



PRESS RELEASE

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Japanese Business Leaders Convene in Belleville to Discuss Economic Partnership Opportunities

The City of Belleville Friday welcomed honored guests from Japan and the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois to discuss burgeoning economic opportunities between the region and the country of Japan.

Mayor Mark Eckert welcomed guests including representatives from the Consul of Economic Affairs for the Consulate General of Japan, Keidanren USA – the Japanese Business Federation, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), and regional businesses and leaders from throughout southwestern Illinois.

“We are humbled to have these dignitaries here to work on the business relationship between Belleville, the Leadership Council and the State of Illinois,” said Mayor Mark Eckert.

According to Dr. Ronda Sauget, executive director and CEO of the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois, this visit is the result of collaborative efforts made by her organization, STL Alliance, local governments, and interested business leaders from the region and Japan.

“The Japanese have been investing in the midwestern states for years and they remain interested in this region,” said Sauget. “Japan comes to the market with real money, and we want to be poised to continue this relationship and make it stronger in order to create jobs and industry in our region.”

Ralph Inforzato, chief executive director of JETRO, said that he is very encouraged by this group’s visit to southwestern Illinois because “the leadership council and local governments in the region are addressing the same issues that [JETRO] contends with everyday.”

“We’re finding more depth and substance to the issues of economic development and job creation as we work with local leaders, organizations, and educational institutions,” said

Inforzato. “I know that Japanese companies are job creators for people in the US, and I know that Japanese companies and local American organizations want to create jobs together. We hope to do just that.”

According to Inforzato, Japanese firms have created 860,000 American jobs through direct investment, and nearly half of those jobs are in manufacturing. In 2018, there were 732 Japanese business facilities providing 47,000 jobs in Illinois, and the pace of Japanese investment within midwestern states is expected to continue to grow.

“I actually think in the next 10 years, local government will have more and more economic development responsibilities,” said Inforzato. “That's why we're here today -- to make relationships with you and build jobs in the region.”

To learn more about the City of Belleville and its economic opportunity efforts, visit www.belleville.net.

Cutline: Belleville Mayor Mark Eckert is pictured with Dr. Ronda Sauget, executive director and CEO of the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois; Ralph Inforzato, chief executive director of the Japan External Trade Organization; and several Japanese business leaders Friday in Belleville at the Japan Forum hosted by the Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois.

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