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EXPERIENCE GRAND RAPIDS HIRES VP OF MULTICULTURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
New leadership position designed to foster a stronger, more welcoming market for diverse businesses, travelers, conventions and talent

Grand Rapids, Mich. – Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR) has hired Angela Nelson as vice president of multicultural business development for the destination marketing organization. Nelson was selected from a pool of more than 1,000 candidates as part of a nationwide search conducted by Management Business Solutions.

The position will have three primary responsibilities:

- Develop and oversee a Supplier Diversity Program that connects local minority business owners with the growing convention and leisure travel industry in West Michigan.
- Work with the EXGR sales and marketing teams to promote West Michigan as a welcoming, multicultural destination for both leisure and meeting/convention business.
- Develop strategic partnerships at the local and state level to attract diverse talent to the region with the goal of creating management opportunities for minorities in the hospitality industry.

"This hire is mission driven," said Doug Small, president and CEO of Experience Grand Rapids. "It's about growing our local economy through leisure and business travel, but it's also about being more intentional in the way we do that. Whether it's in the vendors we use, the groups we attract to the region or the talent we seek, we have made a commitment to be more welcoming and inclusive in our approach."

Nelson's hiring is a clear example of a commitment EXGR made to embracing inclusion initiatives when its Board established the Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC) in 2015. Eva Aguirre Cooper, community affairs director at WOOD-TV8 and chair of the DAC, and Joe Jones, president and CEO of the Grand Rapids Urban League and a member of the DAC, both served on the search committee.

"This is an important strategic hire for the growth of EXGR and our region," said Aguirre Cooper. "We are thrilled to find someone with Angela's experience and regional knowledge."

When outlining the responsibilities of the new position, the DAC identified several additional attributes it felt were essential in the new hire, including experience in sales, marketing, community engagement and collaboration.

"EXGR's vision for this position is that it will cultivate new convention bookings and create local minority business opportunities while embracing diversity, both within and outside our community," said Jones.

“Angela will help connect visitors to local businesses and develop partnerships that will create new career pathways for minorities in the hospitality industry.”

Grand Rapids has built incredible momentum in attracting leisure travelers and new conventions and meetings in recent years, resulting in seven consecutive years of growth in Kent County hotel occupancy and revenues. But EXGR leadership has its sights set even higher. It recently partnered with Grand Action on a Destination Asset Study, which identified potential growth and expansion opportunities that would make our region even more desirable to convention planners.

“The biggest benefactor of diversity is innovation,” said Small. “The best ideas come when diverse individuals collaborate. That’s what we’re trying to accomplish here.”

Nelson earned her undergraduate degree from Grand Valley State University and master’s in business administration from Michigan State University. She will start in the newly created position on March 19.

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About Experience Grand Rapids

Established in 1927, Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR) leads the marketing of Grand Rapids/Kent County as a premier convention & visitor destination providing a significant positive impact to the West Michigan economy. Previously named the Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau, EXGR represents the second largest city in Michigan with over one million residents.