

Mission to Ireland and UK Yields Promising Results

Jack L. Fischer, AIA, Secretary



Commerce Secretary Jack L. Fischer, AIA, (center) stands with (left to right): Mary Regel (Commerce), Mickey Judkins (Commerce), Prof. Michael R.H. White (UK U Liverpool), Deborah Godt (Commerce), Dr. Max Ahmed (Nano Imaging Devices Ltd.), and Dr. Andy Jones (Assistant Director of the Merseyside TCS Centre) were in Liverpool to discuss potential business partnerships and alliances with bio community leaders at the Liverpool Science Park Innovation Center.

Mission participants include:

- **Big River Lumber company**, which offers Northern and Appalachian hardwoods
- **Bonstone Materials Corporation**, a manufacturer of epoxy adhesives for stone and concrete repair work
- **Forté Composites**, which deals in pre-cast polymer concrete technology
- **Humane Manufacturing Company**, which produces rubber flooring products for industrial, agricultural and athletic applications
- **Kretz Lumber**, specialists in white hard maple
- **LOGICARE Corp.**, a provider of clinical information software technology
- **Marth Wood Supply** which converts wood scrap into energy sources and plastic alternatives
- **Wisconsin Bench**, a producer of custom work surfaces, tables and furniture
- **Michael Best & Friedrich**, a law firm, which offers counsel on U.S. business law

The intent of our recent business-led trade mission (March 10 – 14) to Ireland and the UK was to promote export trade opportunities for Wisconsin firms interested in the expanding Irish market and to initiate and expand relationships with Irish companies that are looking for growth opportunities in North America. We were also very interested to learn about the steps that Ireland has taken in the last few years to transform its economy.

The trade mission provided participants with opportunities to meet with distributors, potential customers, and key business and government officials.

The United Kingdom is Wisconsin's 5th largest export destination and most significant trading partner in all of Europe. Exports from Wisconsin to the UK have consistently grown over the years and totaled over \$686 million in 2006. The UK has the fourth-largest economy in the world, is the second-largest economy in the European Union (EU), and is a major international trading power. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the UK, which expanded by 2.8 percent in

2006, is forecast to grow by 2.6 percent in 2007, and 2.3 percent in 2008. The economy is one of the strongest in Europe and is highly developed, diversified, and market-based.

Ireland continues to be one of the fastest growing economies in the EU and is now entering its thirteenth consecutive year of economic growth. The Irish economy is extremely open to and dependant upon international trade and is a very receptive market to U.S. products. Ireland is Wisconsin's 34th largest export destination and purchased over \$82.6 million in Wisconsin goods in 2007. Dublin is considered a model international financial services center and continues to spearhead Ireland's economic growth.

After returning last week from the weeklong, working mission, I've been reflecting on what we accomplished. Indeed, we didn't have to wait long to see the fruits of our labors. Before our plane even touched the ground back in the Midwest, Governor Doyle had received word that Nano Imaging Devices, Ltd., Liverpool, UK, has decided to open its first U.S. office in Madison. We're excited to be working with company owner Mushtaq "Max" Ahmed in welcoming his staff to the U.S. and in doing what we can to help ensure a great working relationship with our state.

Not only are foreign investors realizing what a perfect central North American location Wisconsin is, they are also learning what wonderful products our state produces – from lithium batteries (our #1 export to Ireland) to custom electrical and industrial machinery and more. While on the mission, Wisconsin-based companies were encouraged by the interest shown in what they have to offer. (For a complete list of participating companies see chart accompanying this article.)

In fact, our state has had yet another outstanding year in 2007 selling a record \$19.2 billion of goods worldwide, ranking Wisconsin 19th in exports among the 50 states. And we're just getting started.

During the mission, I'd say I personally spoke with some 65 or more businesses, municipalities and organizations – and hundreds of individuals - who are interested in working together to strengthen ties in our new, global economy. People like Matthew Cross of Think London – such an innovative thinker, and Barry O'Dowd, who handles the Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology department of investment and Development Agency (IDA) Ireland who was very interested in learning more about UW's Professor James Thomsen and his fellow stem cell researchers.

There are so many people to thank following an undertaking such as this. Kate Clarke and Kara Smith, directors of our UK office did a tremendous job overall, and were invaluable in assisting participants with individual businesses as were our staff here at Commerce. My sincere, personal thanks to all.

The staffs at the U.S. Embassies in Dublin and the UK could not have been more accommodating. Perhaps the highlight of the mission for me was the evening that the U.S. Embassy in Dublin hosted a delegation of some 60 businesspersons who engaged in a lively, informative exchange of ideas. Ireland has had a tremendous economic boom in the past decade and it was fascinating to hear how their government, financial and labor groups came together to make it happen.

So many of Governor Doyle's initiatives – in education, streamlining permitting, training and tax advantages, Act 255 - which provides opportunities for venture capital – are helping to put the global economic puzzle pieces together. I was pleased to confirm my long-held belief that our fine UW System and network of private colleges and universities, which are partnering with businesses in so many ways throughout the state, are tremendous assets. Not everyone has such a resource.

Couple that with the best workforce in the U.S. and there is no stopping us once the world hears our story. We can work with anyone, anywhere, to continue to grow Wisconsin's economy. I am pleased to be a part in telling that story on behalf of Governor Doyle – and all of the citizens of this great state.

-- Secretary Jack L. Fischer, AIA