

Summit aims to put Tampa fully on the globalized map

4/20/2007

Summit aims to put Tampa fully on the globalized map

Tampa Bay Business Journal
April 20, 2007

TAMPA -- Early last year, the Tampa Bay Hispanic Chamber of Commerce held an international business event that attracted 5,000. Then it began wondering "what if?"

Last October, the Hispanic Chamber began conversations with the Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce as well as several other bi-national chambers until the network of involved chambers grew to nine and the concept of a much larger international business materialized. Now, the International Business Summit is slated to attract up to 6,000 attendees and more than 150 vendors at the University of South Florida's Sundome and Embassy Suites in mid-May, and the event has attracted a high-profile international businessperson, Dr. Kiran Patel, to be a keynote speaker.

While the sale of booths is yet to fully take off, organizers see the event as a one-stop shop for international business networking, deal making, trade discussions, relationship building, education and cuisine among Bay area businesses.

Tampa-based freight forwarding company Diversified Brokerage Services is planning to attend and bought a booth. Nearly 98 percent of Diversified Brokerage's business relies on China, so if the Chinese government was to embargo trade it could very well put the business under, said Michael S. Dubin, president.

"It's not enough to put all your eggs in one rickshaw. I need to diversify, and that comes with exposure," Dubin said. The international business summit is about raising awareness and sparking relationships, which could one day make this place as much of an international business hub as anywhere in Florida, he said.

Filling a void

For several years, Bay area chambers of commerce have been organizing events specific to world regions in a vacuum, not pooling their resources to accomplish a shared vision for global business initiatives, said Ivette Mayo, a director with the Hispanic Chamber.

"Each chamber had been fixed on specific communities and specific regions. Now it's nice to have some of them come together with one common vision and one common goal," said Derek Lloyd, secretary for the Caribbean American Chamber.

There has been a stronger push involving globalization in Tampa during the past year, but the question remained about how best to create momentum here.

"Our main goal is to show Tampa is an international place with both a cosmopolitan and metropolitan feel, and joining forces puts us on the map," said Michael Hodges, treasurer with the British American Business Council in Tampa.

Event needs energy

The event has been a learning process, organizers said. Now that the summit is a month away, the pressure is on to meet sales goals.

Discussions with international business sources about the event yielded general concerns about the relatively sluggish base of booth sales so far and whether the event on USF's campus would primarily draw a college crowd. The expo has sold 30 out of a total 164 booths so far, Mayo said.

But she is not concerned about possible turnout troubles, considering she had put together a similar event last year at the Tampa Convention Center and sold 100 booths in the last two weeks. The event eventually sold its total sum of 150 booths, she said.

One immigration lawyer doesn't mind either way.

"We're hoping to get some exposure," said Neil Lewis, managing shareholder for Neil F. Lewis PA in Tampa. "USF is one of the places we would like to be more visible, and foreign students may seek employment opportunities."

His reasons for attending the event and securing a booth aren't entirely altruistic.

"We're there to offer information to people and to be a resource if the attendees would care to use us. However, at heart we are a business," Lewis said.

INFO

International Business Summit

WHEN: May 18 kick-off; May 19 expo

GOAL: To attract a diverse crowd -- both culturally and financially -- including entrepreneurs, mid-to-large company executives and college students

PHONE: 813.837.0717

WEB: ibsummit.org

drandall@bizjournals.com | 813.342.2463