

Kia Families Set Their Minds on Georgia

Cross-cultural training classes ease the transition from Korea to the U.S.

LaGrange, Ga., August 2007 – Though the West Point, Ga., Kia plant isn't scheduled to begin production until 2009, Kia team members are already settling here and beginning production in their own way. Seven-month-old Jason Park, the first child born in Georgia to a Kia team member, was among those attending a recent training session offered by Quick Start to help the families of Kia executives acclimate to their new home.

“Thank you all for coming, in spite of your tight schedules,” said Eddie Jin, Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia senior director, welcoming the group. “This is very important training and orientation, and I'd like to thank Quick Start for preparing this class for the Kia families.”

“When a company sends team members overseas, one of the biggest challenges is making sure the families feel comfortable in new surroundings,” said Jackie Rohosky, who oversees Georgia's Quick Start program which will be providing workforce training services for Kia. “We wanted to do our part to help our new residents make their transition here a smooth one.”

Kia's chief operating officer, Steve Kang, was among several company executives on hand to offer his support at the cultural training session, held in LaGrange at West Georgia Technical College's Callaway Center for International Development. Speaking in Korean, Kang told the women that their role as wives of Kia team members was very important to the success of the new facility, and that by maintaining a stable home, they made it possible for their husbands to focus on their jobs.

In the class, “Welcome to Georgia,” 21 wives of Kia team members already working in Georgia learned facts about LaGrange and Troup County, Georgia's historical attractions, school system and social customs, just to name a few.

“In Korea, when two people meet, it is the older person or the higher-ranking person who must initiate a handshake,” Quick Start Instructor Ron Hartsell told his class during a discussion of social customs. “In America, anyone can.” Other surprises and challenges are in store for the newcomers, including the American convention of addressing women as “Ms.,” which requires the use of a “z” sound that doesn't exist in Korean.

The women were especially interested in learning the rules of the road when driving in the United States. Although in both countries, drivers use the right side of the road, the students had several questions about intersections and who has the right-of-way in certain situations to make sure they had a good grasp of how to drive safely.

Shopping for shoes and clothes for the family will be the responsibility of the Kia wives, so shoe and clothing sizes were another important topic covered in class. In Korea, shoe

sizes are given as the length of the shoe in millimeters. For example, a woman might buy a 248 millimeter shoe in Korea, but she would probably wear a size 6 ½ in the United States. In clothing, Korean women's sizes are given as 44, 55, 66, 77 and 88. A woman who wears a size 55 in Korea might wear a size four or six here.

Still, the newcomers are settling into their new lives, and bringing touches of home with them. For example, several of the women said they'd already been making kimchi, a traditional Korean dish of spicy, fermented vegetables, at home.

After the class, the group was treated to a buffet lunch of traditional Southern food, with black-eyed peas, fried chicken, peach cobbler and pecan pie.

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A class photo of the first Quick Start cultural training session for families of Kia team members, held in LaGrange at West Georgia Technical College's Callaway Center for International Development.