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55 YEARS

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Sandra Johnson - Metro Hartford, Connecticut - Economic Development Gardening - Cultivating International Business

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Reporting on business development is often a look in the rear view mirror. We tend to overlook all the "economic development gardening," relationship building and deal nurturing that was necessary to produce that successful yield. Here in the Hartford Region, a Connecticut-Israel Technology Summit, the first of its kind held on May 11th, was a good example of such economic development gardening.

The Connecticut - Israel Technology Summit germinated from the collaboration between The MetroHartford Alliance's International Business Council and the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford in an effort to strengthen the region's and the state's business relationships with Israel. This unique collaboration joins the MetroHartford Alliance's business development mission with the Federation's cultural and civic mission in providing continued growth, vitality and preservation of the Jewish community as a whole.

The synergies all make \$ense. Israel is the largest U.S. export market in the Middle East with high-tech and pro-American business communities. For Israel, the U.S. represents one-third of their exports. With rapid development in several common sectors, specifically the life sciences, security and defense, the Technology Summit, brought together nearly 100 New England-based and Israeli companies to Goodwin College, in East Hartford. With promotion limited to participating sponsor networks (participating sponsors were BEACON, Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, Connecticut Technology Council, Connecticut Venture Group, CURE, Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut and New England-Israel Business Council), the Technology Summit attracted a broad representation of businesses from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York. These visiting business leaders had the opportunity to hear from and meet with an impressive panel that featured Israel's economic minister to North America, Yair Shiran as well as Marie O'Brien, president, Connecticut Development Authority; David Barone, principal, Boston MedTech Advisors, Inc.; David Galuska, senior vice president, Module Centers and Operations, Pratt & Whitney; and Avi Lupo, chief executive officer, FST21 - Americas.

In addition to sponsor representation, senior members of Connecticut's federal delegation - the offices of Senator Blumenthal, Congressman Larson, Congressman Murphy - as well as the Department of Commerce and the state's Department of Economic and Community Development provided attendees the opportunity to connect with Connecticut business groups, government funding sources and political leaders to learn about conducting business in the state.

The energy in the room was palpable as the Summit provided a forum for an exchange of ideas, networking, and personal meetings. Our preliminary feedback from both U.S. and Israeli business leaders has been positive and we are already facilitating business interests today. We are on a roll, but this is just a beginning. Further cultivation may take the form of a trade mission and continued outreach and facilitation.

Israel is but one country that the MetroHartford Alliance has in its direct focus. Through our International Business Council chaired by Leslie Robertson, senior vice president, Foreign Direct Investment, Bank of America, similar action is also occurring with France, the UK, and Germany. As my Jewish Federation colleague Laura Zimmerman says, "We live by thinking that it is not enough to have the idea. You need to study it, develop it, add new dimensions and live with it so the idea can be a part of you." This is not just relative to Jewish thinking; it also relates to how we are economic development gardeners in preparing the soft, fertile ground for new business growth where they too can become a part of this community!

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