

Florida sees sunshine in Israel's high tech developments

By David Brinn June 14, 2007

There's been such an influx of visits to Israel by Florida residents recently that there's a rumor going around that SeaWorld's star whale Shamu is considering relocating to Eilat.

But even if it remains a rumor, the fact is that Florida businessmen and government officials have become enamored with what they see as the potential rising out of Israel's thriving high tech and biomedical sectors.

A Jacksonville-based consortium of healthcare and business professionals called M-EDG (Medical-Enterprise Development Group) last week launched, together with Israel's Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Florida-Israel Biomedical Initiative (FL-IBI) that is planning to identify the best in Israeli medical technology and through investment and guidance, bring those devices to the American people.

And no less than the state's governor and future presidential hopeful Charlie Crist recently led a delegation here to discuss increasing business ties.

"The bond between Florida and Israel is obvious," Crist told *The Jerusalem Post* during his visit. "It is cultural, it is educational, it is religious. On so many levels, we have so much in common."

Trade between Israel and Florida, however, has declined over the last three years and stood at \$229 million last year. One of the purposes of Crist's delegation - which included state officials and business leaders - was to increase Florida's exports to the country. A deal was worked out during the trip with the Industry, Trade and Labor Ministry that will see Israel and Florida jointly invest \$20 million over the next five years in stimulating bilateral business partnerships. Minister Eli Yishai was invited to pay a reciprocal visit to Florida in October to ink the agreement.

The FL-IBI initiative is part of that effort to stimulate that partnership, and its president and CEO John Perry talked like a cheerleader for Israeli technology at the official launching of the initiative last week in the presence of Yishai's senior economic advisor Shimon Ifrach.

"We have met dozens of amazing people and seen hundreds of outstanding innovations since we began our quest with the people of Israel close to two years ago," said Perry. "There is no place on earth with as much talent and as much innovation. As experienced and successful business leaders, we know that some of the technologies will make it and some won't. Our goal is to be instrumental in easing the transition for the Israeli scientist from the laboratory in Israel to US commercial success."

According to the initiative's literature, Israel is number one in the world after the United States in almost every high tech and biotech financial indicator - yet the transition from the lab in Israel to the sales floor in the US still poses a high hurdle that many worthy technologies cannot clear.

The FL-IBI, working in conjunction with local and US-based business leaders, plans to facilitate the transition by



FL-IBI president and CEO John Perry (left) talks to Israeli officials at last week's BioMed conference in Tel Aviv.

taking upon itself all aspects of US commercialization - from research to development, from funding to marketing and on to actual sales.

"This initiative has the potential to change the way Israel does business in the US," Ifrach told ISRAEL21c. "This new level of economic cooperation really shows the strength of the relationship between the two states - Israel and Florida."

According to Perry, the decision to cultivate Israeli companies was a no-brainer.

"We looked at other places like Japan and China, and I have to tell you, there are some great products and companies there and other places in the world," Perry told ISRAEL21c. "But you know, most countries generally produce about five or six company launches in the biomed field each year. In Israel, there are something like 60! That explains our interest.

"And it's not simple technology, but very complex fields like laser, light reflection and diagnosis developments that are badly needed around the world, especially in the US."

Despite that high level of innovation within the Israel technological incubators, Perry and his colleagues repeatedly returned to the point that it wasn't enough, that these young companies need a helping hand to realize their potential.

"Commercialization is not just distribution - it's also marketing, technology transfer issues, it's all the functions, and it needs to be done by somebody who understands it. We'll be partnering with these Israeli companies to make them commercially successful," said Perry.

The initiative goes hand in hand with Crist's observation during his visit to Israel that he believes the areas the two states can boost trade are in pharmaceuticals and aerospace.

As far as aerospace, according to the *Jerusalem Post*, Israel Aircraft Industries board chairman Yair Shamir told Crist in a meeting that the governor characterized as "extraordinary," that the aeronautics giant was interested in investing significant sums in partnerships with Florida, either with defense contractors or with civilian enterprises.

And for the pharmaceuticals? That's where the FL-IBI fills the gap. Perry is adamant that this is a "win-win" situation for both Israel and Florida, and an endeavor that is not only going to provide future health care for millions of Americans, but put Israel in the spotlight.

"How many people know that the Centrino chip by Intel and Microsoft technology is coming out of Israel?" asks Perry. "That will change five years down the road, when Israeli fingerprints will be on the biomedical developments coming to market - we'll make sure everybody knows it's Israeli."