

Canada Israel group reaching out to boost membership

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TORONTO – One long journey is ending for the Canada Israel Chamber of Commerce. Another is just beginning.

The resurgent Canadian non-profit, also known as the CICC, officially installed its board of directors and board of governors recently with a VIP-studded reception at the home of Leslie and Anna Dan in Toronto's tony Bridle Path neighbourhood.

"The purpose of the chamber is to increase business and trade between Canada and Israel, which is vibrant and growing, but still has huge upside potential," said David Rubin, the organization's president and a partner at Gowlings law firm.

"The chamber is an independent, Canadian, non-profit organization and has no political affiliation to any party, political movement or lobby group. Its activities are free of influence



PHOTOS: KEREN SEGAL

Joe Lebovic attends CICC evening.

and links to any agenda that is not business, trade and investment related."

By all accounts, the seed for the current edition of the Chamber was planted by Alan Baker, Israel's outgoing ambassador to Canada.

"When I got here four years ago," Baker said, "one of the only free-trade agreements Canada had... was with Israel. When I saw the miserable state of trade [between the two countries], I said 'We have to do something about this.'"

But when he approached a number of Jewish leaders in the Canadian business community, he became "quite frustrated" with the response.

"If it's not part of a politically identified advocacy group," they said, "we won't be part of it and won't support it."

Eventually, though, he found an ally in Jacques Shore of Ottawa, also a partner at Gowlings, who introduced Baker to Rubin. Not long after, the CICC officially relaunched in 2006. Both Shore and Rubin were founding directors. Shore is now a national Vice President.

Baker's tenure as ambassador is now over. In fact, the ritzy reception for his brainchild was the final event that he attended in that capacity, a symmetry that was not lost on him – nor on others in attendance.

In recognition of his work, the



CICC Chair Leslie Dan and his wife Anna hosted reception.

chamber has given him an honorary membership and a mention on its letterhead.

But the chamber's work continues. Today, after hosting or co-hosting more than 25 events in the past two years, it can point to its two growing boards as initial signs of success. At last count, there were 27 directors and 46 governors crossing geographical lines and areas of expertise. The two boards include men and women, Jews and non-Jews. About half of its members were at the launch.

While most of its leaders are based in the financially significant Ontario-Quebec corridor, some reside in Vancouver and Calgary. One calls Halifax home.

Noted philanthropist Leslie Dan, who sold his generic-drug company, Novopharm, to Israeli giant Teva Pharmaceuticals in 2000, is just one of many well-connected business leaders who have joined the cause. He serves as the CICC's chair.

Other notables include veteran politician and current senator Art Eggleton, who signed the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement a decade ago; Toronto MPP Monte Kwinter, and business icons Isadore Sharp, Joe Lebovic, Philip Reichmann and Sam Belzberg.

However, for Toronto-based Ron Yekutiel, CICC Executive

contain detailed information on the interests and goals of Canadian investors on the one hand and Israeli business opportunities on the other.

For the Toronto lawyer who has a hankering for a ripe Israeli high-tech opportunity, for instance, only a few clicks of the mouse will separate the Bay Street office from the Tel Aviv-area loft of a hot new start-up. And so it goes for industry after industry, all searchable online.

As a number of CICC officers stressed, though, this is not a charity; it's a money-making opportunity. The idealism enters the picture at the back end. As Dan said in greeting his guests, "We have one thing in common: We all love Israel."

The CICC offers many services, chief among them being listed in and having access to the online database. Other benefits include

posting and viewing business opportunities online and receiving referrals from CICC staff.

All this could not be possible without an organization that Yekutiel calls the CICC's sister: the Israel-Canada Chamber of Commerce, the yin to the CICC's yang, which provides the business opportunities. Indeed, the coming months will see extensive promotional activity in Israel designed to increase the 60-plus membership of the Israeli chamber.

Currently, the CICC is inviting individuals and corporations to become members. Various packages are available, from a special September offer of \$150 for a yearly individual membership to a maximum of \$10,000 for the highest sponsorship package.

They can be reached online at www.canadaisraelchamber.com or by phone at (416) 260-4381.

To that end, the CICC will seek to attract new members and Yekutiel is betting that the CICC's list of about 2,000 Canadian prospects will give the organization a boost.

The latest big news for the chamber is the launch this week of its new web presence. Not just pretty pictures, the results-oriented project is "an automatic web-site tool to identify prospective partners and initiate contact with them," Yekutiel said.

Its searchable database will



PHOTO: YOSHI ARBEL

CICC President David Rubin and Ambassador Alan Baker



From the left: CICC Governor Avi Krispine, El Al Manager Dinah Kutner, and CICC Platinum Member Jim Bensimon