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SIUE International Trade Center Contributes To Economic Growth

(EDWARDSVILLE, Ill.) When you're enjoying those blueberries on your cereal in November from Argentina, or you've been eating asparagus from Peru during these summer days, you can probably thank the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Illinois SBDC International Trade Center (ITC) and its associates, including the state of Illinois.

By the same token, several businesses in South America have benefited from companies in southern Illinois that are sending goods south of the border. Thanks again to the ITC, which coordinated travel earlier this year for some local shippers, farmers and manufacturers who went south for a trade mission.

The ITC, along with the state, has been helping pave the way for exporting for the past 25 years under the auspices of the SIUE School of Business. With the guidance of ITC Director Silvia Torres Bowman and her staff, the University's trade program has made a large contribution to economic growth throughout the Southern Illinois Region.

"The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), through its Latin America Office and our ITC, organized the Southern Illinois Trade Mission to the 'Southern Cone' to visit Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru for 12 days in March," Torres explained. "The mission was geared toward small to mid-sized companies seeking distribution channels and end-users in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru."

"Three companies and two organizations participated in this trade mission, four from Southern Illinois," Torres pointed out. "And, they made the trip at a much lower cost than they would have if they had done this on their own."

But, don't take her word for it. Talk to Larry Taylor from Mid-America Airport in St. Clair County. "We visited five cities and met with representatives of 40 companies," Taylor said.

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“The level of professionalism every step of the way was great.” His main goal was to provide a delivery and/or departure point for shipments to and from the U.S. and other countries. “Mid-America does a brisk business in air cargo shipping.”

Taylor said he had in-depth conversations with specialists in each country. “There was always a clear understanding of what we needed,” he said. “The 40 companies we met with fit our needs perfectly. I’ve been on these trade missions before and they have been less than 100 percent effective.

“But, the missions with the University’s ITC program and the state of Illinois’ trade offices are 110 percent effective.”

Pam Wildermuth, a sales-marketing representative for the B. Deo-Volente (BDi) Inc. in Galesburg, and Steve Gillis, president of BDi, agreed that the trip was very much worthwhile. “It was quite an experience.” Wildermuth said. This trip was one of the best things to happen to our business,” she said.

BDi makes stainless steel mesh screens that can be used in the ethanol industry, the sugar refining industry and in gold mining—all of these types of industries have operations in South America. “We’re planning a return trip to Brazil where we had interest in our product,” she said. “And, there’s a company in Peru interested, too.”

Lisa Stephens, assistant city manager and economic development director for the city of Greenville in Bond County, also attended the trade mission as a representative of businesses in Greenville. “I represented Buchheit’s (a home center store), which also manufactures farm equipment, Enertech Manufacturing, DeMoulin Bros. & Co., InBev as well as several other companies. “I was instructed what to ask and acted as a liaison for them with the businesses in South America.”

All participants said they were impressed at how much preparation the ITC and the state provided. “They did so much legwork beforehand that we immediately began meeting companies as soon as we arrived,” Stephens said. “We didn’t waste any time.”

Torres explained that the Illinois Foreign Trade and Investment Offices are located in Brussels, Belgium; Wanchai, Hong Kong; Warsaw, Poland; Johannesburg, South Africa; Mexico City, Mexico; Tokyo, Japan; Toronto, Canada; Shanghai, China; and Jerusalem, Israel. “The Illinois SBDC ITC at SIUE is a member of the Illinois Entrepreneurship Network in partnership with the Illinois Office of Trade and Investment,” she said.

“These relationships provide our clients access to foreign market experts, NAFTA trade specialists and international trade offices.”

The Illinois SBDC ITC can be reached at 618-650-2452 or via e-mail at International-Trade-Center@siue.edu. Their website is www.siue.edu/ITC.

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