



Lakeshore Advantage Receives 2026 Recognition of Excellence for Entrepreneurial Development from the International Economic Development Council

HOLLAND, Mich. – Lakeshore Advantage received a 2026 Excellence in Economic Development Silver Medal Award from the [International Economic Development Council](#) (IEDC) for its Next Center project in downtown Holland. The award recognizes Lakeshore Advantage in the Entrepreneurial & Small Business Development category for communities with populations of 200,000 to 500,000. **Nora Vandenbrink**, vice president of entrepreneurship, will accept the award on behalf of Lakeshore Advantage at the IEDC 2026 Annual Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, October 25–28.

Developed by Lakeshore Advantage, the Next Center is a three-story hub for innovation, entrepreneurship and regional collaboration designed to strengthen the support system for founders and small businesses in the Lakeshore region. The center brings together Lakeshore Advantage, the economic development organization for Ottawa and Allegan counties, and its SURGE program under one roof, while also connecting startups, business leaders, educators, investors and community partners. These intentional connections between emerging companies and established employers help shape the region's future economy.

It serves as the home of [SURGE](#), Lakeshore Advantage's startup and high-growth business support program which assists more than 50 startups a year with meaningful business connections, programmatic support, mentorship and navigation.

"Lakeshore Advantage is leading with excellence in the field of economic development with its Next Center project. This award shines a spotlight on Lakeshore Advantage's commitment to its community and showcases the significant impact of economic development," said **Nathan Ohle**, IEDC President and CEO. "IEDC is honored to present this award to Lakeshore Advantage to celebrate their leadership and innovation in the field."

Each year, IEDC honors economic development organizations, government entities, initiatives, and programs that consistently demonstrate excellence in the field. The honorees lead transformational projects that revitalize communities and advance the practice of economic development.

"The Next Center was created to make entrepreneurship more visible, accessible and connected in our region," said VandenBrink. "By bringing startups, small businesses, mentors, investors and economic development partners together under one roof, we are building a stronger support system for founders and helping grow the next generation of primary employers along the Lakeshore. This recognition from IEDC affirms the power of that collaborative approach and the community commitment behind it."

This year's awards take on special meaning, as IEDC celebrates its 100th anniversary. In recognizing excellence in economic development, IEDC and its partners are celebrating

successes and shining a spotlight on programs that inspire and prepare the field for the next century of economic development.

About Lakeshore Advantage

Lakeshore Advantage is the economic development organization for Allegan and Ottawa Counties in West Michigan. Since 2003, it has supported the growth of primary employers—ranging from startups to global corporations—by solving economic challenges and fostering long-term regional prosperity. Learn more at www.lakeshoreadvantage.com.

About the International Economic Development Council (IEDC): Based in Washington, D.C., IEDC is the world's largest association for economic developers. Originating a century ago, IEDC is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization that represents the entire economic development profession. Members include practitioners in economic development through local, state, provincial, and federal governments, non-profits, public-private partnerships, entrepreneurial support organizations, chambers of commerce, utilities, universities, and a variety of other organizations.

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