It takes two to tango

I'm not a big fan of the United Nations. I know that an international forum in which protagonists can discuss their differences is a better solution than meeting on some battlefield, but the outrageous waste, mostly in bureaucracy and opulent buildings, is a visual manifestation of poor organization and management.

However, the UN has implemented some programs and projects of which I do approve. Those that treat hunger, control disease, and educate children are examples, even though these, too, are saddled with high administrative overhead.

Coordinated partners can effect a well received result.

I've personally been involved with a UN-endorsed program for the past two years. The International Center for Science and High Technology (ICS) is an autonomous institution operating within the legal framework of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Essentially, ICS is mandated to transfer know-how and technology from developed countries to developing countries. In my more simple view, it's a way for industrialized nations to assist less industrialized nations to develop a domestic manufacturing base. And, again in my view, it's a means to develop a vital business sector that will foster entrepreneurship, create jobs, channel the fruits of secondary education, and, most of all, produce a consuming middle class that in turn will demand better roads, schools, community infrastructure, and more stable government.
It’s not quite a grass roots, bootstrap process, but it’s got the potential. I’ve met dozens of students attending two-week training courses sponsored by ICS in South America and I can tell you they’re bright, earnest, hard working scientists, engineers, and company managers who spend long hours learning how to implement new technology, in this case laser processing, into manufacturing.

As an invited lecturer it’s been my privilege to teach and to socialize with these young people, from South American and Central American nations, who have the potential to someday be the small businessmen of their countries. The ICS organizers see to it that professors and students share the same lodging, meals, and social events so that we who routinely live in the industrial world share through formal lectures and informal anecdotes our experiences. And, I can tell you, the students are like sponges, soaking up all that we lecturers can offer. For me it’s a privilege to work with these potential future business leaders.

The latest ICS event, organized and conducted by CIOp, the national center for research and training in optics and lasers, was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in June. Argentina is a nation in transition, with a burgeoning industrial base that is being led by young entrepreneurs like those attending the ICS training courses.

Visitors can sense the opportunities that will arise in Argentina and its neighbors to the North—Brazil—and West—Chile. There’s going to be a rapid increase in middle class growth, read this as consumers, in Argentina, and that will create demand for consumer goods that will lead to a stable economic situation.

Argentina is still home to the tango, an art form grounded in peasant and low-income protest. The dance, as we know it, is only a physical manifestation of the songs that tell stories of poverty, hardship, and unrequited love. For a non-Spanish speaker, however, it’s the music and dance that attract.

Talented dancers move in synchronized motion to produce a fluid, exciting result. An analogy could be made of the ICS effort, which takes the professionals, with their technology and business knowledge, combined with the students, who yearn for a business opportunity, to effect a positive result. —DAB