

Westchester County-led delegation returns from 9-day trade mission to China

By Scott Fernqvist

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A delegation of Westchester County environmental engineering and IT companies is home after a 9-day trade mission to China aimed at developing business opportunities in China and promoting Westchester's reputation as a world technology leader.

"Each trip we are able to ratchet up the Westchester brand and to make better business and government contacts," said Norman Jacknis, the County's Chief Information Officer who has participated in all five of the County's trade missions to China since 1998, when County Executive Andy Spano first took office. "The County continues to build on past efforts in the region and open doors for local firms interested in doing business with the world's fastest growing economy."

Also representing Westchester County in China were Sal Carrera, Director of Westchester County's Office of Economic Development & Real Estate, and Daisy Yau, Director of Asian American Affairs & Business Development.

China's rapid economic growth has been accompanied by significant pollution and now the Chinese government has committed itself to a major program of tackling issues ranging from air and water quality protection to hazardous waste management. In response to this, many of the trade mission's participants were recruited from Westchester's highly-regarded environmental engineering community.

The firms of Malcolm Pirnie Inc., Lyn Staar Engineering, P.C, and Stearns & Wheler, LLC presented themselves as an advanced environmental engineering team and were able to leverage their expertise and Westchester's reputation as a center for innovation and environmental know-how to secure meetings with top officials in Beijing, including the China Association of Environmental Protection Industry (CAEPI) and the Environmental Bureau of the influential and well-funded Chinese Ministry of Science & Technology. As a next step, the firms have been asked to prepare a statement of capabilities so that the Chinese government can find appropriate Chinese partners, as a step on the road to bringing the Westchester companies into big projects there.

Other highlights from the capital city included a visit with officials of the Beijing Haidian – high tech – District and meetings with the Beijing Investment Promotion Bureau. The delegation also met with the director and other staff of the Zhongguancun Haidian Science and Technology Park, known as the "Silicon Valley" of China because of its location next to the two major universities in the country. A county proposal for the development of a global technology center in Westchester was received with great

enthusiasm by the Zhongguancun leadership and the proposal is now being developed by both sides.

Most of the delegation wrapped up its mission in east China's Shandong Province, the second wealthiest province in China and home to some of the most well-known Chinese brand names, including Tsingtao Beer and Haier appliances. (Prior to leaving for China, delegation members attended an investment conference hosted by Shandong to get a crash course on the region's business and investment climate. Delegation members built on this introduction by connecting personally with business and government leaders while in Jinan, the capital city, and touring additional technology parks and important business sites throughout the region.)

Dr. Jacknis stayed on to complete work that had been started in an earlier trip – which now concluded in the signing of cooperative agreements between Westchester County and the Pudong New Area Government of Shanghai as well as with the Shanghai Pudong Productivity Center (SPPC) and its associated Pudong Software Association. Both agreements are intended to support mutual economic cooperation as well as to solidify the county's standing in the Shanghai region. A new and somewhat unique aspect of the agreement with Pudong is the addition of exchanges of government officials, especially concerning information technology. Such exchanges will help further position county businesses for favorable treatment in China.

Now back in Westchester, delegation members will use the positive momentum from the trip to expand their business opportunities in China. Like any other opening of a new market, this will not happen overnight, but these companies are now well positioned for future business.

The lesson for other Westchester companies is to join in these efforts. Even without a trip to China, expressions of interest and a willingness to find business partners will open new doors to future sales.

*Because Westchester County wants to help local companies interact with potential foreign customers and partners at little or no cost, it has made a standing offer to any small to mid-size business to use its international videoconferencing and web-based conferencing systems for free. **For more information on this or any of the county's international economic development activities, contact Scott Fernqvist, Special Assistant to the CIO, at 914-995-3078 or sef1@westchestergov.com.***