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Jim Hettinger was born in Albion, Michigan. He is a graduate of Albion High School. He earned a B.A. and M.A. in Political Science from Western Michigan University. He then went on to the University of Missouri to pursue a Doctorate in Public Administration.

While pursuing studies, Jim worked as a Local Government Specialist for the University of Missouri's Governmental Affairs Program. He returned to the Battle Creek area in 1978 as the Marketing Director for Battle Creek Unlimited. In December of 1979, he was promoted to President and CEO of Battle Creek Unlimited. In January 2009, he retired but continues to serve in a consulting position.

Jim has written and published a book and numerous articles dealing with economic development. He is listed in the Who's Who of the Oxford Elite Professionals and was Governor Engler's first Economic Developer of the Year in 1995.

He is a certified instructor for the International Economic Development Council and has served as an Adjunct Professor at Western Michigan University and Michigan State University.

Jim enjoys Great Lakes history, photography, reading, and walking on the beach. It would be an understatement to call him an avid hockey fan.