

## Enterra blazes trail to Iraq

By JOHN ANASTASI

Bucks County Courier Times

Stephen F. DeAngelis, head of Lower Makefield's Enterra Solutions LLC, believes Iraq's Kurdish region is poised to follow in the footsteps of emerging high-tech hubs for foreign investment like Bangalore, India, and Singapore in southeastern Asia.

Enterra Solutions LLC is launching an Iraqi regional office in Erbil, according to a statement issued Monday.

There, DeAngelis said, the company will help modernize how the region's products are sold to increase their availability. The company will establish an Iraqi-staffed call center to handle customer service requests and, eventually, telemarketing.

Enterra also hopes to work with the region's government to make it easier for foreign companies to invest in Iraq, DeAngelis said.

The region's factories produce high-quality leather goods like shoes, jackets and handbags, plus suits, rugs and textiles. The problem, DeAngelis said, is that businesses operate only on a "cash and carry" basis.

"Customers show up with money. There's no means of transacting [business] online," said DeAngelis, who has made several business trips to the Kurdish region in recent months.

Enterra is building business-to-business and business-to-consumer trading exchanges in the Kurdish region to set up a secure way of selling products overseas via the Internet, DeAngelis said. Enterra hopes to hire about 50 employees by May, he said.

"We're going to try to employ as many Iraqis as possible," said DeAngelis. "The Iraqis are extremely eager and most are trilingual. They speak Arabic, Kurdish and English."

"The way a nation stabilizes is directly related to how many people are working," he said. "The more Iraqis who are put to work, the more the country will stabilize and the more people it can hire."

Nestled between Turkey and Iran, the relatively peaceful Kurdish region of northern Iraq is already attracting interest from foreign investors and its economy is growing quickly, said DeAngelis.

He said it is advancing on a track that is "very similar to the growth model" seen in recent years in places like Singapore and Bangalore, India, where technology booms have led to aggressive investment by foreign companies, including those located in the United States.

Kurdistan is still a far cry from the booming Singapore, "but that's not to say it's not a great place for investors," said George Washington University School of Business assistant professor Liesl Riddle.

"It's a region with a lot of hope, a lot of capability and a lot of potential," said Riddle, whose area of focus is the Middle East.

So far, much of the foreign investment is coming from Turkey, which she said makes Enterra's plan to help potential investors get up and running in the region an important priority.

"Any healthy economy should be based on investment from more than one source," she said. "A lot of people are still concerned about the security situation there and it is a complicated place to do business because of the red tape and the fact that there's no one-stop entity [where investors can get help] in what is a complex public sector to navigate."

In a statement Monday announcing the opening of Enterra's Kurdish office, DeAngelis said the company is committed to the region.

"We want the government, the business community and the people in the region to know that we believe in their potential and have cast our lot with theirs and we will work hard to make them successful," he said.