

NORTHERN INITIATIVES

Marquette, MI



OVERVIEW

Northern Initiatives is a nonprofit lender headquartered in Marquette with offices throughout Michigan. Northern Initiatives is celebrating 30 years of providing loans and business services to entrepreneurs and small business owners who create jobs and help their communities thrive.

Knowing that one of the best ways to build generational wealth is through business ownership, Northern Initiatives has a mission to level the playing field in business ownership. We also know that small businesses build resilient communities, provide good jobs, and improve quality of life. Northern Initiatives' typical customer is one with strong growth prospects, but often has a limited track record, limited or insufficient collateral, and is cash constrained. What Northern Initiatives measures as compensating factors are character and cash flow. In 2022, that was reflected in the fact that 67% of our loans were to startups. But access to capital is only part of Northern Initiatives' mission. We also support our customers with training, education, and technology systems that we've been building for years. That's why we created Initiate, our online small business education platform with hundreds of interactive tools, templates, videos, and guides available in both English and Spanish.

THREE-YEAR IMPACT

- ▶ \$18.9 million in loans
- ▶ Financing provided to 226 businesses financed (72 minority-owned, 155 women-owned)
- ▶ Jobs created: 467 at businesses, 107 at tenant businesses
- ▶ 305,930 sq. ft. of commercial real estate

THIRTY YEAR IMPACT

- ▶ 1,706 loans totaling \$101.96 million
- ▶ 2,651 jobs created, 4,406 jobs retained

NEWLYWEDS MAKE BUBBLE TEA DREAMS TRUE

Kaila and Daniel Ball, newly married during the pandemic, had dreams of something fresh, away from metro Detroit. Before they left the Great Lakes State, they decided to take "one last trip" to the Upper Peninsula. They're still there. And Marquette is losing its mind over Blossom Bird Bubble Tea.

"This shop opening up is one of the best things to happen to the Marquette area," Sam Benedict wrote on Facebook. "My girlfriend and I make a point to go here once a week. We both love it. The staff is amazingly kind and friendly. The drinks are always great. The atmosphere is always cheerful and inviting."

"Everything about this business is an extension of us," Daniel Ball said. "We're passionate and we're sharing that." Bubble tea, a drink that originated in Taiwan, is the star, but the supporting cast includes milk teas, boba lemonade, flavored iced teas, and a selection of clever and yummy baked goods. Kaila is the baker and wishes she could do more of it; she also makes custom cakes but is limiting orders for now. Turning a former fitness center into an airy and inviting café was hard work – and expensive. Daniel "kept working and I Googled," Kaila laughed, and they admitted they weren't aware of all the resources they could have tapped into.

A local bank, which wouldn't loan to a startup business, recommended Northern Initiatives. "This wouldn't be possible without Northern Initiatives," Daniel said. "It paid for the plumbing. The Northern Initiatives loan was the last chunk of money we needed to complete the whole project," he said. "We were at a point where we had everything taken care of except for redoing the plumbing in the building so we could actually hook up all of our sinks and ice machine. The money we had already secured was spent on all the appliances and other startup costs, and we were left faced with a larger expense for the plumbing than we initially expected." Northern Initiatives got the water flowing and freezing, and Blossom Bird Bubble Tea opened in June 2021. After a successful first year in business, the Balls refinanced their SBA Microloan and consolidated other debt into a new SBA Fast Track Loan that closed in August 2022.