

**News Release**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
August 19, 2019

Media Contacts: Cash Cook, Executive Director  
Kalkaska DDA  
231-258-9191  
ddadir@kalkaskavillage.com

Mike Allison, President  
Village of Mancelona  
231-587-8331  
mjallison@gmail.com

---

## **New Website and Social Media Encourage You to “Explore 131 North”**

NORTHWEST LOWER, MI – A new website and social media campaign will encourage people to “Explore 131 North.” The website, [explore131north.org](http://explore131north.org), is part of an effort by several northern Michigan communities located along the US-131 highway to collaborate on tourism promotions, branding, and economic development in the hopes of bringing more visitors and business opportunities to the corridor.

Explore 131 North is a grassroots initiative established in 2016 that is spearheaded by government and community leaders from several key communities along US-131, including Cadillac, Manton, Fife Lake, Kalkaska, Mancelona, Boyne Valley, Walloon Lake, and Petoskey. Early on, the group teamed up with the community development agency Networks Northwest for planning and facilitation assistance.

As a backbone in the region, US-131 struggles with a lack of economic opportunity in many of its smaller rural communities—particularly compared to larger waterfront cities along the coast. Having experienced some of the same community issues, they have realized that working together to promote the region will help more than competing individually. After laying the organizational groundwork, Explore 131 North is now ready to launch their marketing efforts for tourism along the corridor.

While some communities have chambers of commerce or visitor bureaus, others lack those resources, so earlier this year the group contracted with Bit Social Media. The digital marketing firm based in Cadillac will create and manage a strategic online campaign to reach new audiences and bring new visitors to the area.

(MORE)

“We have been very pleasantly surprised to discover all the unique characteristics within each of the communities over the last several months,” said Lindsey Westdorp, Owner at Bit Social Media. “We’re excited to be able to share a variety of these assets on behalf of the group knowing that it will have a direct impact on their growth and economic progress.”

The new [explore131north.org](http://explore131north.org) website and an active social media presence will both be supported by paid digital advertising as well as branded print assets. These strategic campaigns will work to hyper target audiences throughout Michigan and beyond in order to bring in new visitors. Features of the website include a travel blog, featured lodging, dining, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and signature events – all of which highlight the great places to visit that are typically known only to locals.

After the efforts to promote tourism have launched, the group will then be working specifically on a second phase - economic development. “There are so many reasons not to just visit these towns, but then come back and buy a house or start a business as well. We can’t wait to share what we already know with others who have never slowed down or stopped to explore these smaller towns,” said Westdorp.

The Explore 131 North initiative arose out of the US-131 economic development strategy, “A Framework for Growth & Investment along the US-131 Corridor”. Created in 2016, the report states, “The mix of manufacturing and tourism industries within the region provides opportunities for a thriving year-round economy that leverages a high quality of place to attract new industry.”

# # #

NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by e-mailing Dan Boss at [dan.boss@networksnorthwest.org](mailto:dan.boss@networksnorthwest.org) and stating preferences for resolution (300 dpi?), file format (.tif? .jpg?) and file size (1MB or less?). Or, phone (231) 929-5047. Check our online Media Room at: [networksnorthwest.org/media](http://networksnorthwest.org/media)

Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10 county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works, Small Business Development Center, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities’ requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our web site, [networksnorthwest.org](http://networksnorthwest.org) Networks Northwest’s member counties are: Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.