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Five questions ... for Bill Burwell

Director of U.S. Commercial Service in Baltimore



Bill Burwell is director of the U.S. Commercial Service in Baltimore, the Commerce Department's trade promotion arm and part of the International Trade Administration. (Kim Hairston, Baltimore Sun / April 11, 2013)

By **Lorraine Mirabella**, The Baltimore Sun

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Bill Burwell wants to see more Maryland firms competing globally.

"We want to enable Maryland firms to win in overseas markets," said Burwell, director of the U.S. Commercial Service in Baltimore, the Commerce Department's trade promotion arm and part of the International Trade Administration.

Baltimore's U.S. Export Assistance Center, which Burwell has headed since 2004, works to help companies launch or increase sales in global markets. Over the past two years, the center has counseled and provided other services to about 350 Maryland businesses, most of them small or medium-sized employers. That's generated more than \$525 million of new international business in more than 77 countries, Burwell said.

Besides trade counseling, the center helps local companies connect with international customers through market research, business matchmaking and commercial diplomacy. It also helps connect businesses to a network of international companies located in Maryland.

Before joining the commercial service, Burwell was a program manager for a manufacturing extension partnership program at the **National Institute of Standards and Technology**. He also has been a consultant with **NASA** and the Department of Defense.

In 2012, exports of merchandise from Maryland grew 9 percent to a record \$11.8 billion. On the import side, the state recorded total imports of about \$25 billion last year, according to the Commerce Department.

What were some factors that drove growth in Maryland merchandise exports last year?

First is the great pool of globally engaged businesses and business leaders in Maryland. We are very fortunate to have some incredible companies leading Maryland's growth.

From a larger ecosystem perspective, favorable U.S. dollar global exchange rates are a big factor as well as Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). America's FTA partners purchased 6.7 times more goods per capita from Maryland than non-FTA countries did in 2012.

In addition, [Gov. **Martin O'Malley**] launched the Maryland Export Initiative in 2011 to take advantage of the National Export Initiative announced by President **Barack Obama** in 2010. These efforts continue to provide valuable support to Maryland's international businesses. For example, since October 2011, 51 Maryland small businesses have been awarded ExportMaryland grants from the **Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development**, Office of International Investment and Trade. These grants are vital for small businesses and the grant recipients have turned that small investment into over \$125 million in estimated increased export sales and created over 270 new jobs. It is a great program for Maryland businesses.

Where are Maryland's top markets internationally and what's driving the demand in those areas? What are some of the newer markets that Maryland businesses are trying to break into? How tough is it for companies to start selling internationally?

Canada (\$1.8 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$858 million), United Kingdom (\$575 million), China (\$558 million), Japan (\$465 million) are all big trading markets. However, smaller markets are also prosperous. For example, Nigeria has grown the fastest at 42 percent per year since 2002 and export to Turkey is up by 34 percent.

Countries with Free Trade Agreements, such as Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, Jordan, Korea, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Oman, Panama, Peru, Singapore are great places to start. In general, FTA markets have fewer barriers to trade, such as strict labeling requirements and complicated import licenses, and have more analogous legal system and accountability mechanisms that U.S. businesses are accustomed to.

It is not difficult to begin selling products — the biggest issue is to understand the risks. The USEAC, the Maryland/DC District Export Council, the MD Office of International Investment and Trade as well as other partners have made tremendous efforts in educating potential manufacturers on the issues and concerns and providing answers to the questions and solutions to address the risks.

What is Maryland known for as an exporter? Has that changed over the years? What are some of the emerging categories of exports that are expected to be strong in the future?

By the macro numbers, the largest merchandise export category is transportation equipment, which accounted for \$3.2 billion of Maryland's total merchandise exports in 2012. Other top merchandise exports are chemicals (\$2.0 billion), computer and electronic products (\$1.8 billion), machinery (except electrical) (\$1.2 billion) and primary metal manufactures (\$559 million). Another of Maryland's fastest-growing export categories is pharmaceuticals and medicines, which has increased by 23 percent per year since 2002. In 2012, exports of these products reached \$993 million.

At a street level, a great story from the computer and electronics sector is Patton Electronics, based in Montgomery County. Patton began selling its products internationally in the early '90s. Now Patton has more than 400 active international resellers and distributors. In 2012 Patton sold its products to more 120 countries with more than 70 percent of its revenue coming from outside the United States.

Another great story from the primary metals space is [Marlin Steel, a manufacturer based in the Baltimore Enterprise Zone](#) in the city's Westport area. Marlin does 20 to 25 percent of its business in exporting custom-engineered material handling containers of steel wire and sheet metal. [Marlin exports to 36 countries](#) and they have seen strong growth in FTA markets such as Colombia.

Regarding emerging sectors, I believe that Maryland will be very strong in cybersecurity as well as unmanned vehicles/aircrafts and related products and services. With its history of experience in both IT and telecommunications and close proximity to the federal government, this should provide an economic boom for the state.

Can you talk about a typical week for you as director of the export assistance center? How much traveling, either around the state or internationally, have you done?

No two days are alike. We work with entrepreneurs and well-established businesses. It is very rewarding to be able to assist companies by either solving a trade barrier problem or by helping to open up a new market for future international sales. We have a great team of people and partners at the USEAC and we engage one-on-one with companies. We will travel to any company, anywhere in Maryland to learn about their business and determine if we are able to help them grow international sales. Since we have offices in over 75 countries, we tend to stay focused on Maryland and rely on our global network for overseas support.

What are some of your favorite ways to unwind when you're not working?

In the past few years I have rekindled my love for ice hockey and have been playing quite a bit. I am excited about competing this summer for the coveted Mullet Invitational Hockey League Championship. In addition, I try to keep pace with my 10-year-old daughter and all of her interests and activities.

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<http://www.baltimoresun.com/business/bs-bz-interview-bill-burwell-20130413,0,1287837.story#ixzz2QXLl9are>

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