



Beyond the Metrics

SmartZone and SBSH Client Impact



Two Paths. One Mission.

For too long, economic development has been split in two: Innovation and Small Business. Innovation is for the labs, small business is for the locals.

At Headwaters North, we don't see it that way. A coffee shop owner expanding their roastery is just as bold as the engineering prototyping their new sensor.

Our mission is to provide capital, connections, and coaching to help startups scale and small businesses thrive.

Hear how Headwaters North's mission translates into success right from our Smart Zone and Small Business Support Hub clients!



From the CEO, Nikki Storey

At Headwaters North, we back the bold. The entrepreneurs and small businesses of the Eastern UP don't wait for perfect conditions – they build, they adapt, and they push forward with grit that defines this region.

The stories and metrics in this booklet paint a clear picture: when you invest in people who refuse to quit, the return is real. Capital unlocked. Grants deployed. Businesses growing in places too often overlooked. Every number reflects someone who took a risk – and a community that's stronger because of it.

Our mission is simple: stand behind the doers. The builders. The bold. And this proves what happens when we do.

Thank you for believing in this work and in the grit of the Eastern UP.

Nikki Storey, CEO



Visit our website and
learn more about
Headwaters North



SMARTZONE CLIENT STORIES

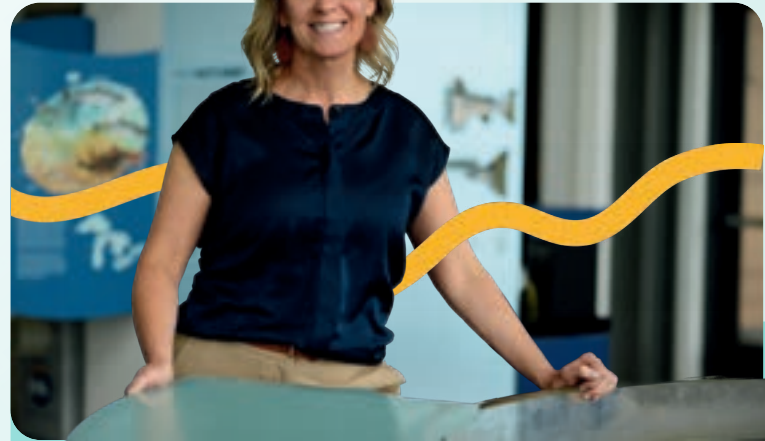
Name: Dr. Ashley Moerke

Business: LSSU's Center for Freshwater Education and Research (CFRE)

Client: SmartZone

Fostering Innovation and Research for the Blue Economy

Dr. Ashley Moerke is helping position Center for Freshwater Research and Education as a growing leader in freshwater innovation and applied environmental research. Through a strong partnership with the SmartZone and Headwaters North, CFRE is helping connect research, student innovation, entrepreneurship, and commercialization opportunities across the Eastern Upper Peninsula. Together, they have supported initiatives like the Innovation Fellow program and expanded collaboration between researchers, industry leaders, and economic development partners to help turn freshwater technology and research into real economic opportunities for the region.



From Dr. Moerke

”By expanding access to real-time, distributed water quality data, MiWaterNet enables a low-cost, earlier detection solution for environmental changes and more informed watershed management. Through connections to industry, sustainability networks, and academic partners supported by Headwaters North, this work can move more effectively from research into applied use.

DIVING DEEPER INTO CFRE

CFRE's Role in Freshwater Innovation and the Blue Economy

The Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE) is home to a modern Water Quality Lab built for one purpose: advancing the future of freshwater. From tracking ecosystem health to supporting community, industry, and research partners, the lab turns scientific expertise into real-world impact. CFRE's team provides high-quality water analysis, data interpretation, and research support that help protect the Great Lakes, guide smart decision-making, and fuel new ideas in freshwater technology and stewardship. It's where environmental science meets innovation, and where the next breakthroughs in water quality, resilience, and sustainability begin.

What You'll Find at CFRE

CFRE offers access to modern lab space, versatile equipment, and skilled experts who help turn freshwater questions into actionable insights. Together, these tools create a collaborative environment where science and innovation move from concept to real-world impact.



DISCOVER MORE ABOUT CFRE HERE! →



SBSH CLIENT STORIES



Name: Scott LaBonte

Business: Famous Soo Locks Boat Tours

Client: Small Business Support Hub

Providing the Resources, Enhancing Accessibility

Scott LaBonte has proudly led Famous Soo Locks Boat Tours since 2022, continuing a beloved local tradition that has connected visitors to the St. Marys River since 1959. Through the SBSH program, Scott secured funding for a state-of-the-art video system that enhances accessibility by streaming upper-deck views to screens on the lower level, ensuring every guest can enjoy the full Great Lakes experience. With offerings like ASL-supported tours, live music “Sip and Sail” cruises, and seasonal themed events. Scott and his crew are committed to creating safe, inclusive, and memorable experiences for the entire community.

From Scott LaBonte

” The SBSH grant application process was quick, easy, and backed by plenty of helpful guidance when needed. Because of that support, Famous Soo Locks Boat Tours was able to install a cutting-edge video system that has significantly improved accessibility and taken our guest experience to the next level.

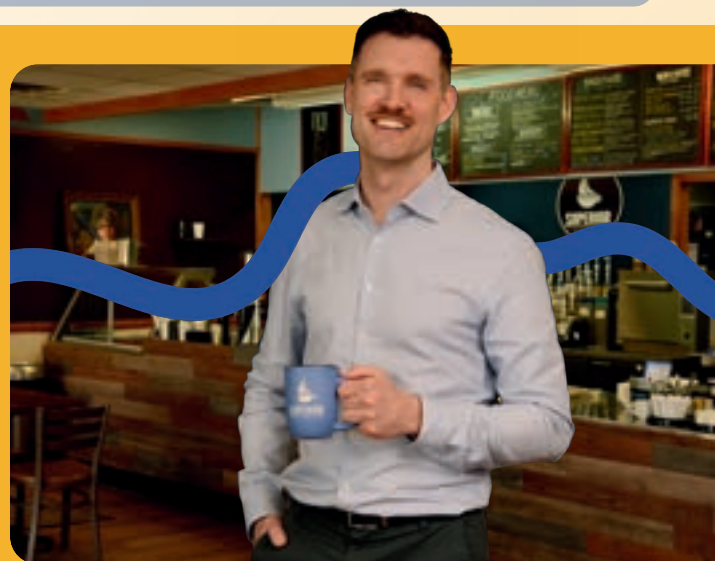
Name: Ron Kurnik

Business: Superior Coffee Roasting Co.

Client: Small Business Support Hub

Ensuring Smooth Operations and Protecting Products

Superior Coffee Roasting Co. has become a staple in the Sault, known for its expertly roasted coffee and strong community roots. Through support from the Small Business Support Hub (SBSH), Ron secured funding for a synchronized triple-battery backup system, ensuring operations can continue smoothly during power outages and protecting the roasting process from costly disruptions. Despite challenges like rising commodity prices and 2025 tariffs, Superior Coffee has continued to adapt by streamlining operations at LSSU’s Considine Hall café and launching a new website to better serve local customers. Ron and his team’s resilience and passion for quality coffee continue to make them a favorite across the region.



From Ron Kurnik

” Power outages used to mean lost inventory, safety risks, and chaos. Not anymore. The SBSH grant funded a backup battery system that keeps Superior Coffee running no matter what — and that peace of mind is priceless.



Name: Dave Goudreau

Business: Northern Wings

Client: Small Business Support Hub

Supporting Veteran and Tribal Businesses

Northern Wings' owner, Dave is a native of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and a graduate of Lake Superior State University. Retiring after 24 years in the U.S. military, having served in the infantry and as a helicopter pilot in the Marine Corps, he came back to the U.P. to start Northern Wings. Northern Wings is a veteran-owned and Native American-owned aerospace manufacturing company quietly making a global impact from Newberry, MI. Focusing on highly

specialized aerospace, the company is known for its precision, innovation, and long-term industry partnerships. With support from the EUP SBSH grant program, two team members recently became certified quality inspectors, strengthening Northern Wings' in-house expertise and competitive edge. Their work now reaches far beyond the U.P., including components featured on two Blue Origin satellites headed to Mars. Northern Wings was recently recognized as Veteran-Owned Business of the Year by Michigan Works!, proving that world-class innovation and leadership can thrive in rural areas.

From David Gordeau

” Two newly certified quality inspectors. Sharper skills, stronger team – made possible by the SBSH program. Working with Miche made the whole process seamless. Northern Wings is flying higher because of this support.

Name: Rachel Hanna-McDermott

Business: Tri-County Business Center

Client: Small Business Support Hub

Enhancing Legacy Family Businesses

Tri County Building Centers continues to be a trusted cornerstone of the Upper Peninsula's construction and home improvement industry, serving communities through multiple locations and expert cabinet design services. With support from an SBSH direct grant, the company upgraded to a new all-in-one printer, copier, and scanner system, significantly improving office efficiency and streamlining daily operations. The investment has allowed the team to spend less time managing outdated equipment and more time focusing on customer service and supporting building projects across the region.



From Rachel Hanna-McDermott

” Thanks to this grant, we've drastically improved our print operations. Managing our business workflows and customer documents is more efficient than ever, and the team sees the benefits. It has been a catalyst for ongoing updates to our information systems infrastructure.

SMARTZONE CLIENT STORIES

Name: Grant Riley
Business: SimplMobility
Client: SmartZone

Engaging Students to Solve Real Problems with Real Solutions

Grant Riley is the founder of SimplMobility, a tool designed to support post-concussion recovery through guided mobility and breathwork routines. A former Lake Superior State University (LSSU) goaltender, Grant was inspired to build the platform after a career-ending concussion reshaped his own recovery journey. With support from the SmartZone and Headwaters North partnership, he has advanced through customer discovery, commercialization planning, and early-stage business development, turning lived experience into a scalable health tech solution while contributing to the region's growing innovation ecosystem.



From Grant Riley

” Headwaters has provided the support and guidance that has helped in developing both the plan and execution toward getting Simplmobility in front of the proper customers. They have been very helpful in their direction to push this forward!



Name: Nick Huyck
Business: Nature's Acres Organic
Client: SmartZone.

Innovating with Families

Nick Huyck is turning practical experience into innovation through Nature's Acre Organics. With support from the SmartZone and Headwaters North, Nick transformed a backyard experiment into a growing business focused on specialized soil blends designed for northern growing conditions. Through testing, branding, commercialization planning, and a provisional patent process, the SmartZone helped move the idea from concept to market-ready innovation, highlighting the region's growing culture of entrepreneurship and locally driven solutions.

From Nick Huyck

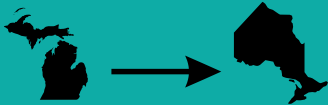
” Growing up on a farm, I have had my hands in dirt my entire life. With the ever-growing demand for better soil, not just synthetic inputs, we see a real opportunity to bring quality home gardening soils to market. I am very grateful for all of the help from Headwaters North in realizing I could take an idea and a dream and mold it into a marketable idea.

SBSH and Headwaters: Turning Up Results

BOLD RESULTS: SMART ZONE

BOLD GATEWAY

Developing innovation that crosses Michigan/Ontario border in the **Sault twin cities**



BOLD SECTORS

EUP'S SIX sectors of resource-powered innovation

Outdoor Recreation

Blue Economy

Air Mobility



Skilled Trades

Energy

Natural Resources

BOLD STRATEGY

Four-part strategy for Headwaters North

Innovate

Accelerate

Connect

Strengthen

BOLD VISION

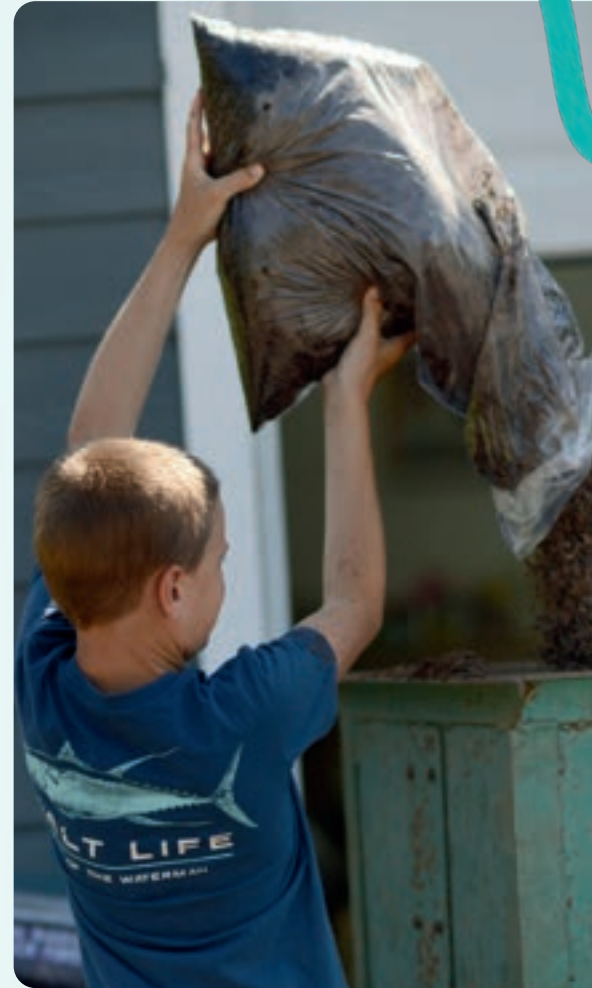
Establish Sault Ste. Marie as:



A national force in **innovation**



A resource-powered hub where **natural assets, applied research, and entrepreneurial grit** converge



REAL RESULTS: SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT HUB

REAL GRANTS

\$415,846

DOLLARS DEPLOYED TO 89 EUP SMALL BUSINESSES

REAL REACH

316   

BUSINESSES SUPPORTED ACROSS 3 EUP COUNTIES

REAL ROI

8.84X 

RETURN ON EVERY DOLLAR OF SBSH GRANT DEPLOYED

REAL CAPITAL

\$3,670,000

DOLLARS ACCESSED BY SBSH-SUPPORTED EUP BUSINESSES



HEADWATERS NORTH

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WE BACK THE **BOLD.**