Connections, connections

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By MAY ZHOU in Houston |   
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Pete Saenz, mayor of Laredo, a South Texas border city about 310 miles from Houston, brought a small group to attend the US-China Innovation and Investment Summit (UCIS). He wanted to make connections with and attract Chinese investors, and he got what he came for.  
Saenz met with representatives from Suzhou at the opening night highlighting Suzhou and got connected with many.  
The next day, he also had an opportunity to introduce his city to Chinese investors: It ranks as the No. 1 land port on the US-Mexico border. Its trade with Mexico also ranked first at $214 billion in 2017.  
He sees China as the place to further grow his city's economy.  
"China has invested $9 billion in Texas since 2000. That's a good and strong indication that if we want to grow and to develop, we need to look to China," the mayor told China Daily at the summit. "I met a lot of people at the summit, including representatives from Suzhou."  
Saenz already has extended an invitation to the city of Suzhou to visit his city or to attend its 25th North American Logistics and Manufacturing Symposium in September.  
Cai Jianfeng, deputy director of the Suzhou Municipal Commission on Economy and Information, also invited the city of Laredo to Suzhou to explore cooperation opportunities.  
"The Chinese delegation and investors are looking for places to invest. We have made invitations to particular people and are developing relationships with China. China is our No. 2 trade partner, and Laredo is open for business. Hopefully soon we are going to visit Suzhou and see what's there for Laredo," Saenz said.  
In fact, the wheels have set in motion to organize a Chinese business delegation to visit Laredo within the year, said Zhang Shuoyang, founder and president of Z LAB. She has been leading the marketing efforts on behalf of the US-China Innovation Alliance (UCIA), the organizer of the summit.  
"Currently we are talking to various Chinese companies to explore the possibility to visit Laredo either during the symposium or later this year," she said.  
As an organizer of the summit, Zhang saw a lot of connections in action. A judge for the InnoSTARS Competition found a potential partner among the competitors. "They hit it off and ended up talking about doing business together," Zhang said.  
The judge was Benjamin Li, president of Geotegrity Group, an artificial intelligence-technology developer specializing in deep machine learning and blockchain-based asset-integrity solutions for the energy industry. The company is based in Houston, with R&D in China.  
Li found that Invatare's technology is similar to what his company is doing. Invatare is also based in Houston, with R&D in South America. It is the industry's only company with a transformational approach to bring holistic autonomous production and operations to the oilfield.  
Li visited Invatare and found that its technology was complementary. They quickly signed a non-disclosure agreement for collaboration.  
"Invatare's distributed AI platform complimented by Geotegrity Group's deep machine learning and blockchain technology will disrupt and transform the entire oil and gas industry," Li said.  
Li said the two companies intend to market their products in North America and China.

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