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Trade Development Center Poised to Assist Local Businesses by Shirley Fogarino

The East Bay Center for International Trade Development (EBCITD), housed at Berkeley's Vista Community College and hosted by the Peralta Community College District, is poised to help launch small and mid-sized businesses into the profitable world of international business. Funded as an economic development project of the State Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges, Peralta, and Vista, its mandate is to serve small to mid-sized businesses in 14 community college districts located in Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa and Solano counties.



Dr. James Garrett is director of the East Bay Center for International Trade Development at Vista Community College.

“Our mission is to work with businesses to leverage public and private partnerships and direct sales, work with government, local chambers of commerce, and other economic development groups, and to guide and mentor local entrepreneurs toward international business prospects,” explained Dr. James Garrett, director of CITD and international student programs at Vista. “We provide free and low-cost counseling and mentoring to emerging and established small to mid-sized companies who want to expand overseas.”

Starting with Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley, and Albany, EBCITD plans to expand to other cities in the next year. “Many entrepreneurs think that international trade is beyond their scope,” Garrett said. “That is no longer true, especially today, when we live in a global economy.”

The U.S. Department of Commerce has categorized small business as those with yearly revenue of \$10 million, mid-sized businesses with annual incomes of up to \$100 million, and large businesses as those that generate more than \$100 million each year.

“Given California’s vital economic position in the Pacific Rim, as well as the role it plays in the global economy, it is crucial that small and mid-sized companies understand how to expand internationally,” noted Peralta Colleges Trustee Darryl Moore. “Centers for international trade provide training and international business opportunities which generate local jobs and economic growth,” Moore said.

Under Garrett’s direction, EBCITD already is planning several trade missions or business/cultural exchanges with Bangladesh, China, and India. More will come in the next year. A recent Moroccan venture brought together Merrit Chesley, U.S. Department of Agriculture trade representative; Thomas Riley, U.S. Ambassador to Morocco; and U.S. Department of Commerce advisers, with local businesses and EBCITD’s Dr. Said Cherkaoui, an international business consultant.

“We organized local firms who wanted to export agricultural products – rice, almonds, sauces, fruits – of particular interest to Moroccan culture,” Garrett said. “More than 1,000 people attended the six trade show workshops we presented there.”

By the mission’s end, three major contracts were signed with Moroccan food distributors, and two Casablanca hospitals had started talks about importing medical equipment from the U.S.

In October, an EBCITD agreement with China will bring a delegation from the northeast area of that country to America. The group will learn idiomatic English and U.S. business practices, as well as develop joint economic ventures between China and local business. A local group, in turn, will visit China this year.

A third project will connect Hindi, Sikh and Muslim students and business representatives from New Delhi, India, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, to learn about U.S. language and customs, and the American business climate. The local Best of Both, a woman-owned cross-cultural hospitality service, will arrange housing and cultural activities, while Vista and Peralta District colleges will provide education and student support.

At present, EBCITD is organizing an Oct. 2-10 trade mission to Brazil. “We want to find 20 local companies in three categories – personal products (e.g., cosmetics for dark-skinned women), clothing, and small wineries to join the mission,” Garrett said. “It’s a perfect venue for East Bay entrepreneurs who are interested in import/export to South America, to join us.”

“During the past 10 years, trade agreements have created a wealth of opportunities which once were limited or closed to American exports,” Garrett observed. “The Bay Area is a hub for international commerce, thus it is imperative that anyone who wants to sell their products outside the United States, or bring them into the country, gain knowledge of trade practices and procedures.”

Practitioners who know the ins and outs of import/export and joint venture protocols of many nations teach EBCITD workshops. Consultants also provide free advice in areas such as international finance, marketing, import/export, freight forwarding, and international business protocol.

“Once entrepreneurs go through EBCITD workshops, they can ask for free business services if they need more help,” Garrett noted. “We want more local businesses to consider expanding into world markets, and take advantage of EBCITD workshops and services.”

Entrepreneurs can visit or contact the EBCITD at 2020 Milvia St., suite 111C, 510-540-8901 or visit <http://www.eastbaycitd.org/>.

Shirley Fogarino is the public information officer at Vista Community College.

For more information, read the Oakland Business Review, the Chamber’s monthly business newspaper.

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