

Smart Ideas to Boost Local Businesses

The World Chambers Competition, "an Olympic Games for chambers of commerce," spotlights projects that help small businesses compete

The Piedmont region—often called the cradle of Italy's auto industry—was hit hard when Fiat Group (FIA.MI) began a restructuring program in 2002 that included culling the number of its suppliers. The Torino Chamber of Commerce stepped in to help local mom-and-pop suppliers attract new clients. Its \$6.6 million marketing campaign brought 45 buyers to the region and helped local businesses organize trade missions and secure contracts with other automakers from around the world. For its success at helping to rescue part of the local economy, Torino's project won the prize for Best International Project awarded on June 5 in Kuala Lumpur by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The ICC's annual World Chambers Competition recognizes initiative in creating partnerships between small and large businesses around the world. It's like an "Olympic Games for chambers of commerce," says Calvin Bartlett, a competition judge and head of the Anguilla Chamber of Commerce & Industry in the Caribbean. With the economy in the dumps, cooperation among companies, governments, and the nonprofit sector is more vital than ever. "The competition promotes public-private partnership and gives small businesses worldwide recognition, giving chambers the opportunity to exhibit diversity and cooperation between countries," said Anthony Parkes, director of the World Chambers Federation (WCF), a section of the ICC that organizes the competition.

Award-Winning Ideas Every year, the International Chamber of Commerce, through its World Chambers Federation division, recognizes a handful of innovative development projects from around the world for their potential impact on business and human welfare. Winners of the 2009 awards announced this month have one big thing in common: Each project was an effort to improve relationships between countries. The organizers handed out awards this year in four categories: small business, networking, international, and unconventional, plus a special award of recognition for the best project in a developing country. From simple initiatives establishing health and safety codes for small businesses to big projects revitalizing areas hit by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, chambers around the world are working together. Click on to discover the inspiring winners and runners-up for this year's awards.

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