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**CONSUMERS ENERGY FOUNDATION AWARDS AN ADDITIONAL \$200,000  
FOR GRANTS BY VENTURE NORTH TO SMALL BUSINESSES AFFECTED BY COVID-19**

**TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN** – The Consumers Energy Foundation has awarded an additional \$200,000 to the Regional Resiliency Program (RRP), created in 2020 by Venture North Funding and Development, to award grants to help small businesses with nine or fewer employees help power through the COVID pandemic. Since May 2020, the Foundation has now awarded \$450,000 to aid small businesses in Venture North’s ten-county region.

“While we join others in cautious optimism about a COVID-19 recovery, we know businesses are still struggling from the worst pandemic in more than a century,” said Brandon Hofmeister, president of the Consumers Energy Foundation. “The RRP is enabling us to invest in a powerful way, at the ground level, with communities, business owners, and employees to work toward recovery together.”

“The Consumers Energy Foundation is doing what it did in 2020 when it granted an initial \$200,000 enabling us to form the Regional Resiliency Program that rapidly converts philanthropic giving ranging from Foundations of all sizes to individuals seeking ways to help small businesses in their home town survive,” said Laura Galbraith, President of Venture North that administers the RRP. “We want to thank the Foundation on behalf of thousands of small businesses in our ten-county Northwest Michigan region that are battling COVID to recover and will soon be able to apply for grants up to \$5,000 through the RRP. We are planning our first grant round for this year in April 2021 and more news will be available soon.”

Galbraith said that over \$500,000 in charitable contributions to Venture North was allocated in grants to over 200 small businesses in 2020, enabling response to both urgent needs as well as priorities to shift business operations to market and sell within the limitations of the COVID pandemic. She said local organizations like community foundations and the Industrial Development Corporation in Manistee had the crucial partnering role of reviewing grant applications and recommending funding that were followed in making small business grants. Venture North is a nonprofit, 501c3 organization and the only certified Community Development Financial Institution located in northwest Michigan. More information about the RRP can be found at [www.venturenorthfunding.com](http://www.venturenorthfunding.com).