



THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER Advancing Indiana's global presence

When Rajan Gajaria moved his family from Mumbai, India, to Indianapolis 12 years ago, his top priority was to ensure a smooth transition for his wife and children. Only then could he fully focus on his new assignment at Dow AgroSciences.

"That's a challenge all expatriates face," says Gajaria, now U.S. marketing director for the company. "We want to become totally productive at work as fast as we can, but first we must resolve issues at home such as choosing schools, finding a pediatrician, getting involved with the local community...."

And the list goes on and on.

Because Dow AgroSciences had established a partnership with the International Center, Gajaria's wife learned about COPE (Community Orientation Program for Expatriates). The eight-session seminar did more than reduce the stress of relocation and help the family bridge the culture gap. "We got to know people who were in similar situations," recalls Gajaria. "That's how we made our first friends, and it's also how we came to know the International Center."

The experience was so positive that he later accepted an invitation to join the center's board of directors and now serves as its chair. An enthusiastic advocate

The youth dance troupe **Watoto De Afrika** of the Watoto Memphis Performing Arts Academy got things off to a lively start at the International Center's 26th International Citizen of the Year dinner at the JW Marriott in Downtown Indianapolis.

for his adopted hometown, Gajaria applauds the manageable size of Indianapolis, the ease of getting around the city and the variety of family-friendly activities. "But what we really like are the people. Hoosiers are so friendly and welcoming," he says.

Rob Smith, president of the Eli Lilly and Company Foundation, shares Gajaria's appreciation for the center's programs and services, which also help Lilly's international employees and their spouses and families acclimate to living in Indianapolis. "I hear many favorable comments about the efforts of the International Center from my colleagues from around the world," he says. "It is so important for them and their families to start off on the right foot when they move to Indianapolis. We know that our employees are more productive when their spouses and children are happy and prospering here. The center is critical to our efforts to help them do so."

Harnessing Hoosier hospitality

The city's knack for reaching out to international guests in an intentional way dates back to 1972 when the White House asked then-Mayor Richard Lugar to host a NATO Conference of Mayors. The event's planners needed to recruit local interpreters, but they knew little about the area's immigrant populations or how to tap into their expertise. "The NATO conference was a moment of reckoning for the community. Everyone wondered, 'How are we going to pull this off?' 'What resources are out there?'" explains Diane Thomas, president and chief executive officer of the International Center, the organization that was formed to answer the questions.

Diane Thomas, president and CEO, sees that the International Center provides services and programs dealing with everything from protocol to naturalization – all to help citizens, communities, organizations and companies make global connections with confidence.

The center contributed to the conference's success, and its value has only escalated since then. Cultural diversity is on the upswing in Indiana – the international population has almost doubled since 1990 – and the state is working hard to attract global investment. International traffic now moves briskly in two directions as more Hoosiers travel abroad to conduct business and more global companies travel stateside to scout locations. With ongoing support from Lilly Endowment, the center acts as a catalyst for Indiana's international growth by offering programs that advance cultural understanding. Services include:

- ▼ Providing cultural education for Indiana professionals headed to international assignments
- ▶ Offering relocation assistance to newcomers adjusting to life in Indiana
- ▲ Training workforces to interact comfortably with colleagues from other countries
- ◀ Hosting dignitaries on tours as guests of the U.S. Department of State





professional counterparts of the guests and, after a long day of touring, a relaxing dinner in the home of a Hoosier host.

“These visits are a wonderful way for us to showcase Indiana’s strengths,” says Thomas. “What’s unique about our community is that we have access to high-level people who are willing to help us.” For example, when several Latin American journalists visited, they engaged in lively dialogue with the editor of the state’s largest newspaper. When representatives from the nonprofit sector in a developing nation came to Indianapolis, they spent time at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University and “soaked up everything they could learn about the role of philanthropy in a civil society.”

This year more than 240 guests from 71 countries traveled to Indiana as part of IVLP, and Thomas hopes to increase that number in 2012. “It used to be that the State Department would say, ‘Let’s take a delegation to the Midwest and split the group between

Jackie King, a nursing coordinator and International Center volunteer, leads a session of COPE. The eight-session seminar familiarizes newcomers with Indianapolis and reduces stress by lessening concerns about relocation issues. Listening are (left to right) Lisbeth Gonzalez (Spain), Winnie Ho (Canada) and Jesus Sarasa (Spain).

Indianapolis, Minneapolis and Milwaukee so they can have a Midwest experience,” she says.

That approach has changed as Indiana has built a reputation for assets that set it apart from neighboring states. Thomas and her staff want people to come to Indiana, not because of its geographic location, but because of its distinctive resources at the IU School of Medicine and the Center on Philanthropy and in the media, sports, arts and culture, the justice system, government and so forth. “It’s a matter of carving out our niche and promoting our assets,” she adds.

Focusing on Asian cultures

One of these assets is the Asian Learning Center of Indiana (ALCI), a new organization in incubation at the International Center to help Hoosiers understand Asian history, culture and business opportunities. According to *Destination Indiana*, a guidebook produced by the center, more than 27 percent of the state’s international residents are from Asia, with India and China topping the list.

Albert Chen proposed the idea for ALCI a few years ago. Born in Taiwan, Chen started Telemon Corp. in 1985 in Indiana. The technology-services company has become a global enterprise with more than 500 employees and annual revenues exceeding \$500 million.

Because of his international business perspective and his desire to help improve the quality of life in Indiana out of gratitude for all the state had given him and his family, Chen believed that the creation of ALCI was compelling. Discussions with the Endowment led to an Endowment-funded feasibility study that confirmed the need and support for an entity that would familiarize Indiana’s future workforce with the language and traditions of Asia and create partnerships with global companies. Now on the board of the center, Chen says, “The center’s leadership and support in ALCI’s early development have been indispensable and helped increase the community’s awareness of the importance of understanding Asian culture and history.”

Among ALCI's first projects was to discover how many Asian organizations exist in the state and to open a conversation with them. "Within two weeks we had identified more than 80 groups," recalls Weilin Long, vice president of strategic initiatives at the center. "When we assessed their willingness to collaborate with us, 98 percent responded 'yes.'"

She envisions recruiting members of these groups to serve as resources to schools interested in creating or expanding Asian studies curricula. Eighteen schools or school districts already participate in a pilot program begun by ALCI and its partnering institutions. One such partner, Global Indiana, has

"China is such a force in the industrial world, and the competition is only going to increase," says Dick Johnson, a Columbus, Ind., science teacher who traveled with Long to Asia this year as part of a Global Indiana delegation. Industry in Columbus brings many Chinese and Japanese engineers and their families to the community. "We're leaping and bounding into cultural change."

Rather than limit Asian material to an occasional unit in a history or geography class, Johnson and his colleagues at Northside Middle School integrate Asian material across the curriculum. As an example: "I show students the photos I took on my trip and talk to them about modern China and how the country has moved ahead so fast that the environment is suffering because of it. That leads to a discussion about what can be done to improve air and water quality," Johnson says.

Growing global awareness

Johnson credits parents for supporting faculty efforts "to prepare their kids for a world that has changed a great deal" since the parents attended school. This same willingness to adjust to global change has increased the impact and growth of the International Center since its founding in the wake of the 1972 NATO Conference of Mayors.

Contributing factors in the success of past and present initiatives have been the increasing ability of Hoosiers to understand and accept cultural diversity and create an environment in which people of diverse backgrounds feel comfortable and welcomed. "That's what leads to business deals, educational partnerships and cultural exchanges," says Thomas. "That's what will make a difference."



sponsored trips for Indiana educators to visit Asia and interact with their Asian peers. The teachers often return to their classrooms with a stepped-up determination to strengthen students' understanding of the global economy.

Welcoming and helping might describe the center's personality, as Thomas shows wondrous surprise at meeting little Pablo and his mother, Begona Carnero, from Spain.