who fails and who succeeds. Some things go right, while others go wrong. Some ideas succeed based on sound strategy while others are, truthfully, pure luck. You just never know. That's why we take a chance on a lot of things using small dollar amounts.



It would be nice to say that there was something special about Derik Lolli when he walked through our doors at Start Garden. It would be gratifying to claim that his idea jumped out as one we should pay attention to. While clever, his idea for an app that enabled people to buy and redeem digital gift cards while fundraising for a favorite charity was no more clever than many other startup ideas we heard in those days.

Over the seven years Derik and his co-founders built *Benefit Mobile*, there would be many more downs than ups, with a lot of days when the business seemed unlikely to ever scale as big as they had hoped. Much more time was spent grinding it out than celebrating big wins.

To describe the reality of being a startup founder, he watched other startups hit home runs while he was praying for a base hit. As a successful CEO said one night at a Start Garden event, "I spent the first 11 years owning my own company coming home feeling like a failure."

Fortunately, *Benefit Mobile* caught the attention of a private equity firm that had just acquired a traditional gift card company. They bet that *Benefit Mobile* and their recent acquisition could merge into something greater than the sum of its parts. They were right.

When *Benefit Mobile* was sold, the payoff was much, much bigger than they had ever imagined. Importantly for Start Garden, the return to local investors covered all of the small investments we had made over the years. The cost to create an ecosystem was financially covered and the new value Derik and his company had created—and grown from—had come full circle.

Derik Lolli Benefit mobile

* SOLD COMPANY

IT PAYS TO FUND A LOT OF IDEAS WITH SMALL AMOUNTS OF CAPITAL.

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= \$3.3M

IDEAS FUNDED



= \$3.3M

STARTUP ROI





IF IT'S COMFORTABLE, YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG.

ORGANIZATIONS FACE THEIR WEAKNESSES HEAD ON AND FIGHT TOWARDS A SOLUTION TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD.

In the early years of Start Garden, we attempted to follow startups that we thought could be easy wins. For example, some entrepreneurs we invested in had a lot of experience and were well-connected, working on things that sounded like many other successful businesses. Predictably, our community of founders started to look the same. Then, Grand Rapids ranked 51 on a list of 52 cities that were good for Black business owners. The Wealth Gap was getting worse as we were trying to breed a new generation of wealth creators. Something needed to change, so we changed ourselves.



When Start Garden expanded its ecosystem-building work, we knew that we were taking on more complexity and would need a different "brain" at the top. In fact, we needed four.

Authentically reaching into every neighborhood, addressing systemic problems which had left people feeling excluded from entrepreneurship and truly serving our community was work that needed more than one captain.

In 2017, we adopted a co-leadership model. Essentially, four executive directors provide a 360-degree view of the decisions we make, to make each one stronger.

Within a year, participants on all our platforms had shifted demographically to 50% women and 50% minority across all things Start Garden does. Today, our incubator at 40 Pearl St. is arguably the most diverse office space in Grand Rapids. "Across three companies and a dozen projects, at every step of my journey as a founder and coach, Start Garden has been in my corner."

- Ryan Vaughn, Varsity News Network



OPNR Andrea Wallace

Technologist by day and DJ by night, Andrea "Super Dre" Wallace built a platform utilizing machine learning to help artists like herself identify and connect with audiences streaming their music online.

After winning \$20,000 from The 100 in 2019, Start Garden made a serendipitous connection to Michigan House that resulted in Dre merging with Detroit startup, *Opnr*—a platform for venues to book opening acts. As CEO of the new entity, she's scaling a game-changing platform for artists to book, manage and promote their music internationally. Andrea was just accepted into MSU Foundation's Conquer Accelerator program and recently entered into a strategic partnership with NIVA (National Independent Venue Association) where she will be speaking at this year's inaugural NIVA conference later in 2022.

"Find some folks who dream as big as you and are doing what you do because they are going to be some of the few people on the planet while you're doing this that will truly understand you."

- Andrea Wallace

2019: \$20,000

TODAY: SERVING 400+ VENUES & PROMOTERS AND 7,300+ ARTISTS

PARTNERING WITH 5 MUSIC FESTIVALS



2018: \$5,000

2019: \$20,000

TODAY: \$260,000 EXPANSION

WORMIES Luis Chen

Luis Chen was driving a truck to provide fresh produce in food deserts when he started composting with worms to create high-quality, healthy soil. He won \$5,000 at 5x5 Night in 2018 when he needed a machine to screen his soil for packaging.

When the cannabis industry came to Michigan, his compost met a new market with huge demand. He received another \$20,000 through The 100 to help him scale.

Today, he runs a facility selling hundreds of cubic yards of compost and soil blends at premium prices. He also provides a solution for individuals and businesses to help make their waste streams clean and sustainable by composting food scraps with worms. *Wormies*' compost has been nationally recognized for its bio-intelligent soil quality, acknowledged by the recycling industry in the state of Michigan for the innovation of its circular business model and awarded a market development grant for \$260,000 to expand operations in 2023.

"I pitched dozens of times at competitions and networking events. Sharing and not winning an award never felt like losing. There was always so much learned and improved, new connections and more people found to be a part of the idea."

- Luis Chen





A CHANGE MEANS YOU'RE PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION.

NO BUSINESS STAYS IN BUSINESS WITHOUT CHANGE. PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF YOUR AUDIENCE, THEN FOLLOW THROUGH WITH PROVIDING IT TO THEM.

We had played the role of investors that wanted 10x returns. We had also played the role of economic developers trying to spark new job creation. However, at the core of an entrepreneur is their search for freedom, both for themselves and their families. In order to serve entrepreneurship, we had to reorient around a different goal: Wealth. More importantly, not wealth as defined by an investor or an economic developer, but wealth as defined by the individual entrepreneur.




MUSE Stephen Smith TODAY: 3 LOCATIONS

Stephen Smith is a creative with a passion to serve his community. A "lifestyle business" is how a highgrowth-focused person would describe *Muse*; a nice business that provides the owner a living doing something they love. But an entrepreneur sees it *differently*. On one hand they have passion, on the other hand they have wealth. Can the two fit together in a way that meets their goal?

A high-end gallery and event space that's accessible to the community and showcases contemporary Black creative talent—that was Stephen Smith's plan when he was working for a public school. With the help of \$20,000 from The 100 in 2018, he was able to secure a building on the West Side of Grand Rapids and create what is now *Muse*.

Muse has opened a second location and has a third venue in a portable container gallery. Not only has *Muse* become a popular destination, in addition the wealth of Stephen's business has grown tremendously with the explosion of the real estate market in the neighborhood. *Muse* has married both Stephen's passion with new wealth to achieve the entrepreneurial goal.







Liz Hilton pitched a 3-D knitting machine that could weave a piece of fabric into 3-D shapes at 5x5 Night in July 2015 and won \$5,000.

In July 2018, she took the stage again at The 100 and won \$20k for a new product—a swaddling garment for newborns 3-D knitted as a single piece of fabric that can't unravel during sleep.

Liz went viral on TikTok and now averages 600 sales a month. Today, she is expanding into a 6,000 sq ft. manufacturing and warehouse facility near her home.

THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE



BLACKBIRD RSVP Laura Vaughn

2013: \$5,000

2014: \$20,000

TODAY: \$1 MILLION IN REVENUE

When Laura Vaughn got married in 2013, she wanted the convenience of managing her wedding day online, but with the sophistication that printed invitations carried. Her initial idea, *Sitting in a Tree*, would eventually evolve into *Blackbird RSVP*—a full event-management platform that looks and feels as thoughtful and planned as the event itself.

Through creative partnerships with local developers, *Blackbird RSVP* has been profitable without ever needing more than Start Garden's initial \$25,000 investment. *BlackbirdRSVP* is a scalable company where the founder has been able to grow it to fit her life needs, not set aside her needs to grow the company.

HUSTL ET I 2 REWARD



LAWNBOT Kendall Hines

Growing up in the family lawn care business, Kendall patched together an idea for an automated online sales tool (Lawnbot) which many call Shopify for lawn care and pest control companies. It would eliminate the need to physically visit homes to measure for a price quote, while allowing homeowners the ability to sign up and pay online for services.

After winning \$20,000 at The 100, Kendall brought on Erik Albug as a technical co-founder and together they crafted their no-code prototype into a robust digital product. They continued innovating, adding users and MRR, and within 18 months they had grown the company to \$50K ARR and sold to Real Green Systems for 10X ARR.



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GRNOIR Nadia & Shatawn Brigham

The Brighams wanted to bring their passion for wine and jazz to downtown Grand Rapids for people to come and appreciate Black culture. With a little help from winning \$20,000 at The 100 in 2019, and a lot of hustle to open a wine bar in the midst of COVID, GRNoir has become a premier destination for wine, music and food—enriching Grand Rapids' nightlife and culture.

\$20,000

TODAY:

LEVEL 2 SOMMELIER

\$1 MILLION IN ANNUAL

REVENUE

SHAWTAWN-

Shatawn, one of only two Black men in Michigan with a sommelier certification, curates the wine selection for customers and wine club members. GRNoir has recently released the second wine in their collection, with more slated in the coming year.

- "Prepare to adjust, become comfortable with ambiguity, center self-care and don't let current circumstances distract you."
- Nadia Brigham





RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE COMPANY.

TRUST MAKES A COMPANY. BROKEN TRUST BREAKS A COMPANY.

Start Garden often plays the role of that first pivotal startup relationship. The one that says, "You got this. Go do it." Our most important work is to build trust networks around the entrepreneur. We focus on the person building the company. We look for hustle, not a great resumé. We value grit over knowledge; smart execution versus business plans; talent, not ideas.







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TODAY: \$12 MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE

MULL-IT-OVER Bruce Burgess

While out of work during the Great Recession, contractor Bruce Burgess decided to move forward with his idea for a sound-insulating product. His invention could be installed postconstruction on glass framing to stop noise that would inadvertently carry from room to room.

An early winner of 5x5 Night in 2012, Bruce now sells his product internationally to major corporations, the government and hotel chains with annual, multi-million-dollar contracts. He never had to go back to his construction job.

"Any transition between products creates an opportunity for improvement."

- Bruce Burgess



\$20,000

\$25,000

TODAY:

YEAR

2X SALES YEAR-OVER-

CURLCASE Felisha Rodriguez

Felisha Rodriguez was solving her own problem when she came to Start Garden in 2019. She had created a "case" for naturally curly hair that would solve "morning bedhead" and the subsequent painstaking process of re-styling.

Her work was rapidly growing her Instagram following and she was using the inside of her trunk as a display table while meeting with potential manufacturers in parking lots—using prototypes, materials and fabrics to explain her big idea to cut-and-sew manufacturers. She built a huge demand that depleted her inventory within the first month of launching—a not-so-easy feat that caught Start Garden's attention.

With \$5,000 from 5x5 in 2019, \$20,000 from The 100 in 2019 and \$25,000 as a 5x5 All-Star in 2021, she stabilized her inventory problems and has been growing ever since. Sales doubled from 2020 – 2021 and Felisha won the Naturally Curly Best of the Best Award in 2021.

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PAYLOAD James Mikrut

COMBINATOR

"Listen to your customers. Make sure you're building something they want-not what you want. If you give them what they want, they'll love you for it."

- James Mikrut, Payload CMS

Behind every good website is a software platform that holds all the content—known as a CMS (content management system). James Mikrut and millions of other website developers have struggled with existing CMS offerings, which can create huge headaches for adding content and functionality as online requirements change. Funded with \$20,000 in 2019 and launched in 2021, James introduced Payload CMS into the developer landscape.

Payload is a developer-first headless CMS and application framework built to finally give developers a better choice in the world of CMS. From documentation to design, *Payload* is crafted from the ground up to save engineers

time and effort while building the back end and admin panel for websites, native apps, e-commerce, SaaS and any other products that need content management. Payload is changing the CMS status quo—working to give developers the tools they want to build the CMS they need, all in clean and well-structured code.

Payload CMS was accepted into Y Combinator's Summer 2022 batch and secured \$500K in additional funding. Recently, the company moved to an open-source model, prompting a major growth in developer exposure and adoption.

LESSON 8



FREEDOM IS THE END GOAL.

ENTREPRENEURS DEFINE FREEDOM FOR THEMSELVES.

The grind is real and there's nothing glamorous about a struggle to keep afloat. It's easy to find yourself working *in* the business to keep it going rather than *on* the business to make it what you originally set out to build. Both are necessary, yet time and again, it's not the entrepreneurs but the communities around them that are able to remind them of what they set out to do. Startups grow out of relationships. Our most important work is cultivating the community.



86 REPAIRS Joe Gallager & Daniel Estrada

Joe Gallager and Daniel Estrada could be found bouncing between new ventures and corporate jobs for years as they looked for a business model that they could really grow. They found a real pain point in restaurants: The moment something breaks in the back of house, it eliminates what's available on the menu in the front of house, causing financial losses by the minute.

So, they created *86 Repairs* in 2018 as an innovative repair and maintenance platform built specifically for the restaurant industry to reduce time, money and pain from a manager's day when something breaks. Today they service over 1,500 restaurants in 46 states and continue to grow quickly as restaurants have streamlined their operations post-COVID.

2018: JOINED INCUBATOR

TODAY:

GROWTH

LANDED \$15.2 MILLION IN SERIES A FUNDING

3X YEAR-OVER-YEAR REVENUE

Some notable customers include Boka Restaurant Group, Castellucci Hospitality Group, 4Rivers Smokehouse and quick-service brands like McDonald's, Jimmy John's, Sonic, Taco Bell and many more. In 2021, *86 Repairs* was named one of Chicago Inno's 21 Startups to Watch, The Spoon's Restaurant Tech 10, winner of the Rising Star Award for 1871's Momentum Awards and included in the Top 40 finalists for the Chicago Innovation Awards.

"Even the best products can't survive without great execution."

- Daniel Estrada

in 46 states and

T T T T T T T T SMART MOVE



2016: JOINED INCUBATOR THE

TODAY: \$4 MILLION REVENUE

URBANEER Bruce Thompson

Seeing the demand for housing, Urbaneer set out to make a whole suite of products that make micro-living totally livable through smart design.

Launched in 2016, today Urbaneer offers three complete space-saving home configurations under 700 square feet called the *Tioga* series. Tioga provides predictable timing, price and quality in an unpredictable, price-inflated and, at times, substandard housing market.

"The team at Start Garden has been an awesome resource as we grew up from an idea to a real company."



MAXONE Jason Mejeur

\$5,000 + \$20,000

TODAY: **1 MILLION** COACHES & ATHLETES

When you hear Jason Mejeur talk about A.I. today, you wouldn't have guessed that in 2015 he was a high school coach with an app idea. With \$5,000 from Start Garden's 5x5 pitch competition, he got to work on a coaching aid that would help develop athletes when they weren't at practice.

When COVID took off in 2020, so did the demand for *MaxOne*, as coaches needed a remote solution to keep training athletes. Today, MaxOne has served almost 1 million coaches, athletes and parents on its platform. MaxOne has also acquired and launched the OWN IT app, which serves college athletes and corporate wellness clients using their own biometric data.

- Jason Mejeur

"It's easy to get sucked into wanting to build a cool, sexy business that's raising millions of dollars and getting featured on TechCrunch. Don't get enamored with the hype. Build the type of business you want to run—one that fits the lifestyle you want to have!"

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- Laura Vaughn, Blackbird RSVP







OUR COMMUNITY IS OUR HOME.

STARTUPS ARE PART OF CREATING THE WORLD WE WANT TO LIVE IN. LET'S BE SURE WE'RE CREATING A BETTER ONE.

We can't turn the world into the place we want to live in, but we can make a startup into our ideal community. When our co-leaders (Darel Ross, Jorge Gonzales, Laurie Supinski and Paul Moore) engage, it's about our small community practicing equity and enjoying it—even when it's hard. Having the privilege to run an organization also means having the opportunity to be the change you want to see, which ripples out beyond the walls of your company.



\$5.000 \$20,000

TODAY: VIEWED IN 8 **MILLION HOMES**

WIMAGE Michael Hyacinthe

Originally prototyped as an app to help disabled veterans express creativity, US Navy Seabee veteran Michael Hyacinthe pivoted Wimage (Words to Images) several times over the years. After his partner Kevin Kammeraad joined the team, they created a character named Wimee the Robot to inspire kids to see the power of their imaginations.

When COVID created a surge in demand for educational activities for kids learning from home, their hard work paid off. *Wimage* is now a thriving children's tech and media company creating fun, interactive and educational content with an interactive PBS kids show, Wimee's Words, as well as a website and Wimee.tv. Wimage also secured a three-book deal with publishing powerhouse HarperCollins, launched a financial literacy show for kids with a credit union and opened Wimee's Dream in partnership with the Grand Rapids Children's Museum—a pilot exhibit for future exhibits around the country. *Wimee* is available on the Hello Saurus platform and will be available on Kidoodle later in 2022.

"We've received support in both mentorship and funding that has helped our venture have conversations with media heavyweights in LA and New York."

- Michael Hyacinthe

THE PASSION PROJE CT



KBRAKES Wes Keely

\$5,000 was all industrial designer and professional drummer Wes Keely ever needed for KBrakes. In 2013, he was able to spin up multiple prototypes of a kick drum brake that prevents movement while playing and test his concept by 3D printing pieces and sending them to drummers around the world for feedback.

A profitable business from the start, today *KBrakes* includes a line of products for drummers to keep their rig in place while they play on any surface. Wes runs his business from home and gets to hang out with customers that play in bands like Black Flag, Scott Stapp, Dan and Shay and more.

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VNN SPORTS Ryan Vaughn

SCALED STARTUPS

2011-2020:

TODAY: HELPING **OTHERS SCALE**

In 2011, Ryan Vaughn was building a platform to fill in the gap where local news could no longer afford to cover high school sports. Having launched the startup in Start Garden's predecessor program, Momentum, he became Resident #1 for a startup community in Grand Rapids.

Now in all fifty states, *VNN Sports* is the largest media company for high school sports in the country. Ryan coaches startup founders around the globe and feeds back into our local ecosystem as co-facilitator of a new Start Garden program, Accelerate Equity. It's a year for new founders of color and established founders that successfully built companies to develop deep relationships, wrestle with the complex problems of the Wealth Gap and grow companies together.





IT TAKES ALL OF US.

YOU CAN BUILD A SMALL COMMUNITY ON YOUR OWN, BUT OUR LIVES AND OUR COMPANIES GROW WITHIN A LARGE COMMUNITY—MUCH OF WHICH WE CAN'T CONTROL.

The truth is, we continue to lose great entrepreneurs to Chicago, Miami and Atlanta. They get their start here and don't want to leave, but the investors are more serious elsewhere. Doors are opening faster "out there" and entrepreneurs can grow faster if they move away. Those who stay tell us about flying out of Grand Rapids each Monday to raise the funds they need to keep growing back home. They want to raise their families and keep their teams, but their needs outgrow the support available here.

There is also the real dilemma of the Browning Effect that we see every day. The inexplicable shift in a meeting when a founder of color is treated like a high school student working on a class project—something nice, but not serious—instead of the business builder they are.

As much as 10 years is a victory lap for what we learned and the great entrepreneurs who started here, it also reveals how far we have to go as a city. We made a great place to start. Now, we all have to work together and invest the resources needed to make Grand Rapids a great place to stay.

ECOSYSTEMS DON'T EXIST IN ISOLATION. ECOSYSTEMS FOR STARTUPS.

THEY COMPETE **AGAINST OTHER**

Grand Rapids is a great place to start, but we continue to struggle to offer resources to convince entrepreneurs to stay.

CHICAGO

ILLINOIS

KAT SAMARDZIJA WEAVER Launched Locker Lifestyle at 5x5. Relocated to Chicago.

BRIAN AND KRISTINE LAI Founders of *The Only* Bean, currently relocating to Chicago.

WILLIAM THATCHER Launched Anvil at The 100 in 2018. Relocated to Chicago.

GLEN MCELFRESH Launched Fruitera (Golden Root) at Start Garden. Relocated to Chicago.

FLORIDA

ARIANA WALLER Started career as technologist at Start Garden and launched first startup at The 100 in 2018 Relocated to Miami. FL.

TED SPOONER

Built *Respondwell* out of

Start Garden. Sold to

Zimmer Biomet:

relocated to Florida.

NAPA CALIFORNIA

GEORGE WALKER

Launched winery from 5x5. Recruited by NBA star Dwyane Wade to head up his winery in Napa Valley.

PARK CITY UTAH

DERIK LOLLI

Sold Benefit Mobile, relocated with his family to Park City, UT.

DETROIT MICHIGAN

CHASE LEE Co-founded Ambassador, which sold. Relocated to Detroit to start Trustpage.

ARIANA WALLER DECIDING BETWEEN ECOSYSTEMS

Post accelerator, raises \$3.3M to launch *Mueshi*, led by Harlem Capital.

Accepted into Miami-based accelerator started by billionaire Scale Al founder, Lucy Guo, to build Ariana's next startup, *Mueshi.*

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
MIAMI, FL	Black Tech Week Miami launches to bring Black STEM talent and startups together.	Venture Cafe incubator is founded to create more inclusive community of innovators.	3 women start We Shape Tech at Art Basel. The explosion of tech convening at the festival will later be nicknamed Tech Basel.			Black Ops Ventures, an all-Black-led venture fund, closes \$13M for pre-seed and seed investments.	Now considered a hot startup hub, Harlem Capital co-founder moves to Miami to source new deals from diverse founders.	
								DECISION: Return to her Grand Rapids consulting business
GRAND RAPIDS, MI	Enrolls at GVSU as engineering student.	Shares startup ideas with Start Garden; advised to learn coding at Grand Circus.	Starts consulting biz, launches Women in Tech podcast, ranks top 10, becomes Apple Developer Scholar.	Wins \$20,000 at The 100. Launches first startup, <i>Adorra.</i>	Start Garden takes Ariana to Afrotech, expands network nationally.	Has consulting firm of WMI software clients. Wins Nolan Groce Leadership Award.		d or accept an opportunity to build tech-based app for well-known Miami entrepreneur. CAPITAL FINANCIAL SOCIAL INTELLECTUAL
U								





10 YEARS DOWN, FOREVER TO GO

Over the past decade, we've learned that creating opportunity is no easy feat. It takes grit, hustle, agility, unwavering passion and the support of a community.

Every idea we've stood behind, every decision we've made and every failure we've embraced has brought us to where we are today. And we couldn't be more motivated to continue creating opportunity and building an ecosystem that, in turn, spreads wealth into all of our neighborhoods in Grand Rapids.

While there's still plenty of work to do, keep your eye on Start Garden and Grand Rapids. Big things are happening here, and we're dedicated to continuing our mission to create opportunity and support entrepreneurs for decades to come.



Opportunity Starts Here

"Being in the space is just nice because everyone is sort of doing the same thing so they can become your 'support group'. Without Start Garden, I would still be doing the same things... but it definitely would have taken me longer."

- Andrea Wallace, Opnr

