Business people push exportation to Japan

BY ANGELA SIMONEAUX
Acadiana bureau

LAFAYETTE — America's trade relationship with Japan is talked about often these days, but not much of that discussion centers on American exports to Japan. Wednesday, local business people met here to discuss that — turning the tables and taking advantage of Japan's new openness to American products. The seminar at Lafayette's Holidome was sponsored by the city's Centre Internationale. Shintaro Oishi said it is an ideal time for U.S. manufacturers to export products to his country. "The market is very big and very open," said Shintaro, who is executive director of Japan External Trade Organization in Houston. JETRO is a non-profit organization designed to expand Japanese imports. Last year, machinery and equipment, food, and raw materials topped the list of Japanese imports from America. Top products were office products, meat, seafood, wood, fruits and vegetables. A program designed to encourage that trade is awaiting approval by the Diet, but Shintaro said he thinks the program will pass.

New measures include tax incentives for Japanese companies that import goods; eliminated or modified tariffs on more than 1,000 industrial products; budget allocations for internationalization centers in Japan; and low-cost financing programs — with interest rates of 5.2 to 5.4 percent — from the Export-Import Bank of Japan, Shintaro said. Shintaro's organization has established a database that will help link U.S. distributors with Japanese buyers, and has set up a program whereby Japanese experts come to the U.S. to find products with potential for distribution in Japan. These experts will conduct seminars to provide U.S. distributors with technical assistance. JETRO also helps Japanese buyers locate U.S. trade shows and product fairs, and assists U.S. trade delegations in commercial negotiations with Japanese businesses. Shintaro said he wanted to urge business people to contact his organization in Houston. "Competition in the Japanese market is very strong. It is not so easy to enter," Shintaro said, adding that American distributors must compete with European and domestic companies.

He also said that, before attempting a foray into the Japanese market, distributors must be sure their product is high-quality and competitively priced; that they have done appropriate market research into regulations and cultural differences; that they have perseverance and patience in dealing with Japanese business people; and that they make frequent trips to the country, establishing their presence in Japan.

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Page 1cl Column 4