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MACEDONIA

SUCCESS STORY

Investors and Business Leaders Meet

A savvy minister invites investors to Macedonia to discuss opportunities



Photo: Agland Investment/William Scott

Mite Iliev, left, owner of the Iliev-Prom construction supply business in Dabilje, Macedonia, gives a tour of his businesses to Bolt Moore, right, an American pastor based in Budapest, and Bruce Cameron of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation.

“I care about these people’s spiritual lives,” says Bolt Moore, an American pastor based in Budapest, “but I know they live in the real world ... and that there’s an ethical way of doing business that’s compatible with one’s spiritual beliefs.”

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

As a practicing minister in Strumica, an agricultural community in southern Macedonia, Reverend Slave Velesanov often heard about his community’s challenges and aspirations. Thanks to his travels, he also had many contacts in religious communities abroad. He decided to put his contacts abroad in touch with his parishioners.

Thanks to his efforts, 10 international businessmen, including six Americans, came to this medium-sized town in Macedonia to hear local business people discuss investment opportunities in agriculture, construction, and even a new ski area. The business symposium involved prominent business, professional, and political leaders, international investors and participants from all faiths. The goals of the symposium were to forge new relationships with potential international investors, as well as to improve relations between local businesses, government, and trade groups. USAID helped organize the event and find speakers, including a senior investment officer from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), a U.S. government agency, to discuss how Macedonian entrepreneurs could work with OPIC.

The symposium’s goal was less to wheel and deal than to take time to discuss the qualities and strengths of entrepreneurship and values-driven leadership. And, of course, it was a great opportunity for business leaders and investors to get to know each other.

“I came here from Lynden, Washington, but I’ve discovered that Macedonian businessmen involved in farming and agriculture share many of the same problems and the same beliefs that I do,” said Dean King, a retired businessman and church leader. “Churches in our community are looking for ways to become involved in economic development.”

The symposium ended with a pledge to explore organizing a bigger conference next year, combining the resources of religious communities in Macedonia and the United States, along with the organizational support of USAID. It is just the beginning of a relationship that will change and educate everyone involved.