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China valuable market for many Pa. companies

 By **Ron DaParma**

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Friday, October 13, 2006

China can learn from Pittsburgh's dramatic transformation from a "polluted" city to a "beautiful" one, said Li Haiyan, a Chinese government official, at a business forum Downtown Thursday.

And that could mean business opportunities for Pittsburgh companies, said Haiyan, counselor for economic affairs at the Chinese Embassy in Washington.

"I think a lot of people from China should come here because we share some of the same problems," Haiyan told about 120 local and visiting business representatives at the Omni William Penn Hotel. The program was sponsored by the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce.

He joined a group of experts who came to advise small- and mid-sized companies about expanding opportunities in China.

Photo Gallery

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 Roger Gaydos, head of
Gaydos Monument Co.

Keith Hodan/Tribune-Review

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With just over 1.3 billion people, it's the world's largest and most populous country.

But along with its rapid economic expansion -- its gross domestic product growth rate is about 9.5 percent annually -- it faces challenges, such as reducing pollution and developing cleaner energy sources.

"We need your expertise and technology," said Haiyan, who met yesterday with representatives from a number of the region's major companies,

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including Alcoa, Eaton, H.J. Heinz, Industrial Scientific, Siemens Robicon and U.S. Steel.

China already is Pennsylvania's fifth-largest export market, with \$933 million in goods in services exported there last year. The state's exports grew by 238 percent from 2000 to 2005, said Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato, who disclosed that local leaders are planning a trade mission to China.

Smaller companies need to understand changing dynamics of China's economy, experts said.

"Opportunities for doing business in China are increasing, but the nature of opportunities is shifting," said Jeffrey Bernstein, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai.

While the first wave of expansion of American business in China was to manufacture there for export to take advantage of lower labor rates, companies are investing more to take advantage of tremendous domestic growth there, he said.

His chamber's membership, predominately manufacturers as recently as five years ago, is 55 percent service companies.

"The lesson we can learn from that is that their domestic market is growing, so U.S. companies are producing in China to effectively address that opportunity," he said.

Roger Gaydos, head of the family-run Gaydos Monument Co. of Chartiers, Washington County, wasn't among those at yesterday's program.

But his company is among the local firms doing business with China.

He has turned to overseas producers and suppliers -- mostly in China and India -- to get the granite his business needs to make grave markers, monuments, countertops and landscaping statues.

Gaydos began purchasing foreign stone from a U.S. broker in the early 1990s. The broker was able to get the company a better price for many of the same products, he said.

He later participated in trade missions to China, relying on multi-state organizations to help with the logistics of traveling there. Use of a translator helped to overcome the language barrier in arranging the complicated transactions, he said.

"Regrettably, I think everyone in the U.S. that produces a product has to look at an alternate place for raw materials because it is getting to the place where it is unaffordable. The consumer is not willing to pay the (higher) price," said Gaydos, whose father started the business in 1948.

Ron DaParma can be reached at rdaparma@tribweb.com or 412-320-7907.

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