

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Travel through Grand Rapids, Michigan, and it becomes quickly apparent that this is a healthy, growing community. New construction abounds, companies are expanding, familiar names in entertainment adorn the marquee on the local arena, and world-renowned exhibitions are featured at the local museum and conservatory.

The anchor city in a region of more than 1 million, Grand Rapids has been quietly transforming itself from an office furniture manufacturing capital with a reputation for quality, to a diverse, high-tech economy that also boasts arts, entertainment, and cultural attractions more commonly seen in cities twice its size.

A history of economic growth

Once a turn-of-the-century capital for fine furniture, Greater Grand Rapids has evolved into a world class manufacturing center. Area companies produce everything from chrome-plated wheel covers to intricate surgical devices, advanced cell phone software, and world-renowned office furniture. With concentrations in metal forming, plastics, medical devices, and biopharmaceuticals, area manufacturers complement and support the region's growth as a center for life science innovation and excellence in patient care.

In the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, a growing campus of premier research and patient care facilities has spawned nearly \$1 billion in life science investment in less than a decade. Anchoring this growth is the Van Andel Institute, whose \$160 million expansion will more than double its laboratory space and accommodate new research related to Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's, and other chronic illnesses. Other investments include a university health-science facility, top-ranked hospitals and centers for neurosciences, cancer, cardiac, and pediatric care. This life sciences cluster also includes one of the nation's largest biopharmaceutical and medical device clusters, bioinformatics companies, research firms, incubators and consortia, and academic research projects. In fact, Greater Grand Rapids is the western anchor of a life science research and resource corridor that stretches south to Kalamazoo and east to Ann Arbor.

Life-long learning

There is a philosophy of life-long learning and innovation in Greater Grand Rapids that begins with our youngest students. The metropolitan region is well served by a great depth and variety of public and private educational programs. The area's 20 public school districts, two parochial districts, and 16 charter schools serve more than 120,000 students. Special programs offered within the schools include gifted and talented programs, advanced technical programs, work-based learning opportunities, career preparation, foreign languages, and fine arts to name a few. In addition, Greater Grand Rapids is a regional "learning center" where continuing education opportunities abound. Several of the more than 20 area colleges and universities operate campuses in the heart of downtown or within six miles of the central city. Together they provide degree-granting, technical, and continuing education programs to more than 65,000 students. Many of these schools feature extensive programs in manufacturing, engineering,

technology, and life science disciplines. They include unique, leading-edge initiatives, world-class facilities, and specialized laboratories.

A world of culture and recreation

With its vibrant economy, it's no wonder Greater Grand Rapids is Michigan's fastest growing region. Affordable housing, award-winning schools and dynamic employment have helped attract an international workforce that is young, well educated, and highly adaptable. Over half the population is between the ages of 18 and 44.

Grand Rapids is home to people of every race, creed, color, religion, and national origin – our public school students represent more than 40 languages and 53 countries. Such diversity is further supported by a wealth of retail and dining establishments, social networks, schools, and religious institutions. Each year, the region celebrates its ethnicity with a host of festivals that bring our central city to life with the sights, sounds, and tastes of our eclectic community.

The region's diversity also extends to its lifestyle, arts, and entertainment options. From the outdoor enthusiast to the opera connoisseur, there is something for everyone here.

More than

1.5 million people attend Greater Grand Rapids' impressive array of museums, galleries, theatres, and events every year. Here, residents and visitors enjoy:

- the nationally recognized Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra;
- Michigan's only opera and professional ballet companies;
- a 125-acre botanical garden that includes a 30-acre sculpture park – one of the world's ten best;
- Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, the nation's second largest community theatre;
- one of the country's leading public museums;
- the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum; and
- the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

A re-born central city, combined with thriving suburban communities, make for an unusually diverse range of affordable housing and entertainment options. From rural living to lakeside villages, to retrofitted urban lofts, there are communities within communities here to suit every preference. Virtually any day -- or night -- of the week, dining choices abound, as well as clubs for every age group and taste from the thriving blues and alternative music scene to jazz and dance clubs, wine bars, and dinner theatre.

Also downtown, the 12,000-seat Van Andel Arena hosts a diverse mix of national and international music, ice, and celebrity performances as well as the Grand Rapids Rampage arena football team and the Grand Rapids Griffins minor-league hockey team. Greater Grand Rapids is also home to the West Michigan Whitecaps, a Class A minor league baseball team affiliated with the Detroit Tigers.

Outdoor enthusiasts will also enjoy the more than 250 miles of paved trails for non-motorized vehicles located throughout the area, world class trout and fly-fishing on the region's countless rivers and streams, and Lake Michigan's pristine white sand beaches. The rolling foothills that edge the lake offer tennis, skiing, camping, hang-gliding, and

golf. In fact, with the second-most daily fee golf courses of any state in the country, including numerous world-class courses, Michigan is truly one of the world's great golf destinations.

Drive thirty minutes from downtown, and you can begin to explore the charming resort towns along Lake Michigan – including Holland, which celebrates its Dutch heritage in unique and entertaining ways, and Saugatuck, a picturesque harbor village and renowned arts colony.

Even with its sophistication, Grand Rapids prides itself on such small-town virtues as friendly people, safe streets, minimal traffic, and good old-fashioned Midwest values. Its people take pride in the fact that the city has been named one of America's Most Livable Cities.

More information about Grand Rapids is available online at:

<http://www.rapidgrowthmedia.com>

<http://www.visitgrandrapids.org/multicultural.php>

http://www.michiganswestcoast.com/coasting_routes.php

<http://www.kentisd.org/>

<http://www.rightplace.org/>

www.bestmichigan.org