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SECTION B

## Governor to lead Far East trade mission

Fourteen businesses and education groups plan to take part, after learning the countries' customs.

By SUSAN M. COVER  
Blithen Maine News Service

AUGUSTA — Mark Eichenbaum's product is carried in 9,000 stores, including Maine supermarkets. It's sold in six other countries.

Now he hopes that a trip to

South Korea and Japan will expand the reach of The Baggle — a plastic device that makes it easier to carry shopping bags.

"My goal is to generate some business from another part of the world and increase our revenues ... by getting The Baggle into the hands of people that will really appreciate its attributes," he said.

Eichenbaum's Augusta company is one of 14 business and educational organizations that

will take part in the 2007 gubernatorial Trade Mission to South Korea and Japan later this month.

Gov. John Baldacci plans to lead his fourth mission abroad in hopes of helping Maine businesses expand their reach in the global economy.

"It's part of an aggressive economic development strategy," said David Farmer, Baldacci's spokesman. "The governor is able to bring the prestige of the

office. That helps make business possible and that translates into money and jobs for Maine."

Sales generated by the previous three trade missions are pegged at \$12 million, according to the Maine International Trade Center, a nonprofit in Portland that organizes the trips.

This year's trip is a departure from recent missions to Europe, said Wade Merritt, director of operations for the trade center. The center, which has been

organizing the trips for 10 years, chose Japan and South Korea, Merritt said, because both are among the top five countries for Maine exports such as education and items from the food and beverage industries.

Four schools — Foxcroft Academy, York County Community College, the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine — will send representatives in an effort to attract more students from the two

countries.

On the business side, at least one lobster company, the Maine Pulp and Paper Association, a window company and the distillers of Cold River Vodka will be on the trip, he said.

Colby College economics professor David Findlay said it makes sense for Maine businesses to visit Japan and South Korea.

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### Trade

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Maine exports, Merritt said.

Leading the agenda are education and the food and beverage industry, he said.

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Colby College Economics Professor David Findlay said it makes sense for Maine businesses to visit Japan and South Korea.

"Japan ... is clearly going to continue to experience long-term growth," he said.

"That is an area presumably worthwhile visiting for Maine firms."

Findlay cautions against putting too much stock in direct monetary returns from trade missions.

"Politically, they are worthwhile," he said. "Economically, let's hope they are worthwhile."

Gov. John Baldacci will lead a delegation of Maine business leaders to South Korea and Japan on a trade mission later this month.



Staff graphic by Sharon Wood

Also accompanying Baldacci will be John Richardson, commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development, a state tourism official, and a representative of the agriculture department.

Richardson said his goals are threefold: Expand already strong trade relationships in the semiconductor and pulp and paper industries; help other businesses break into the market; and tourism.

"We really think, and the studies tell us, there's a big market of Japanese and South Korean tourists," he said.

"We know they go to Boston and southern New England. We want to improve our tourism promotional plan and focus on the Asian market."

Before they leave on Oct. 27,

### IMPORTING IN '06 FROM MAINE

1. Canada: \$922 million
2. Malaysia: \$673 million
3. China: \$153 million
4. Japan: \$129 million
5. South Korea: \$112 million

Source: Maine International Trade Center

those who are taking the trip will sit in on two courses run by the trade center to help them learn about the political and historical backgrounds of the countries, and business etiquette, Merritt said.

They will learn how to present business cards, the importance of showing up early rather than on time, and how to understand status and rank.

That's one of the reasons why it's important for the governor to take part in these types of missions, Merritt said.

"This is a very rank-conscious society, and if you're able to arrive with a group that includes the governor, the perception is you've got more oomph," Merritt said.

"Having the governor along is incredibly helpful in opening doors."

The business people who go on the trip pay their own way, and chip in a little extra to cover the expense of bringing the governor and his body guard. This

trip, which is more expensive than most because of travel costs, averages between \$5,500 and \$6,000 per person, Merritt said.

It will cost somewhat less for government officials — Richardson estimated \$4,650 each — because the trade center does not provide them with the same kind of advance work it provides to businesses.

Airfare alone cost \$2,100 per person, and they are flying coach class, Richardson said.

Seven state or quasi-state officials are expected to take the trip for a total cost of about \$35,000. That includes two officials from DECD, one from the department of agriculture, and one each from the port authority, USM, University of Maine, and York County Community College.

Eichenbaum, whose device was recently honored by the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, said he has six appointments set up in each country. He has hired interpreters to help him bridge the language barrier, and believes his product has universal appeal.

"I don't think the issues in the U.S. are that much different than in other parts of the world," he said.

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