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New troops in brain-drain battle: Jewish Federation joins efforts to retain young adults

By [Sherri Welch](#)

Just three months ago, Jason Raznick was considering moving his fledgling financial market news and analysis service company [Benzinga.com](#) to Chicago so he could connect with potential employees.

“I knew there were knowledge workers here in Southeast Michigan, but it's hard to find them,” Raznick said.

“In Chicago, when I go downtown, I know I'll see people I'm used to seeing. In Detroit, there's not a recognized area where young people congregate.”

A friend told Raznick that before he made the move he should talk with the **Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit**, which in February hired another young professional, Jordan Wolfe, to develop ways to connect internally and to stop brain drain.

That effort — dubbed CommunityNext — aims to connect young adults with job and internship opportunities and create a lifestyle attractive to young adults, making Detroit a place they want to live, work and play.

Wolfe connected Raznick to a number of local IT professionals he'd met through personal networking, and to subsidized office space for a year provided by the **Farbman Group** in its Bingham Farms building.

Raznick, a metro Detroit native who earned his bachelor's degree in business from the **University of Michigan** — and eight employees — are now moving into the new office space for [Benzinga.com](#).

He expects to hire three to six marketing and IT professionals for entry-level positions over the next couple of months.

He's also looking for candidates interested in finance to write about stock performance for the company's website, www.benzinga.com.

The site, which began operating in January, attracted more than 825,000 unique visitors

in April, Raznick said.

“The driving force to stay in Michigan was ... CommunityNext (which) helped me ... realize that there is this exciting community of young people who are enthusiastic about growing young companies that I didn't know existed before,” said Raznick, 32.

Keeping Raznick and his company in metro Detroit is just the beginning of what Wolfe and the Jewish Federation hope to accomplish with CommunityNext, an effort that has already attracted contributions in the “hundreds of thousands of dollars,” Wolfe said, declining to give an exact figure.

Wolfe is leading a multi-pronged effort to not only connect young Jewish adults with the Jewish Federation's programs but also, ultimately, to connect young adults across the region through a central website expected to launch this fall.

*Wolfe, 27, moved to San Francisco from Michigan to take a job with private equity firm **Mainsail Partners** after earning a degree in finance from **Indiana University**.*

He returned last year. While still working for Mainsail, he launched **Uwemp L.L.C.**, now beta testing software that provides an academic framework to help university students learn.

To launch his company and those of a couple of friends, he rented the Royal Oak Music Theatre and invited organizations including the **New Economy Initiative**, **Ann Arbor Spark** and **Bizdom U**. He also spread the word through social networking sites, which helped attract 800 people to the event.

At the Jewish Federation, one of Wolfe's initial projects was an informal survey of about 200 young adults in the region.

Respondents said they were looking for job opportunities at fun places to work, and more social and cultural events geared to their age group.

“They're very hungry for dynamic programming and meeting people from different cultures — the things you get in larger cities like New York, Chicago and San Francisco,” Wolfe said. “Those are definitely missing here.

“What it really comes down to is if we had an urban core and public transportation infrastructure, that would be a big help,” he said.

Wolfe acknowledges efforts by other business and community groups to put in place the right spaces and amenities to attract and keep young adults in the region.

“The problem is that the way they communicate and deliver these programs is not digitally centric — it's not branded and offered in places where young people will look and relate to,” he said.

To make it easier for young people to connect, he's creating a website that plans to aggregate those resources in one place.

Also in the past few months, Wolfe launched “Come Play Detroit,” an intramural sports league for young adults, with two basketball leagues and a kickball league. He plans to add bowling, volleyball and dodge ball. More than 400 young adults have registered.

He's also planning a gala with an around-the-world theme as a way to get young adults together and to highlight different cultures.

Another part of the CommunityNext effort is a job and internship portal.

But the Jewish Federation isn't looking to reinvent concepts already in play, Wolfe said.

It's talking with the **Detroit Regional Chamber**, for example, about its Intern in Michigan website launched last year.

As the CommunityNext effort progresses, it's important that the Jewish Federation is aware of everything else going on in the region to attract and retain young professionals so that the efforts can complement each other, said Christianne Sims, director of **Fusion**, the young professionals group at the Detroit Regional Chamber and one of the co-conveners of the regional **Young Professional Leadership Council**.

In metro Detroit there are at least 40 young professional groups and publications, such as **Model D**, **Metromode** and **Metromix**, presenting social and local business information through websites, along with other intramural leagues and places where young professionals can network, Sims said.

“We don't want to continue to fragment ourselves and stretch ourselves too thin ... resources are (scarce).”

There is already a tremendous pool of young, energized talent in the region, said David Egner, executive director of the **New Economy Initiative** and president and CEO of the **Hudson-Webber Foundation**. The foundation has funded efforts to help attract and retain young talent.

As CommunityNext is doing, “we've got to put them in the forefront of all of the efforts under way. ... You can make things happen here — get involved here in ways you can't in cities like New York, Chicago and L.A.,” Egner said.

Sherri Welch: (313) 446-1694, swelch@crain.com