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CAROL CAIN

Chinese chamber sets up area shop

BY CAROL CAIN • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • NOVEMBER 16, 2008

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Despite the woes of the domestic auto industry, a Chinese business organization is opening an office in metro Detroit dedicated to building bridges into the Motor City.

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The China General Chamber of Commerce-USA, (www.cgccusa.org), a not-for-profit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., held a ribbon-cutting Monday in Troy with more than 200 people attending.

The group's Automotive Committee will serve as a regional office to assist firms based in China and

those already operating in Michigan build stronger connections to the automotive sector.

The committee was formed by a group of influential Chinese automotive companies like Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp. that are operating in the state.

It is one of five industry-specific organizations that are part of China General Chamber of Commerce-USA and the only one not located in New York City.

The others focus on finance, telecommunications, transportation and information technology.

"This marks a new beginning for Chinese business in Michigan and will also

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assist more and bigger Chinese business from a variety of industries entering Michigan," said Youzhou Chen, president of the Automotive Committee, who is also president of SAIC USA Inc. in Troy. "The potential is tremendous."

Ping Huang, consul general of the People's Republic of China who is based in Chicago and oversees seven states including Michigan, talked about how the auto industry has changed in China.

"Ten years ago when the finance building" in Beijing "was put up, there were no parking spaces created as few people owned cars. Today, there are over 5,000 people working there and over 3,000 drive their cars to work," he said.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who attended the opening, said the Chinese firms are bringing jobs into his county and elsewhere in the state.

"We put the world on wheels, and everyone across the globe understands that," Patterson said.

The Chinese are coming

From autos to education, it is obvious the Chinese are coming to Michigan.

Greentown Education Group, a educational company from Hongzhao, China, outside Shanghai, brought a group of seven educators and Chinese executives to visit metro Detroit schools.

Ernie Minghine, superintendent of the Westwood School District in Wayne County, hosted the group Wednesday.

He currently has three teachers from China.

"China is the fastest-growing economy in the world, and Mandarin is the most-spoken language in the world. Offering Chinese and building these educational bridges is another way our district is helping to prepare our kids for the new global economy," Minghine said.

Transition effort launched

Speaking of welcoming more global firms, TechTown launched its International Soft Landings program to help transition overseas companies when they come here.

TechTown is Wayne State University's 43-acre research and technology park incubating more than 40 companies.

The ISL reached an agreement with TechBA, a program created by the Mexican Ministry of Economy, to help high-tech Mexican companies in the automotive industry establish collaborations with Tier I and II suppliers in Michigan.

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The ISL program has the potential to draw international firms that are interested in trading with Canada through the NAFTA agreement, which could lead to significant job creation in Michigan, said Randal Charlton, executive director of TechTown.

"Already, the program has received interest from companies in China, Eastern Europe and Nicaragua," he added.

The ISL program allows international companies to focus on growing their businesses by supplying them with everything they expect to find in an established office.

Companies joining ISL gain access to its affiliated academic institutions, which include Wayne State University, the University of Windsor, Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico and the University of Detroit Mercy.

These affiliates provide research laboratories, engineering resources and interns for businesses focused on technology, the automotive industry, life sciences and alternative energy.

CAROL CAIN hosts "Michigan Matters" at 11 a.m. Sundays on WWJ-TV. Cain can be reached at ccain@cbs.com or 313-222-6732.

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