



**PRESS RELEASE**  
*For Immediate Release*

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**WEST MICHIGAN SPORTS COMMISSION EXPANDS TEAM, HIRING FUNDRAISING EXPERT BARBARA BENDA AS DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, COURTNEY MINER AS STATE GAMES EVENT COORDINATOR**

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., March 27, 2024 – The [West Michigan Sports Commission](#) (WMSC) is bolstering its team as it continues fundraising for the Meijer Sports Complex expansion, hiring fundraising expert Barbara Benda to fill a new position as director of development. The WMSC also hired Courtney Miner as event coordinator of the [Meijer State Games of Michigan](#), the commission’s signature event that embodies the values of participation, sportsmanship and healthy living among Michigan residents.

“Adding Barbara Benda in the newly created role of director of development is critical to the growth of the West Michigan Sports Commission,” said WMSC President Mike Guswiler. “Her extensive fundraising and development experience will be instrumental in not only helping us reach our \$11 million fundraising goal for the Meijer Sports Complex expansion, but also in growing our Victory Lap Community Fund established to impact local sports programming that supports underserved communities. We are also excited to add Courtney Miner to our State Games of Michigan team, who brings relevant sports marketing experience.”

**Barbara Benda Hired as Director of Development**

The WMSC hired Barbara Benda as director of development, starting March 11. In this newly created position, Benda will focus primarily on supporting the \$11 million [“Winning Streak for West Michigan” expansion campaign](#) for the Meijer Sports Complex and on overall development work for the WMSC.

Bringing 25-plus years of fundraising experience, Benda comes to the WMSC after seven years at Ferris State University, where she was executive director of leadership giving and relationships and then added the role of associate director of the Ferris Foundation. As a professional fundraiser, her work also includes the Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital Foundation and Habitat for Humanity of Kent County. Benda is a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) and received her bachelor’s degree from Northern Michigan University.

“Joining the West Michigan Sports Commission as director of development, I am excited about creating opportunities to enrich lives and develop partnerships in our community through sports. I am honored to contribute to the WMSC’s mission,” said Benda. “I was a hockey, lacrosse, and soccer mom for many years and thoroughly enjoyed watching my kids compete. I look forward to cheering on participants at the Meijer State Games and players at the Meijer Sports Complex, while knowing our work will sustain this activity and grow our economy.”

Benda lives in Rockford with her husband, Jay. She enjoys being outside and partaking in activities like paddle boarding, hiking and yoga.

**Courtney Miner Hired as Event Coordinator, State Games of Michigan**

Courtney Miner joined the WMSC in January as event coordinator for the Meijer State Games of Michigan, replacing Julie Shields who was promoted to director of the State Games in August.

A Detroit native, Miner moved to West Michigan to attend Grand Valley State University, where she received a bachelor's degree in sport management in 2019 and master's degree in communication in 2021, working as a GVSU Athletics sports marketing intern during her college career. Miner joined the WMSC from NCSA (Next College Student Athlete) College Recruiting, where she was a recruiting coordinator connecting middle and high school student-athletes with college coaches. She also was a member service representative and sports coach at YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, where she started in 2022 and still works part time today. Prior to that, she was a customer service team lead with rSchool Today, a sports management software platform that serves over 11,000 schools, districts, colleges and universities.

"The WMSC and State Games of Michigan have a large impact on the greater Grand Rapids community, and I'm so excited to be a part of it," said Miner. "Seeing the behind the scenes and collaboration that goes into planning events is so insightful and makes me excited to go into the office every day. I've been involved in sport my entire life in some capacity, but being a part of this team will be the most rewarding experience in my career so far."

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***About the West Michigan Sports Commission (WMSC)***

The non-profit [West Michigan Sports Commission](#) (WMSC) identifies, secures and hosts youth and amateur sporting events to positively impact the economy and quality of life in the region. Since its inception in 2007, the WMSC has booked 1,216 sporting events and tournaments attracting more than 2.1 million athletes and visitors, generating over \$649 million in estimated economic impact. Visit [westmisports.com](#), [Facebook.com/WestMichiganSportsCommission](#) and @westmisports on Twitter and Instagram for more information.