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### China travel viewed as start

#### Chamber hopes trip 1st of many

By Laurie Whalen

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LITTLE ROCK — Springdale Chamber of Commerce officials hope a week-long trip to China will help it become the main contact in Arkansas for future travels with the California-based trip organizer.

Perry Webb, president of the chamber, said being the first chamber in the state to partner with Citslinc International of Monterey Park, Calif., is expected to yield greater financial benefits since “there’s a finder’s fee for doing the legwork.”

Webb said the trip by the delegation of 28, who will leave the state Sunday and travel to Beijing and Shanghai, China, did not represent a moneymaker for the chamber, at least not yet.

Instead, helping arrange the trip represented a break-even venture for the Springdale group. But he’s hopeful more income can be made from gathering a greater number of participants for future trips.

Citlinc International helps arrange guided tours of China. The organization was founded in 1995 by Leo Liu, a California-based entrepreneur.

Shan Nair, co-founder of Nair & Co., an international consulting business with headquarters in Bristol, England, said Wednesday that while many chamber trips are pleasure-oriented, there’s been movement toward encouraging owners of small and medium-size businesses to seek out relationships with the Chinese.

The federal government has been pushing smaller businesses to explore China partly as a solution to solving a continuing trade imbalance, Nair said.

The U.S. has a huge trade imbalance with China, he said. The balance of trade with China - exports subtracted from imports - has been in deficit for the past 20 years, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

Calling small- and medium-size businesses the major drivers of the U.S. economy, Nair said they would be main reason “if that trade imbalance is going to be reduced or reversed.”

“They comprise the gross domestic product of the U.S.,” Nair said.

The group will hit tourist spots such as Tiananmen Square and the Palace Museum while in Beijing. Other destinations include the National Embroidery Institute in Suzhou and a silk-rug factory in Shanghai.

Webb said that while the China trip represented more pleasure than business, “there are business meetings” planned. The amount of commerce-oriented activity will depend on how much the individual wants, he added.

Chris Weiser, owner of J.V. Manufacturing Inc. in Springdale and a chamber member, said unexpected business opportunities could arise.

There will be some Chinese very eager to do business in the U.S. “and they will be looking for opportunities,” he said.

Weiser said he wound up partnering with an entrepreneur he met during a Springdale Chamber of Commerce organized trip to Hubei City, China, in 2001.

"I had no intention of doing business in China," said Weiser of the now 7-year-old relationship which involves assembling cardboard baling machines.

Once in China, the Springdale Chamber contingent will meet with thousands of other chamber members from across the nation. The all-inclusive trip was advertised at \$1,950 per person. The group is expected to return Oct. 27.

Chambers throughout Northwest Arkansas were invited to attend this year, he said.

Steve Clark, president of the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, confirmed that at least one member from his chamber planned to go on the trip.

And Clark, a former state attorney general, said he first learned about Citslinc while attending the American Chamber of Commerce Executives meeting this summer in Raleigh, N.C.

The proposed partnership seemed to be an opportunity "to let businesses go to China at a reasonable cost or as a fundraising event" for a local chamber, Clark added.

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