

California offers scope to Alberta businessmen

By ERIK FLOREN
Staff Writer

Tremendous export opportunities await Alberta entrepreneurs in California, says a trade officer for Alberta Economic Development and Trade (AEDT).

"The free-enterprise system in California is alive and well," said Ron Liepert, the Los Angeles-based AEDT director of Western U.S. operations.

The southern state also represents the largest single market in the U.S. with a population growing "by half a million every year," said Liepert.

"There's more people in California (28 million) than in all of Canada," he told members of a seminar held at the Edmonton Convention Centre yesterday.

The seminar, The California market — Opportunities for Alberta Business, was sponsored jointly by the AEDT, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and the Edmonton Economic Development Authority.

According to seminar statistics, the state averages \$5-billion a year in exports from Canada alone.

In an interview after the seminar, Liepert said California can be a better area for exporting than Pacific Rim countries or Europe because of the common language, similar time zones and western ideology.

It's also closer than the marketplace of eastern Canada.

"And we can also trade into the U.S. without them seeing us as a threat to their livelihood (unlike other countries)," he said.

With the potential free-trade pact — it would "be a good opportunity" for Alberta business to get their foot in the door now, he added.

Some of the areas of commerce that could succeed in California include food products, furniture, computer software — developed from our oilpatch expertise — and the Alberta service sector such as architecture and engineering, he said.

But before going into that business "you have to be prepared, have your contacts in place" and usually a Californian agent, advised Stewart Beck, former Canadian Consul and Trade Commissioner at Santa Clara.

Thoma Roesch, Trade Commissioner with the U.S. Consulate General, based in Calgary, said his office can be used for reference.

"We're a source on how to contact other offices of the U.S. government — if you run into problems with patents or customs," he said.

Roesch called California "by far the most important (state) economically, commercially and by population."

"If you're not exporting now — the U.S. market is the place to go," he added.



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