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Sign of the times: Asian-influenced businesses moving into Gwinnett

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Staff Photos: Jason Braverman
More Asian-influenced businesses are open in the Gwinnett Place area, including those at the Nukoa Plaza in Duluth.



An Asian-influenced business butts up against a Waffle House and QuikTrip in the Gwinnett Place area near Steve Reynolds Boulevard.

Ken Stewart, the commissioner of the Georgia Department of Economic Development, said business focus in China has been a key focus of its group the last several years, so much that the group opened a business center in Beijing last year.

"I am glad to see these investments and those of our partners in Gwinnett County pay off with a quality Chinese company such as Ningbo Self Electronics opening an office right here in Georgia," Stewart said.

Closer to home, the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District has seen a number of new foreign-owned or foreign-managed businesses come online this year. And more are still coming with the planned openings later this year of the M Marketplace at

LAWRENCEVILLE - Take a drive down Pleasant Hill Road and along Steve Reynolds Boulevard through the Gwinnett Place area and you'll bear witness to the changes this county has gone through.

One thing you can't miss for sure are the signs of globalization.

With a good number of business signs and advertisements appearing in Asian script, it's clear Gwinnett County is no longer the rural suburb of Atlanta it was considered back in the day.

Chairman Charles Bannister and members of the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce returned home Thursday from a 15-day economic trade mission to Korea and China. With obtaining foreign investment as the ultimate goal of such a trip, it appears that what we see now in Gwinnett in terms of foreign-influenced or foreign-owned may only be the beginning. It also means this likely isn't the last trip to Asia local officials will embark upon.

"This trip is the second one in 45 days," said the Chamber's Nick Masino prior to leaving. "It's important because China has capital dollars available to invest overseas. We need capital dollars in Gwinnett that is frankly going to other places in the United States, and we want to make sure Gwinnett is there at the table."

From an economic development standpoint on the most recent trip, it appears Gwinnett took its seat at that table.

Last week, China-based, Hisense Company, which manufactures flat-panel screens, announced it would expand in Gwinnett. This resulted in an \$800,000 capital investment in the county coupled with the creation of 35 to 40 new, high-wage jobs.

This week, another \$200,000 in capital investment floated the county's way by means of another expansion announcement; this time from the Ningbo Self Electronics Corporation, also of China. And on June 29, the chamber reported that Gwinnett County and the Gangnam-Gu district of Seoul, South Korea, had officially tied the knot as sister communities, a move that should identify and develop more business opportunities soon.

Gwinnett Place Mall and the new Assi Plaza. While their target markets will be the ethnically diverse population of Gwinnett, Marketplace is Korean-owned and Assi was conceptualized in Asia.

Allen said he believes the county and the chamber are making the right moves by traveling to Asia and targeting Asian investment dollars. He said he also believes there are definitely more foreign investment dollars from Asia headed Gwinnett's way.

"Just look at the area," he said. "It's (the China/Korea trip) just going to bring the international focus more and more to Gwinnett County. I think with the demographics we have here, you've got to have that to survive."

With the Noh Ryang Jin Seafood Restaurant, Ming's BBQ and the Shanghai Cafe opening in the last six months in the Gwinnett Place CID, Allen said the area is beginning to reflect the changes wrought by globalization.

"Look at the new businesses coming in. They are ethnically diverse and many of them are Korean and Chinese," he said. "The chamber is going after the right market. ... We're in a worldwide economy now."

Masino said to expect more economic development announcements that would benefit the county soon, whether they come from the Rust Belt like NCR did or from across the Pacific Ocean in the Orient.

"People are scaling back their efforts so it's the perfect time to attack," he said prior to the trip. "If you're serious about global business, America is still the biggest, richest country in the world."