

# Governor Whitmer Tours Three Downtown Alma Businesses

By William Meiners  
Herald Staff Writer

Accompanied by high winds and a small entourage that included her communications' team, Governor Gretchen Whitmer dropped into downtown Alma on Thursday afternoon to highlight what she called the administration's support of small businesses. Whitmer met with three owners and toured their establishments.

It was Whitmer's second visit to Highland Blush, the coffee shop that had been the site of a campaign stop in 2018. From a cup of coffee at that meeting spot, the group, which included Alma Mayor Greg Mapes, Alma interim City Manager Aerie Ripley, Jim Wheeler, president of Greater Gratiot Development, and others, proceeded on a walking tour of new construction in the 3one3 Boutique Hotel, and a final stop at the Blockhouse.

Both 3one3 and Blockhouse have focused on making something old new again in downtown Alma. People can enjoy an overnight or two in the luxury renovated hotel that's more than 125 years old and cross the streets to enjoy the esports of Blockhouse in the restored and repurposed opera house.

"Small business is the backbone of our communities and it's the lifeblood of neighborhoods and our economy," Whitmer told The Herald. "I think it's important that we never lose sight of that. Showing up and actually engaging with small business owners is the best way to ensure we're focused on the things that are going to help people."

Acknowledging the gargantuan effort small businesses have put forth through nearly two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Whitmer applauded their tenacity. "I'm proud that businesses like the ones we've stopped into today have gritted it through these incredibly challenging times," she said. "A lot of them have worked with the MEDC [Michigan Economic Development Corporation] and have gotten some help from the state to stay afloat or get started. We're proud of that, but we certainly want to be there to help going forward."

Ripley thought it was important for the governor to get feedback from those business owners who navigated the pandemic and perhaps got some grant money to do that. Additionally, she can get a better sense of how those folks are responding to it all.

"From a city standpoint, we had the opportunity to speak with her briefly about the

importance of infrastructure support," Ripley said.

County grants from some of the pandemic funding allowed them to address water main issues that enable certain construction and rehab projects in older buildings. Ripley said having that money available, either by grant or revolving loan, can further collaborations between the city and entrepreneurs.

For Damian Sanderson, owner of Highland Blush, just having the governor back in Alma was pretty awesome. "We're so grateful she took the time out of her busy schedule to come here," he said. "And I love that the visit was presented as more of a way for her to sit down and listen."

Sanderson said his coffee shop was "just a baby" at the time of her campaign stop. No one could have ever envisioned all the craziness to follow in just those three years. Still, the attention from the state's political leader helps a businessperson feel a "little less lonely," he said. "It's special and it's also super cool for Alma."

As small businesses continue to battle uncertain times (to say the least), Whitmer continues to govern in one of the most politically divisive times in U.S. history. The divide may trouble her the most.

"Today's rhetoric can sometimes be so toxic that it repels good people from getting in or staying in," Whitmer said. "I think it shuts down conversation that needs to happen. We're never going to find common ground if we're not talking to each other. There's so much information that's curated to keep us angry with one another, and that's not productive. That's my biggest concern."

Still, in spite of all that pressure and animosity, Whitmer likes her job. "Even on the hardest days I still feel very lucky to be the governor of this great state," she said. "I've spent my whole life here and I love this state."

She said she thinks about her kids and other people's kids. When she focuses on the future of Michigan, as well as the future of the country, she hopes will be a better place for her children and the next generations. From hearing about how the state can create better opportunities for small business owners to simply starting some conversations, Whitmer made the most of a windy Thursday afternoon in Alma. Given the winds of political change, citizens will have to stay tuned for forecasts in the days to come.



Governor Gretchen Whitmer walks alongside Aerie Ripley, Alma's interim city manager, Greg Mapes, Alma's mayor, and Jim Wheeler, president of Greater Gratiot Development, during her visit to downtown Alma last Thursday. Whitmer and her team came to town to highlight her administration's support of small businesses.

## STEAM *continued from page 3*

Just as Hindbaugh-Marr designed a program to instill a love of science in students, she began to write grants to procure more advanced technology. The children all work

on Chromebooks, and they can incorporate their scientific discoveries into those computers. She's been successful with local grants, including funding from the Gratiot

Community Foundation, as well as national ones, like the recent technology grant.

"With more than 800 total submissions, we were truly blown away by the response we received from educators," said John Wheeler, CEO of Vernier Software & Technology. "For 40 years, Vernier Software & Technology has supported hands-on science exploration, and we are excited to now support these 40 educators — from five elementary schools, eight middle schools, 23 high schools, and four colleges — as they use data-collection technology with their students."

All the grantees were chosen by a volunteer Grantee Selection Com-

mittee, which consisted of current science and STEM educators, consultants, and members of the Vernier tech support team who are former educators. The committee selected the grantees based on various factors, including plans for implementing the Vernier technology and current needs of their school.

Hindbaugh-Marr has presented her STEAM program through the Gratiot-Isabella RESD to teachers in Alma and Mount Pleasant. The excitement around the possibilities of science perhaps gaining momentum. "It empowers children in a way to believe they can make a difference," she said.

## TOYS

*continued from page 3*

"I've built a relationship with Nick and Lisa Carter, the parents of Trent Carter," Maxwell said. "They just wanted to give back. Although this had not been the intention to give specifically back to Breckenridge, this helps them to support a community that has supported them over the last few months."

That "feel good" component is central to Maxwell's woodshop class. Plus, it's proven itself to be a very practical course. Students learn machining and woodworking skills, making themselves employable. In just a few years, they've raised more than \$60,000 in materials and equipment. And in the last three months they've produced more than \$15,000 worth of product. Of course, they're giving most of that back to the community.

"I watch the joy of these little students opening these presents, and then I see the joy of my big students, after giving all their hard work, energy, and passion for building these things," Maxwell said. "It's a cherry on top."

For a grateful principal and 310 of his students, it's even better than that. "It definitely means more knowing that Mr. Maxwell and his team would think to give back to our community's students so they all could have a toy for Christmas," Fillwock said.

**Husqvarna**

**VIKING**

*Blending Colors  
Weaving Memories*

**Sapphire™ 930**

**SAVE  
HUNDREDS**

WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!

The advanced SAPPHERE™ 930 sewing machine, offers many features to assist and guide you throughout your sewing. A large sewing space allows you to manage really large projects, and threads are cut by the touch of a button, with the project still in the machine. Most settings are made by the machine itself based on what fabric or stitch you are using. All you have to do is focus on what you love! Sewing!

**User-friendly innovation**

- Free-motion sewing can be done with any stitch.
- A Start/Stop function makes it easy to sew with consistent speed without using the foot control.

**Exceptional capability**

- Large area to the right of the needle ensures wonderful sewing ease.
- Hundreds of 7mm stitches, specialty stitches and up to five font styles.

**Alma Sewing Center**

301 E. Superior St. • Alma • 989-463-3200

Check website for classes - [almasewingcenter.com](http://almasewingcenter.com)

**UNLIMITED GOLF FOR 2 YEARS**

*51st Year Anniversary Membership Special*

UNLIMITED GOLF  
FOR ONLY

**\$89\***

Membership based on 2 years  
with a \$10/year admin fee

Please go to  
[www.hiddenoaksgolfmichigan.com](http://www.hiddenoaksgolfmichigan.com)  
to enroll now!

**CALL FOR MORE DETAILS  
(989) 824-1274**

**HIDDEN OAKS GOLF COURSE**  
1270 W Monroe Road, St. Louis, MI 48880

\*Valid Monday to Sunday. Membership based on two years.