

Meet the Speakers

Friday, March 15, 2024

(Listed in Presentation Order)

Darlene King-NDCCDP, Executive Director, Michigan Diversity Council
9:15 AM – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)



Darlene King, NDCCDP began her career with the Michigan Diversity Council-MIDC, a division of the National Diversity Council, in 2015. As the executive director, her charge is working with corporations and organizations in developing diversity and inclusion initiatives, programs, processes, and procedures. She also oversees the growth of the council in the area of business development, consulting and training and development throughout the entire state of Michigan as well as nationally.

Prior to her tenure with the MIDC, she held the role of director of events, consultant services, training and development for all 34 school districts under the Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency for over 10 years. Her territory covered implementation and execution of all workshops and conference as well as maintaining CEU's for teachers and administrators within Wayne County MI. She managed more than 60 consultants as well as county-wide, signature events such as the Teacher Job Fair, County K-12 Art Fair and the Cultural Collaborative for Learning. Darlene was also an inaugural member of the Diversity Strategic Planning Committee, which rolled out a county-wide diversity plan for all districts.

Darlene's background is widespread. She spent six years as a national concert promoter, traveling around the world with some of today's most popular artists in the industry. She has produced and promoted shows at every concert venue in Detroit and beyond.

In 2008, she launched her consulting company, Life's Journey Training and Consulting. Competing in today's global market, Life's Journey offers services in industries ranging from education to automotive, medical, non-profits and manufacturing. Its area of expertise consists of diversity and inclusion, leadership development, marketing, and public relations. Life's Journey has provided service deliverables to Wayne County Head Start Programs, Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency, The Order of the Fisherman, The Detroit Medical Center, Revival Home Health Care, RTM Music Group, Real Times Media, Stonecrest Behavioral Health, Detroit Area Agency on Aging, Universal Studios, Detroit Community Schools, MASCO Corporation, Diversity Lansing and many more.

Darlene is a native of Michigan and enjoys spending time with her family, nephews and niece. She says her faith in God, family, passion for people and her love of traveling and gardening are the drivers which keep her on a Life's Journey. Darlene has a passion for people and earned a bachelor's degree in public relations and marketing from Wayne State University in Detroit. She has been operating in this capacity as well as in education and organizational development for 25 years. Darlene earned her National Certification as a Certified Diversity and Inclusion Professional in 2018.

Colleen Kuehnel, Benefit Plan and Education Manager, MERS
10:45 AM – Retirement Plan Options: What's the Best and What's a Bust for Your Municipality

Colleen Kuehnel is an industry expert with over 20 years' experience in the various benefit programs available to public sector employees. Colleen manages the MERS benefit plan advisors who partner with Michigan municipalities to design comprehensive benefit strategies necessary to support a secure retirement for their employees, including retirement plans, group life and disability insurances, and other post-employment benefit programs. In addition, she oversees the benefit education specialists who provide in-person and virtual guidance to public sector workers who need to make the most of their benefits packages and supplemental savings options. Colleen believes that engaging employees begins during recruitment and is a career-long endeavor that, when done successfully, enables both employers and employees to achieve their financial goals. Colleen has a Bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and holds a Life and Health Insurance license.

Ryan Woodward, Account Manager / Shareholder, Clemans, Nelson & Associates, Inc.
1:30 PM – Workplace Investigations: Preparation and Potential Roadblocks

Ryan P. Woodward joined Clemans Nelson in 2017, and is now an Account Manager and Shareholder. He represents clients in areas of labor relations, contract negotiation, discipline, wage surveys, and other human resources and management issues. Ryan earned dual BA degrees in Applied Communications and Philosophy from Asbury College and his Juris Doctorate from the University of Maine School of Law, where he was the Managing Editor of the Ocean and Coastal Law Journal. Prior to his legal education, he worked in finance and in law enforcement.