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Group for Asian-Indian community

October 14, 2007

BY CAROL CAIN
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

No one would dispute metro Detroit's status as a melting pot, which can make it difficult to stand out.

Nipa Shah says she believes Asian Indians in particular are overshadowed and need to do a better job of marketing themselves.

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So, Shah, 41, just launched the Michigan India Chamber of Commerce to help fill that role.

Shah, president of Jenesys Group LLC in Novi, an online marketing and Web site development company, grew up in India and came to the United States in 1985.

She launched the chamber envisioning a networking organization that would benefit the Asian-Indian community in business and other areas. She has signed up seven members in the first month of operation and hopes to quickly reach 25.

"The Michigan India Chamber is not just for business owners," says Shah, who earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Bombay and an MBA from Lawrence Technological University. "It's also for individuals, homemakers, companies, youth and those who aspire to be entrepreneurs."

She wants her organization to become a resource center to meet the education, mentoring and networking needs of the Asian-Indian community.

Membership dues are \$350 for established businesses, \$250 for emerging businesses and \$150 for individuals. Nonprofits and students are not charged.

"Everyone in our community talks about the lack of trust that prevents us from doing business with each other," Shah says. "I also see that although we are educated and affluent, we continue to live in our social subcommunities that are based on religion and social class. To bring about unity, an organization like the Michigan India Chamber must exist."

Shah says she hopes to change the thinking of Gujaratis, Marathis, Punjabi and others so they begin to see themselves as Asian Indians.

"I want to form an organization that will demonstrate to the community that we can be unified without having hidden agendas," Shah adds.

As part of that, she is now hosting "Round Table India," a weekly podcast that provides a forum for Asian Indians to discuss topics of interest.

The podcasts are found on the chamber's Web site, www.miicc.com.

PHOTOS

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Ken Rogers



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India trade mission

Ken Rogers, executive director of Automation Alley, is leading a regional delegation of businesspeople traveling in India on a trade mission.

They left Wednesday and are to be in India through Saturday, visiting Bangalore, Chennai, New Delhi and Pune.

India trails only China in the growth of its economy. Companies worldwide have invested billions of dollars in India to take advantage of that nation's emerging middle class of 300 million people that is fueling demand for Western products.

"The opportunity in India is particularly great in the automotive industry, where demand for new vehicles can help southeast Michigan companies," Rogers says.

Other industries being targeted include alternative energy and information technology.

Rogers points out that previous trade missions to China, Mexico, Germany, and central and eastern Europe have garnered more than \$23 million in contracts for southeast Michigan.

Airline connection

Noel Nevshehir, director of Automation Alley's International Business Center, is hoping to hit pay dirt again as he travels in India with the delegation that also includes Laura Jackson, director of marketing and airport service development at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

It was during a similar trade mission Automation Alley arranged last year to China where Jackson was involved in negotiations that helped bring China Southern Airways to Detroit.

Nevshehir says the delegation will meet with some Indian airlines to discuss offering direct routes from Detroit.

CAROL CAIN writes about business and politics on Sundays in the Free Press. She hosts "Michigan Matters" on Channel 62 at 11 a.m. Saturdays and on Channel 50 at 11:30 a.m. Sundays. She can be reached at 313-222-6732 or clcain@cbs.com.



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