



## **A New Forum for Bringing Immigrant and Minority Entrepreneurs Together**

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*By Galen Hull, President HULL International LLC*

Tennessee has one of the fastest growing immigrant communities in the United States. Its capital, Nashville, has earned the title of an “Ellis Island” as a result. Immigrants from around the world are creating businesses and jobs, making notable contributions to social and economic development. There is mounting evidence that Music City has become a global hub attracting foreign direct investment as well a steady stream of immigrants. Nevertheless, numerous issues continue to cloud the immigrant population, not least of which is the presence of a sizeable number of the undocumented. The importance of this demographic development in the Music City area is reflected at the national level in the recent revival of Congressional initiatives to bring about comprehensive immigration reform.

In 2003 the Urban Institute published the report of a study for Building the New American Community Project entitled “Profile of the Foreign-Born in the Nashville Economic Market.” Among its findings were these:

While the share of the Nashville Economic Market’s foreign-born population (5 percent) was less than half the national average (11 percent), immigration to the region was growing rapidly; between 1990 and 2000 the foreign-born population grew by 203 percent, almost four times the national average (57 percent); 40 percent of the immigrants in the Nashville Economic Market arrived after 1995, compared with 24 percent nationally; the foreign born in Metro Nashville-Davidson County grew by 213 percent during this period; the state of Tennessee’s foreign-born population grew by 169 percent between 1990 and 2000; in 2000, Tennessee ranked sixth in the nation in the rate of its immigrant population growth.

As the immigrant population has grown over the past two decades, there has been an increase in interaction within each community; Korean Americans tend to stick with fellow Korean immigrants, or Latino Americans with fellow Latinos. But there appears to have been a corresponding decrease in interaction among immigrant communities. Each immigrant group tends to stay within its own cultural comfort zone. All immigrant entrepreneurs start with few or no resources, facing similar struggles of starting a business in a new environment, with little or no family and cohort support. They must adapt to a new culture, environment, language, social interactions, laws and regulations, and in some cases, new prejudices and discriminations as

well. The notion of working hard toward the American dream has inspired and united immigrants of all backgrounds over the years.

### **Tennessee Immigrant and Minority Business Group Event**

Since immigrant and minority groups have much in common, a synergistic interaction among groups will not only benefit the people and businesses in the various groups themselves, but also be good for the economic and cultural growth of middle Tennessee as a whole. The infusion of new blood, ideas and initiatives will help America grow and prosper in an increasingly competitive global market.

With these considerations in mind, Dr. Ming Wang, a prominent Chinese-American lasik eye surgeon, and I conspired to form a new forum to bring these disparate business persons and communities together. We agreed to embark upon the formation of an organization we called the Tennessee Immigrant and Minority Business Group (TIMBG), with a view toward reaching the widest audience possible. Our mission is to establish a forum for the promotion of communication and interaction among immigrant and minority business owners. Working together, we propose to address common issues and further the interests of all.

As co-founders, Dr. Wang and I agreed to establish a very basic agenda. We would convene monthly seminar meetings enabling immigrant business owners to market their services and products as well as to conduct discussion of topics of general interest to the immigrant and minority business community. Membership in TIMBG would be open to ALL business entrepreneurs, those of immigrants and minorities and anyone who is interested in interacting with immigrants and minority businesses. TIMBG is not intended to be another Chamber of Commerce in the conventional sense. Each meeting is to be hosted by a designated member.

The formula for hosting an event is as follows:

Send a request to host an event to the TIMBG founding member committee for approval; be responsible for hosting the seminar that month once the proposal is approved; set a date, identify a venue, and arrange food/drinks and underwrite the cost; send out an event e-mail invitation to all those on the TIMBG membership list.

Follow the standard format for a seminar event: 6:30pm to 8pm, Tuesday or Thursday, consisting of a 20 minute meet and greet social, 20 min host marketing presentation by the host, followed by 20 minutes for general discussion.

The next event is being held on Nov 21, 6:30pm to 8:00pm, at the Community Event Center, Global Mall at the Crossings (5252 Hickory Hollow Parkway, Antioch/Nashville). TIMBG presents Neera Bahl & Associates discussing immigration law and movement toward immigration reform. Ms. Bahl's firm handles cases concerning H1B, 1A, L-1B, Green Card, deportation, and family based visas. She will be assisted by representatives of TIRRC.

***For more information on future TIMBG events, please contact Galen Hull  
(galenhull@gmail.com)***