

South Carolina to South Africa  
Business Matchmaking Mission  
September 23 – October 1, 2005

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*Front row (l-r): David and Celeste Poston, Palmetto Synthetics and Johnny Brown, US Commercial Service. Back row (l-r): Carolyn Sawyer, Tom Sawyer Company; Elliott Franks, JEDA; Melissa McLeod, SCDOC. Not pictured from the mission: Lonzell Graham, Research Technologies and Kevin Corrigan, American Tower International*

Five South Carolina companies recently returned from a South Carolina Department of Commerce-led trade mission to South Africa. The participating companies ranged from traditional manufacturers to those providing services and investment expertise. The purpose of this mission was to promote the exports of goods and services to South Africa and establish relationships and partnerships between that country and the state of South Carolina.

Participants included the South Carolina Jobs Economic Development Authority (JEDA) whose loan program is the Tax-Exempt Industrial Revenue Bond Program (IRB); the Tom Sawyer Company – a public relations and marketing firm based in Columbia and Washington, DC; Palmetto Synthetics LLC – a colorfast synthetic fiber manufacturer in Kingstree; Research Technologies, Inc. – a Greenville manufacturer of an industrial polymer for automotive use and chemicals for use in multi-ethnic hair care; and American Tower Corp. – a multi-tenant cellular tower developer and operator.

During two days of meetings in Cape Town and three days in Johannesburg, these five companies met with more than 60 South African companies interested in either buying, partnering, representing or distributing for them. Depending on the needs of each participant, pre-screened “Gold Key” appointments were arranged for them by the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) in South Africa. With offices around the world, the mission of the FCS is to promote the export of U.S. goods and services and has an advantage of local industry knowledge to make the right introductions and connections. The Senior Commercial Officer for South Africa is Johnny Brown, a South Carolina native. His presence and enthusiasm proved invaluable and accounted

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for the tremendous interest generated on both sides of the ocean in this mission and for future opportunities between South Carolina and South Africa.

During the mission, a video conference and presentation to more than 50 interested South African companies was made. After welcoming remarks by Clarke Thompson and Amy Thomson of the SC Department of Commerce (SCDOC) given via video-conference directly from South Carolina, Melissa McLeod, Trade Manager for Africa for the SCDOC, gave an introductory briefing on establishing and doing business in South Carolina. Carolyn Sawyer of the Tom Sawyer Company followed with marketing techniques successful in the United States and South Carolina in particular. Elliott Franks described the mission of JEDA, which is to enhance the business and economic climate of South Carolina through loans, investments, exports, and the promotion of services and capital revenue produced within the state. It was the ultimate goal of the presentation to promote growth and competitiveness, create jobs, and improve living conditions in South Carolina, and it seemed that all the tools available to investors in South Carolina inspired much interest in South African companies exploring opportunities overseas.

The mission also had many opportunities to learn more about doing business in South Africa. Of primary concern and focus these days in that country is the pending legislation concerning Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). This legislation, which has all but passed, involves placing economic equity and leadership into the hands of the previously disadvantaged black majority. At a meeting with the South African Department of Trade and Industry, the score card detailing the various levels at which companies must comply was explained. At present, all companies wishing to receive a government contract in South Africa must already be “BEE compliant”.

Though this is the first organized trade mission into the continent of Africa, it is not the first time South Carolina has established trading contacts with South Africa. In 1997, several South Carolina companies participated in the South African International Trade Exposition (SAITEX). For more information on opportunities for doing business in South Africa, please contact Melissa Moïse McLeod at the South Carolina Department of Commerce, (803) 737-2164 or by e-mail at [mmcleod@scommerce.com](mailto:mmcleod@scommerce.com).