

Picture will follow by today evening:Jagdip

PRESS RELEASE

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## **IACCGH organizes outreach program for small businesses**

By Haider Kazim

HOUSTON - The Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston (IACCGH) organized an outreach program on Saturday, Dec. 3, 2011, to help community members start up or grow businesses and create jobs in the area.

The program at India House, sponsored by Citibank, brought people with dreams of owning a business or growing their businesses together with representatives of agencies and organizations that can help turn those dreams into reality. IACCGH's resource partners included lenders, business counselors, certifying agencies, employee and health insurers with an active participation from City of Houston Mayor's Office of Business Opportunity, Port of Houston, Houston Airport System and University of Houston.

IACCGH represents Indo-American businesses, a community of mostly small business owners and professionals.

IACCGH Executive Director Jagdip Ahluwalia said the purpose of the outreach program aimed to provide community businessmen with guidance that can start and succeed a small business.

He said that small businesses are the engine that really drives the US economy.

According to a recent study of the Small Business Administration, small businesses provide about 50 percent of the total jobs in the US economy.

IACCGH President Mona Parikh said IACCGH had promoted small businesses in the past 12 years of the Chamber's existence and had partnered with agencies that help small businesses succeed.

She said that the global financial crisis had affected many key businesses, including small businesses. "Yet when you look at Texas outlook, we realize that we are really in a good place. The outlook here is positive and most of the jobs that had been lost in Greater Houston are now being gained."

Ms. Parikh, an attorney, said that the strict lending requirements or tight credit undoubtedly resulted in serious challenges for business owners.

“We are not alone in this. There are many resources that are available, there are many entities and individuals here who equally believe that small businesses are a true engine of capital growth, she said. I think it will also be a true engine of our recovery.”

She said “it is this optimism which brings us together. That is what this program is all about.”

Business ownership is a cherished goal of Indo-American community and Ms. Parikh echoed that sentiment. “Personally I think that a small business is perhaps one of the most optimistic actions that an individual can ever take. It undoubtedly requires that you have the confidence of decision-making power that enables you to move forward ... It also requires the ability to confront challenges, market cycles and economic downturns all of which come with the need to move forward.”

The participating organizations were Accion Texas, City of Houston Mayor’s Office of Business Opportunity, Community Health Choice, Inc. (CHC), Greater Houston Procurement Forum, Harris County Sheriff’s Office Purchasing and Support Services, Houston Airport System, Houston Business Development Inc., Houston Minority Business Enterprise Center, Houston Minority Supplier Development Council, Houston Community College’s Small Business Program, Port of Houston Authority Small Business Development, Service Core of Retired Executives (SCORE), US Small Business Administration, University of Houston Small Business Development Center, and Women’s Business Enterprise Alliance.

Representatives of participating organizations gave brief accounts of the opportunities that their organizations provide and how small business owners can avail them. They were: Shirley Brooks, Regional Director of Accion; Carlecia D. Wright, Director, City of Houston Mayor's Office of Business Opportunity; Milton Thibadeaux from Greater Houston Business Procurement Forum; Gloria Elisa Moreno, Director of Purchasing and Support Services, Harris County Sheriff's Office; Goodwille Pierre from Houston Airport System; Moises Brito, HBDi Loan Officer, Houston Business Development Inc.; Chris Bilton, Director, and Mark Praigg, Business Consultant, from Houston Minority Business Enterprise Center; Richard Huebner, President, Houston Minority Supplier Development Council; Stacy Semien,, Senior Outreach Program Coordinator, and Pedro Garcia, Manager, Small Business Outreach, from Port of Houston Authority Small Business Development; Allen Shapiro and Sanjay Mundle from SCORE; Manuel Gonzalez, District Director, SBA; Roberta Skebo, Director, Business Consulting - Houston Center, from University of Houston Small Business Development Center; o Ingrid Hill, Recertification Coordinator, Women’s Business Enterprise Alliance; and Ken Janda and Daisy Morales from Community Health Choice, Inc.

The representatives were also available at the booths of their organizations to answer any questions by the visiting community members.

Citibank representative Don Burbach declared the Expo open and said that the bank was planning to sponsor similar outreach programs at other venues too.

CHC President and CEO Ken Janda, who was the keynote speaker, gave a presentation on health insurance options for employers. CHC has an innovative scheme for small businesses with 2 to

50 employees. It has developed a 3-Share Plan in which health insurance premiums are subsidized by Harris County. The plan has limited hospitalization benefits without any deductibles. The premiums are more affordable than those from several private insurers. For instance, the premium for 18-34 age group is \$231 and is split three ways: \$78 by employer, \$126.48 subsidy, and \$26.52 by the employee.

The lunch at the Expo was sponsored by CHC and was catered by Hot Breads, a member of IACCGH.

IACCGH President-elect Ajit Thakur, a well-known CPA, presented a plaque to honor the services of Cleveland Baker, Lead Business Development Specialist at SBA's Houston District Office. Baker retired recently after 43 years of service.

Ahluwalia said that services of Baker had made a positive impact on the lives of so many people and extended him an invitation for life to attend IACCGH events. The plaque presented to him said: "Your service made a world of difference."

The Expo, which had started at 9.30 a.m., continued until 2.30 p.m. and the representatives present at the booths provided information and answered questions about available business opportunities.

Yenyen Chen was the winner of the draw for a Continental Airline ticket by United Airlines Executive Chef Shashi Sanamvenkata. The ticket was donated by United Airlines.

Established in 1999, IACCGH aims to facilitate commerce between the US and India; facilitate access to the Indo-American market; be the voice of the Indo-American Business Community; enable Greater Houston Professionals, Businesses and Corporations to succeed. For more information about the Chamber, its programs and membership, please visit [www.iaccgh.com](http://www.iaccgh.com)