

Abu Dhabi to Seattle: *Bridging the Gulf*

As regular readers of CrossRoads know, international business is all about relationships. The Greater Seattle region is increasingly building relations with the gulf region of the Middle East and the Trade Alliance is playing a part in this. In January, the Trade Alliance helped host a group of trainees from the UAE Academy in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The 13 trainees, mostly women, are college graduates who are preparing to transition into the business world through a training program called *Ibda'a* (creative ability), funded by the UAE Ministry of Presidential Affairs.

The Trade Alliance assisted American Cultural Exchange (ACE) on the trainees' visit to the Greater Seattle region, organizing meetings with local area businesses and organizations. The purpose of the traineeship was to learn about the American workplace and workforce education.

The trainees saw an amazing breadth of Greater Seattle businesses and organizations during their two-week stay. They traveled to Boeing's Everett plant, toured the assembly facility and met with company officials. From the largest company in the region they went to one of Greater Seattle's many successful small businesses engaged in international trade, Athena International, which helps brand companies in the beverage business. Peter Guyer, president of Athena, discussed with the group the challenges and opportunities of operating a small businesses.

No trip to the Greater Seattle region would be complete without a visit to Microsoft. There, the trainees met with human resources staff who talked about what it is like to work in Microsoft. The trainees also toured Microsoft's Home of the

Future, where they saw how technological advances are being applied to the home.

With the UAE becoming a financial center for the gulf region, John Walsh of US Bank provided a great opportunity to learn about the banking industry here.

In addition to visiting and meeting with a wide variety of businesses, the group also spent time with the University of Washington, where they were introduced to U.S. higher education models. The UW recently signed an agreement to develop training activities in Abu Dhabi.



Trainees from the United Arab Emirates Academy tour the Boeing plant in Everett.

All of this activity is the result of the Trade Alliance and ACE hosting and organizing meetings for Dr. Magdi Hafiz in late 2005. Dr. Hafiz was then Director of Training and Planning for the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce & Industry and is now the head of the UAE Academy which was formed by the Chamber

in early 2006. This trip by the trainees is part of a variety of exchanges that are deepening relations between the UAE and the Greater Seattle region. Companies like Boeing, Microsoft and Callison Architecture are engaged in business with this increasingly prosperous part of the world. Starbucks already has 26 stores throughout the UAE.

At the end of the training, each of the participants spoke about their favorite part of the trip. One person mentioned Microsoft's Home of the Future. Another spoke of the tour of Boeing. Some liked seeing how people listen to music while they work. Another was impressed with all the projects in the UAE that Callison is engaged in. And one, despite the rain and snow, said she liked the weather. Clearly, no matter the weather, the relationship between our two regions is becoming warmer. □