Robert Hansen, president and CEO of Dow Corning, the world’s largest silicone manufacturer, visited Korea last month to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the company’s Korea branch.

Hansen said the Dow Corning plant in Jincheon has the largest and most advanced LED production lines among the company’s plants worldwide and that Dow Corning will increase its investment in Korea to meet the demands of Korean companies.

The oldest joint venture in the United States, Dow Corning was established in 1943 by the chemical company Dow Chemical and glass manufacturer Corning, which invented silicone. It is equally owned by both parties.

The company’s history-changing commercialized silicone is widely used today in electronic devices, automotive application components and construction materials, not to mention in the construction of the world’s tallest building — the Burj Khalifa in Dubai — and landmarks in Korea including the new Seoul City Hall building and Sangam World Cup Stadium in Seoul.

Dow Corning Korea was established in 1983 and ranked 5th last year among the global company’s 45 branches worldwide in terms of sales.

The German chemical company BASF plans to open a new research and development center in Korea next year at Sungkyunkwan University in Suwon, near Seoul.

About 40 people will work at the center, which will be an integrated hub for research in the electronic materials sector for the Asia-Pacific region and offer a broad range of solutions.

BASF, the world’s largest chemical company, signed a letter of intent last month in Brussels in the presence of Yoon Sang-jick, Korea’s Minister of Trade, Industry & Energy.

The collaboration is expected to support scientific advancement and generate benefits for both sides.

Praxair Korea, a provider of industrial gases, will hold an art exhibit Dec. 11 to 17 at the Kyung-In Museum of Fine Art in Seoul showcasing the works of its president and CEO, Sungbok Seo.

Seo will sell 40 of his paintings to Praxair employees domestically and worldwide, to Praxair affiliates and others, as the works will also be sold online. The Praxair Foundation will match the profits generated from the sale of the paintings and proceeds will be donated to charity. Funds will go toward low-income individuals, people with disabilities and female immigrants in Korea.

Praxair Korea was started in 1975 and has seven plants nationwide in addition to its Seoul headquarters. A main area of focus is manufacturing industrial gases for the production of semiconductors and LCDs. Corporate social responsibility has long been part of the company’s strategy for success, and its employees make two types of periodic monetary donations: university scholarships for low-income students and living expenses for low-income families and families with disabilities.

Foreign Investment Week 2013 (FIW), Korea’s largest foreign investment attraction event, was held at Lotte Hotel World on October 30. Hosted by The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Energy and organized by the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), of which Invest KOREA is a part, the 9th annual event included a grand opening, industrial forum and welcome reception on October 30 and investment consulting and site tours to Ulsan and Saemangeum on October 31.

Participants of the grand opening included Park Jin-hyung, vice president of KOTRA, Yoon Sang-jick, Minister of Trade, Industry & Energy, and 600 major foreign investors and officials from academia, the government, free economic zones and domestic companies. Amy Jackson,
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President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Korea, Thilo Halter, president of the European Chamber of Commerce in Korea, and Nakajima Toru, chairman of the Seoul Japan Club, also participated.

Investors visiting FIW this year expressed great interest in a variety of business opportunities and in an investment environment rooted in Korea’s strong industrial base and expansive free trade agreement network.

Despite global economic uncertainties, FIW drew 309 companies from 24 countries, which is an increase of 12.1 percent from last year. Foreign investors numbered 398, and global companies long targeted by KOTRA’s 42 overseas offices — including GE Healthcare, BASF, Intel Capital, Curtiss-Wright, Mapletree and SUTL — participated to search for growth opportunities in the business hub that is Korea.

Also invited to FIW were members of the media from all over the world, the aim being to promote Korea’s economy, industry and investment environment globally. Journalists from 17 countries and 23 media outlets, including “The Times,” “Le Figaro” and “Asahi Shimbun,” participated.

KOTRA, the European Chamber of Commerce in Korea (ECCK) and Korea Transportation Safety Authority held a traffic safety “buckle-up” campaign with Grow Together, a group of university student volunteers, last month at four bus terminals in Seoul.

The campaign was held at the Seoul Express Bus Terminal, Central City Bus Terminal, Nambu Bus Terminal and Dong Seoul Bus Terminal to encourage all passengers to wear seatbelts in buses. Participants included employees and members of KOTRA and the ECCK and 50 Grow Together members, who held up banners and picket signs bearing creative slogans that they came up with.

“KOTRA and the ECCK will adopt some of Grow Together’s volunteer activity suggestions to pursue sustainable CSR activities,” said Kiwon Han, the Commissioner of Invest KOREA. “Grow Together members and foreign-invested companies will work together to further expand CSR activities. We hope that this will help organizations, businesses, students and the local community to grow together.”

Governor of South Jeolla Province Park Joon-Young visited the United States last month to promote foreign investment in Korea.

The governor and his delegation visited New York and Washington, D.C. to enter into agreements with state governments. The visit by the governor was his third foreign investment-related activity this year, following visits to Japan and China.

The delegation focused on attracting investment in Korea’s island development industry, such as a yacht town, marine technology and industries including medical, bio and new & renewable energy.

American companies showed great interest in entering the province’s island development and medical industries, as they offer comparative advantages compared to those of other local governments. The investment expectations of South Jeolla Province are high.

Foreign investment in the Saemangeum area is gaining momentum. The Korea Agency for Saemangeum Development & Investment announced last month that it has signed an investment agreement with Belgium’s Solvay, one of the five largest companies in the chemical and plastic industries. This is the second foreign investment in the Saemangeum project, following an agreement with Japan’s Toray Industries.
Solvay plans to build a 66,000 m² chemical products plant in the second zone of the Saemangeum Industrial Complex between 2014 and 2016.

The first investment agreement, with Toray Industries, was concluded in October. Toray, the world’s leading carbon fiber manufacturer, plans to build a 215,000 m² plant with integrated production systems with a KRW 300 billion (USD 283.4 million) investment. This investment is expected to generate 150 direct and about 1,700 indirect employment opportunities and contribute to the development of relevant industries.

The Saemangeum Agency plans to push ahead with various licensing procedures and expand additional infrastructure to support the operations of businesses. It will also prepare consumer-oriented development initiatives and provide various incentives to induce investment from the private sector.

BMW Group Korea announced last month that it has concluded a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the City of Incheon and Bavarian & Co. to build a BMW multiple complex in the Songdo area of the Incheon Free Economic Zone.

Bavarian Motors, an official dealer of BMW Group Korea, jointly established Bavarian & Co. with BMW Group for the BMW multiple complex project. Bavarian Motors and BMW Group Korea will invest 20 percent and 80 percent of the investment amount, respectively. This is the first investment by BMW Group for its service center in Asia.

A total of KRW 44 billion will be invested in Songdo’s High-tech Industrial Cluster to build the complex on a 13,223 m² site. The complex will comprise a large-scale service center, industrial-educational cooperative training center, children’s traffic culture center and museum and event rooms for newly released cars.

According to the MOU, the German carmaker plans to build a BMW culture center and service center by the end of 2015 and expand its service center by 2018.

Korea’s business environment was ranked 7th by the World Bank partly as a result of its efforts to streamline business operation regulations last month. The ranking is one level higher than that of the previous year, marking the third straight year Korea has been in the ranking’s top 10.

The World Bank analyzed the business environments of 189 countries through 10 broad categories, from the beginning to the end of the business life cycle. Singapore was first in the Doing Business ranking, followed by Hong Kong, New Zealand, the United States and Denmark.

Korea climbed from 26th to 18th for construction permits. It rose from 30th to 25th in the taxation category.

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) and the Korea Investment Corporation (KIC) announced last month that they will start a USD 500 million “joint investment platform” to facilitate trade and investment between Russia and Korea.

The RDIF is a USD 10 billion fund established by the Russian government to make equity investments mostly in Russia. The KIC is Korea’s sovereign wealth fund. The joint investment platform will be used to make investments in Russia as well as in other countries and is expected to further investment flows between Korea and Russia.

Korea aims to develop the offshore plant industry as a new growth engine that will generate more than 10,000 new jobs by 2017.

The government plans to jointly invest about USD 848 million with the private sector by 2017 to generate more than 10,000 jobs. It will also implement policy initiatives through close cooperation among relevant departments.

The global market for offshore plants is forecast to grow an average of 6.4 percent a year, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry & Energy.

In the first eight months of the year, Korea secured 39.5 percent of global orders for offshore plants, but China’s global market share is growing fast. To strengthen its global competitiveness, Korea aims to localize most parts and equipment for offshore plants.