

## Small Business Profile: Caswell Studios

by Kate, Calvin, and Kimmie Holthrop



### Charlie & Ashleigh Caswell

Caswell Studios is a professional photography studio in the Lakes Mall, owned and run by U.S. Army Veteran Charlie Caswell and his wife, Ashleigh. Together the Caswells work to provide a comfortable, family-friendly environment in their studio.

Charlie's favorite aspects of Caswell Studios are making photographs that capture emotion, have purpose, show life, and tell a story. Building relationships with clients, and between clients and their families, through each photo shoot is also very important to him. Ashleigh loves being Charlie's second shooter, accompanying him on photo shoots for weddings and other events. She also enjoys working behind the scenes, designing custom books for clients and doing landscape photography.

The Caswells begin every photo session with a client questionnaire, which helps Charlie and Ashleigh capture each client's vision for what story they want their pictures to tell and where they want the session to take place. They have a variety of backdrops available along with many options for kids costumes and accessories for them to have fun during the session.

Having four children of their own, the Caswells have plenty of experience creating a kid-friendly, as well as parent-friendly, environment in their studio. During in-studio sessions, a TV with Disney Plus, Netflix and Prime is available along with coloring books to entertain children. These kid-centered features really help relieve parents' stress about photo shoots, since their children can take a quick break between pictures and have the comforts of home. "The parents think we're fantastic. They love that we turn on their kid's

favorite movie for them to watch in between pictures," Charlie said.

Caswell Studios offers five photography collections—starting with the Basic Collection up to the Caswell Collection. These include a variety of options to choose from, including metal, canvas, and framed prints, as well as keepsake boxes, photo albums, greeting cards, and digital images. Other products offered through the studio include photo prints on ornaments, coasters, playing cards, bag tags, mugs, blankets, key chains, and magnets. The Caswells also do photo restoration.

They have partnered with Entertain Zone located across from them in the mall. They offer \$25 off birthday mini sessions for anyone who has a birthday party at Entertain Zone. Along with partnering with Entertain Zone, Charlie and Ashleigh donate their time and photography skills to the community. They photograph the Fruitport High School Marching Band to provide the band with photo opportunities that are usually only available for the sports teams. 10% of all products purchased goes back to support the band. They also volunteer with Muskegon Pregnancy Services offering maternity and newborn mini-sessions for moms and babies at no cost.

Because of Charlie's military history, the Caswells work long hours to ensure that their military clients get quality family photos at a reasonable price. Around Christmas and New Year's the Caswells make special accommodations to those in the service. They understand how restrictive leave schedules can be and because of this they will open specially for them on the holiday. They also provide a 10% discount for photo sessions for veterans and military personnel all year long. A similar discount is available for portraits of service animals.

Along with their photography services, Caswell Studios has a goal to educate people in art and in the greater longevity of printed material rather than of digital files.

At their studio, the Caswells showcase the work of three other local photographers, a spray-paint artist and a watercolor artist. They plan to help the spray-paint artist get into teaching art classes. At some point, they hope to be involved in hosting an art show at the Lakes Mall, where local student-artists will be able to showcase and sell their work.

On their website, [www.caswellstudio.com](http://www.caswellstudio.com), you can find all of their current prices and products, as well as the work of artists they showcase.

## ROBERT J. BROWN, II, MD



Fruitport - Robert "Bob" James Brown, II, M.D., age 73, passed away peacefully on Thursday, October 13, 2022, in Muskegon, Michigan. Bob was born on April 4, 1949, in Hastings, Nebraska, to Robert James "Jim" and Elizabeth "Jean" Brown. He spent his youth in Nebraska, playing multiple sports

and graduating with honors from Westside High School in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1967. Bob earned his Bachelor of Science from Creighton University in 1971 and his Doctor of Medicine from the University of Nebraska Medical Center in 1975. After his residency, Bob settled with his family in the Muskegon area and established an internal medicine practice that he continued for 40 years until his retirement in 2017. When not serving his patients, Bob enjoyed hunting and fishing. Bob is survived by his mother, Elizabeth Jean Brown of Iowa City, Iowa; his wife, Susan Mary Brown of Fruitport, Michigan; his daughter Alexis (Peter) Brown Stokes, of Austin, Texas; his son, Michael Anderson Brown, of Briar Cliff Manor, New York; his stepsons, Jason (Kristen) Keefe of Summerville, South Carolina, and Chris (Tenille) Keefe of Ottawa, Canada; his siblings, John (Nonie) Brown of Barrington, Illinois, Jeanette (Don) O'Toole of Crestwood, Illinois, and Kathy (Brian) Leohr of Iowa City; his grandchildren, Madeleine, Olivia, and Amelia Stokes, Connor and Hayden Keefe, and London Keefe; and many extended family members as well. A visitation took place on Saturday, November 12 at The Lee Chapel of Sytsema Funeral & Cremation Services. Please share memories with the family and sign their online guestbook at [www.sytsemafh.com](http://www.sytsemafh.com). In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Salvation Army or the charity of your choice.

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## 'Weed' the People

### The less-than-perfect union between Michigan and marijuana

by Kate and Kimmie Holthrop



In 2008, Michigan voters legalized medical marijuana. In 2018, nearly 56% of voters approved Proposal 1, allowing people over 21 in Michigan to possess, use, sell, and grow recreational marijuana—also called pot, weed, or cannabis—and allowing the state to tax and regulate it. Within a year after the vote, about 82% of Michigan's municipalities, including Fruitport, opted out of Prop 1. According to a Bridge Michigan article, 1,378 Michigan communities are still opting out as of the end of 2022.

On the positive side, Michigan brings in a great amount of tax revenue from legal pot. In 2021, Michigan netted more than \$59.5 million in marijuana tax. Most of that money went to the Michigan Marijuana Fund, while some went to other programs. In 2022, the Marijuana Fund total reached \$198.4 million. Former CRA Executive Director Andrew Brisbo says that this funding goes to local governments and creates thousands of jobs, showing Michigan's leadership in the weed industry. In addition to financial benefits, cannabis has possible health benefits, such as treating chronic pain and symptoms of terminal illness.

However, there are negatives, including growing concerns about potency and unintended user abuse. Cannabis products are far more potent than ever before, with toxic side effects. And University of Michigan reported (May 2020, Injury Prevention Center) that 12- to 17-year-olds have a high addiction rate, indicating that children have easy access to pot. By 2021, 35.4% of young

adults between the ages of 18 and 25 (11.8 million Michigan residents) used marijuana in the past year. In 2022, 30.7% of 12th graders used marijuana in the past year and 6.3% used it daily.

Andrew Feather (May 9, 2019, CBS News Channel 3) reported that some people are being more compliant with rules on how much weed they carry with them. But the U of M study found that the number of cannabis-positive test results for drivers in fatal car crashes nearly tripled between 2004 and 2017, and in 2016 one in five suicide victims, and one in two homicide victims, who were tested were positive for marijuana. Additionally, Michigan State Police Lieutenant Derrick Carroll said in an interview with 9&10's Bill Froehlich, "We had an increase of 140% of total crashes with marijuana use... And a 430% increase in injury crashes involving cannabis use."

According to Feather, Kalamazoo police made many less cannabis-related arrests in 2019 than in previous years, and have been freed up to deal with the rising methamphetamine crisis. However, meth trafficking has increased as a result of legalized marijuana, since this is cutting into traffickers' pot profits. U of M reports that opioid use is also increasing as marijuana use increases, indicating the power of weed as a gateway drug.

In terms of the weed industry, more cannabis products are grown than consumers can use or retailers can sell, prompting price drops by retailers who want to move product, according to Andriana Ruscitto (February 14, 2023, Cannabis Business Times). Average cost of pot has dropped to \$90 per ounce, from \$180 in late 2021, even as demand sky-rockets.

Rick Thompson, on the consumer advisory committee for the CRA, warned of a quality decline in Michigan's weed products. "If the market price is so low that you can only produce lower quality in order to remain competitive, then that's what industry growth will do."

Additionally, the CRA's current director, Brian Hanna reports that, despite Michigan law, unlicensed weed that is not safety tested or tracked by the state, is being sold by traffickers and even by some licensed business owners. Under Hanna, the CRA disciplined 25 businesses with fines and license suspensions during September through November, 2022. In October, 2021, The House of

Mary Jane, a medical marijuana retailer in Detroit, had its license suspended and was fined \$75,000, after an inspection revealed "multiple bags, backpacks, and duffle bags of marijuana products that did not have the tracking identification numbers...attached," according to the CRA. The illegal pot was destroyed by the retailer before the CRA was able to confiscate it.

Another problem in the marijuana industry is "lab shopping," also called potency inflation. Since high potency drives the value of weed products in the current market, processors send multiple THC test samples to various labs, selecting the lab that gives the highest percentage results. In November, 2021, Viridis Laboratories, a lab that tests THC potency for almost 70% of marijuana products, came under scrutiny from the CRA, who recalled about \$229 million worth of Viridis' tested products. The CRA said the test results were unreliable, as the lab had passed cannabis that it later determined through retesting contained harmful pathogens. After a law suit by Viridis, a court ordered part of the recalled merchandise to be released for sale, prompting sharp price drops from flooded retailers.

Despite some positive aspects of the cannabis industry and its products, the question remains: Do the potential risks outweigh the potential benefits?

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Community Access Line of the Lakeshore

- A single dad wants to join a parent support group
- A nineteen year old college student seeks HIV testing
- A runaway teen needs a safe place to stay
- A working woman seeks adult day care for her elderly father and a caregiver support group for herself
- A senior citizen wants to volunteer
- A young family in financial crisis searches for budget counseling