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September 11, 2006

Gov. Dave Heineman Friday announced the official opening of the new 565 square foot Nebraska Center in Tokyo, Japan.

Led by Executive Director Koji Nagasaka, six Nebraska Center staffers will promote the state's products and services, participate in Japanese trade shows, introduce Nebraska and Japanese business owners and operators, conduct market research, undertake marketing campaigns and other focused activities that help the state compete there.

"Nebraska has had a strong relationship with Japan," Gov. Heineman said. "With the opening of this office, we hope to pursue an even stronger partnership over the long-term by enabling Nebraskans to work more closely with Japanese companies on business investment and development efforts. The Japanese place a high importance on personal relationships and interactions, and having a physical presence in the country is essential to expanding our opportunities for trade."

Joining the Governor for the announcement were Nagasaka, Richard Baier, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED), and Nizar Mamdani, executive director of the Office of International Healthcare Services at UNMC and The Nebraska Medical Center, two of the many organizations supporting the effort.

The center is located in the Shinjuku District, a business hub known for its high-rise landscape, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Towers. Located a short walking distance away is Japan's busiest railway station, Shinjuku Station, which transports 2 million passengers daily.

"The international program at the medical center has grown to over 100 strategic global partners in 41 countries and each year facilitates bringing hundreds of international patients for treatment, as well as many international researchers, students and prominent speakers to Nebraska," Mamdani said.

"Having a physical presence in Japan is truly a key for further expansion of the medical center's Asian initiatives in the areas of patient care, research, biomedical, biotechnology, education and training. We know that the establishment of this office will drive our strategic international programs to the next level," Mamdani said.

Nebraskans who are in Japan conducting business can use the office's computer, telephone, fax and other services between meetings and travel.

Among the Trade Offices' many services are researching, contacting and meeting with potential Japanese partners, providing basic translation and interpreting services, assisting with trade shows, marketing entry strategy recommendations, providing in-country assistance and selective visits with companies, assisting with hotel and travel needs, and coordinating meetings with Commercial Attache, JETRO, Shizuoka, and other Japanese partners.

"Mr. Nagasaka's experience will be key to helping Nebraska achieve its full potential in Japan," Gov. Heineman said. "The Japanese place a very high importance on personal interactions and spend a great deal of time building relationships and developing trust."

Nagasaka was employed for most of his career at Itochu Corporation, the world's 17th largest company, and one of Japan's largest trading houses involved in the aerospace, textile, agricultural, biotech, chemical, logistics and bio fuels industries. For 17 years, he worked at Itochu offices in New York and Chicago, as manager of the Oilseeds section, and executive vice president of Cigra Inc., a subsidiary company of Itochu, in grain collection and export, respectively.

His main activity was exporting U.S. agriculture products to Japan. He also traded with Brazil, China, Denmark, Norway and Germany. While living in Japan, he managed Itochu's Soybean Section. During his time in New York, he was transferred to Cargill Incorporated and stationed in several different cities, including Central City, Neb., to learn more about grain distribution in the U.S.

Nagasaka also served as president of Kamigumi Air Cargo Service Inc., an Itochu logistics subsidiary, and as executive vice president and owner representative of Kato Real Estate Corp., another Itochu subsidiary. Most recently, he served as deputy secretary general for Itochu Shayu-Kai, a nonprofit organization serving retired employees of Itochu Corporation.

In addition to DED and UNMC, other center partners include Election Systems and Software, Omaha; Lincoln Chamber of Commerce; Nebraska Diplomats, Lincoln; Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce; First National Bank, Omaha; Oxbow Pet Products, Murdoch; Bruckman Rubber, Hastings; Werner Enterprises, Omaha; Nebraska Corn Board, Lincoln; Kawasaki, Lincoln; Nebraska Public Power District, Columbus; and Omaha Public Power District, Omaha.