

Business

Detroit as world gateway is 'one of top export cities'

Nigerian native wants forum to show firms how to unlock area's potential

By Madison I. Gray
The Detroit News

Twenty-five years ago, Detroit was not known as a city big in the international export market, but Efiang Eniang, a Nigerian native thought it could be. All he needed was people who thought as big as he did.

In 1996, however, Detroit has proven to be worth its weight in gold as an export town, and Eniang wants to bring small and medium sized businesses an opportunity to take advantage of the global marketplace the way the Big 3 automakers and their first and second tier suppliers have been for years.

Last year, Eniang put on an African World Expo in Detroit that

brought 200 business, government and trade exhibitors from both sides of the Atlantic.

Eniang, director of the African World Expo, has been in the import/export business since moving to Detroit more than 25 years ago. He started while he was still in Nigeria, but his career in the international market, he said, took off within the last five years.

This Oct. 10-13 at Cobo Center, with the help of the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Wayne County Port Authority, he wants to bring in more people to educate them on exporting and international trade through a series of seminars and workshops.

"Basically we thought there was a need for a forum like this," said Eniang, 46. "We wanted to also create an awareness, an education because this market is relatively new to some companies."

Eniang said Detroit businesses

are at the right place at the right time to take advantage of an international market. The International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce reported Metro Detroit had the highest export total of any of the nation's metropolitan areas.

In 1994, Metro Detroit exported \$27.5 billion in manufactured goods largely to North American Free Trade Agreement partners Canada and Mexico, meaning that Detroit can be a gateway to the rest of the world, records show.

Africa, on the other hand is seemingly waiting for someone to come through that gate. Egypt brought in \$1.4 billion in U.S. imported goods in 1994. In 1993, American firms exported nearly \$1 billion worth of goods and services to Nigeria and \$3.5 billion to South Africa.

Eniang's goal for the Expo is to bring Detroit businesses to the table so they can learn how they might sell



Alan Lessig, The Detroit News

Efiang Eniang, left, director of the African World Expo U.S.A., which comes to Detroit in October, discusses his plans with Walter Hage of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

their own goods and services across the Atlantic.

The major exports to countries such as Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, Africa's top U.S. goods importers, are things such as telecommunications equipment, oil and gas machinery. But smaller items that small businesses would sell, such as sporting equipment,

building products, and computers also do well, said Walter Hage, Mid-Eastern region adviser at the U.S. Department of Commerce's Export Assistance Center.

For more information about the African World Exp, phone (313) 868-4732 or (313) 331-3842.