

Iraqi manufacturers visit Rochester to learn about business

Matthew Daneman • Staff writer • April 15, 2010

Ali A.K. AISady's plastics factory and its 45 workers deal with issues familiar to any western New York manufacturer, such as competition in the form of cheap products from China.

But the polyethylene pipe maker located in Bab-al-Sham, in northeastern Baghdad, also has to contend with a marketplace crushed by years of economic sanctions and then war, where even getting reliable electricity can be a major hurdle.

Despite those differences, maybe there are tips to doing business to be picked up in the United States, the Iraqi businessman said Wednesday through his own English and an interpreter shortly after he and a group of fellow Iraqis arrived in Rochester.

The eight are factory owners and founders of Alnoor Development Society, a sort of chamber of commerce for Iraqi manufacturers. They are in Rochester through Friday on a trip sponsored by the U.S. State Department's **Office** of International Visitors to learn about how U.S. businesses work.

"They had lived in such an insular world from the Saddam (Hussein) era on," said Blake Keller of Holley, a former **business consultant** who spent a year in Iraq as a State Department industrial adviser and who put together the proposal that brought the

eight to the United States for two weeks of information gathering.

"In order to jump-start their thinking, they need to get out," Keller said.

The eight came to Rochester from Washington, D.C., and head Saturday to California. The Rochester leg of the visit was put together with help from the Rochester International Council and will include stops at the Rochester Business Alliance, Monroe **Community College**, Henrietta equipment manufacturer Cross Brothers Co. and Precision Packaging Products of Holley.

The goal is to give the eight exposure to manufacturing practices in the United States and insight on how businesses, academic institutions and business groups collaborate here, Keller said.

AISady said he also hoped to get an idea of labor-management relations in the U.S. and perhaps even find a way to lengthen his **supply chain**.

"I wish to partner with American companies also," he said.

MDANEMAN@DemocratandChronicle.com