

MBA students: Invest in China

Chinese group gives presentations on Ningxia Province



BILL GAITHER/The Register-Mail

GREDA representatives and other audience members listen to University of Illinois-Chicago MBA students from China as they give presentations Monday morning at the U of I Extension office.

By JOHN R. PULLIAM

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GALESBURG —

Sixteen Chinese MBA students from the University of Illinois at Chicago were in Galesburg Monday for a forum at the Knox Agri Center. The event was sponsored by the Galesburg Regional Economic Development Association.

The students had an informal get-together with GREDA board members and some local residents Sunday. After the forum, the students toured the Lincoln and Underground Railroad sites at Knox College and got a look at the BNSF Railway yard here from the County Highway 10 bridge.

The students, from Ningxia Province in northwest China, gave a PowerPoint presentation about the advantages of investing in their region. Mayor Gary Smith said the students are taking the two-year UIC MBA program “on a special, accelerated program. They’re the first representatives from Ningxia Province to ever be at (UIC), so they are the best of the best, the future leaders of their province.”

Most visits to Galesburg by Chinese business people have focused on local efforts to persuade companies to locate in Logistics Park-Galesburg. GREDA Executive Director Greg Mangieri said, in

this case, both areas are looking for economic development investments.

"I think we're looking for reciprocal opportunities," Mangieri said.

Zhu Dong, deputy division chief of the Ningxia Investment Promotion Bureau, was refreshingly open. He said 30,000 people in the province have jobs because of foreign investment from 24 countries, including Japan, the U.S., Great Britain, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Russia and others.

"The biggest one is Japan," Dong said. He said there is a sizeable investment from the U.S. but most comes from Chinese citizens who now live in this country, rather than from long-time citizens.

He said Ningxia's status as an autonomous province allows the regional government to offer foreign companies tax breaks and other advantages.

"We want them to earn money," he said of foreign-owned firms. "Also, our local people can have jobs. I'm speaking very openly."

Showing a picture from AlCan, an aluminum company that operates in Ningxia, Dong pointed to the Brazilian general manager.

"If you want to get some information about Ningxia investment, I can give you his number," Dong laughed.

During his opening remarks, Henry Li, director of the Department of Planning of the UIC MBA program, said the visit was important because "we learn ideas from Galesburg, because Galesburg really is a good classroom for us to learn. Galesburg is an important place."

Tian Ze, deputy division chief of the Ningxia Economic Commission, admitted that China "is still a very developing country," but one with a rapidly growing economy. As for Ningxia Province, he said, "We are a very small province and probably we have a longer way to go."

Ze said advantages in Ningxia include rich deposits of minerals, such as coal, a good infrastructure and a relatively small investment to do business there. He said disadvantages are not unlike some challenges faced by Galesburg, such as being located in a somewhat remote area and having a "small capital market."

Some goals in the rapidly-developing Ningxia market include chemical industries, building a digital manufacturing base, a wind-power generating equipment base and tire manufacturing, as well specialized steel.

“Our people’s living standard is improved,” Lu Chunlei, deputy division chief of the Ningxia Economic Commission, said.

Galesburg region presentations were given by Mangieri, on behalf of Eric Pitcher, regional manager for economic development for the BNSF Railway; David Sager, sales manager of G&D Integrated, Morton; Dennis Edwards, a research agronomist from Monsanto, St. Louis; Dave Schragel, a vice president at Wells Fargo Bank of Galesburg; and Tom Schmidt, president of Carl Sandburg College.