

Israeli companies find much to like about Philadelphia, 6 have now set up HQs here

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Two more Israeli companies have established U.S. headquarters in Philadelphia, making it six since the beginning of last year.

Both companies initiated soft launches last fall, joining **four other Israeli companies** that set up shop here in the first half of 2016.



GB WAWA, short for Green Building Wall to Wall, is a consulting and design company for sustainable buildings. The company, which coordinates and leads green projects and manages LEED certification, moved into a small location at 1735 Market St. in September.

“We liked being in the middle of things,” CEO [Sam Alfassy](#) said. “This is where all of our potential customers are.”

It has just three local employees, led by a business development manager. While it does not have any local clients as yet, it has landed work in Texas and plans to use its headquarters here to seek business across the country.

Alfassy started the company in 2008 as a one-stop shop for green building designs. Clients include developers and governmental entities.

He was invited to lecture about green buildings at Drexel University in 2011 and instantly liked the city. During a conference in Washington in 2014, he met with officials from the [Philadelphia-Israel Chamber of Commerce](#) and started to look earnestly at establishing a Philadelphia office. He met with officials from some of the city's biggest real estate stakeholders — Brandywine Realty Trust, Liberty Property Group and Drexel University — and received positive feedback.

Alfassy learned quickly that his is not the only business with the name WAWA. But he said it has been a conversation starter rather than a distraction.

The second Israeli company to choose Philadelphia for its U.S. headquarters is Golden Number Solutions (GNS), an aerospace defense and aviation company owned and managed by a team of former high-ranking officers of the Israeli Air Force. It provides advanced maintenance, logistics, and fleet management programs to government and private air operators. The company set up operations at 434 Fairmount Ave. in Fairmount late last year.

[Lauren Swartz](#), director for international business investment at the Philadelphia Department of Commerce, said city officials met with GNS General Manager Nili Lesnik to alleviate any concerns she might have had about the city. Lesnik's husband is a documentary film producer, so Swartz introduced him to officials at the Philadelphia Film Office.

GB WAWA and GNS join four other Israeli companies that set up Philadelphia operations last year, according to Vered Nohi, executive director of the [Philadelphia-Israel Chamber of Commerce](#).

- Simlat, which provides training services for operating unmanned vehicles, opened an office at Drexel University in January. It first became connected to Philadelphia during then-Mayor Nutter's November 2013 visit to Israel, which also included Drexel President John Fry.

- Pango, a tech company that recently launched a mobile parking app in the region, opened an office at Pipeline, a shared working space in Center City's Graham Building, and works with the Philadelphia Parking Authority.
- Cogross, a real estate investment company, opened its U.S. headquarters at 105 N. 2nd St. in Old City.
- Pico, a photo-sharing technology company that visited Philadelphia in September 2015 and looked close to opening an office here, initially chose to expand in Europe instead of the United States but then chose to come here.

In addition, WeWork, one of the world's largest co-working space networks, is based in New York. But city officials said Nutter met with CEO Adam Neumann, an Israeli who now lives in New York, on his 2015 trade mission to Tel Aviv and espoused the virtues of Philadelphia. WeWork opened a 30,000-square-foot co-working space at the Piazza in Northern Liberties late last year. It expanded into more office space at 1601 Market last February and is reportedly eyeing more space.

Nohi said PICC expects seven more companies to consider Philadelphia this year for a U.S. headquarters or a manufacturing facility.

"There is really good connectivity with PICC," Swartz said. "And there is a really strong Israeli diaspora population here."

Swartz also provided an update on some of the Commerce Department's efforts to recruit European businesses to establish operations in the city.

- Portuguese software company Cave Digital, which met with Commerce Director Harold Epps during his **European trade mission last fall**, is still deciding between Philadelphia and New York.
- Two German entities — a software company that works in the health care space and a manufacturing firm — will decide on its U.S. headquarters sometime in the second quarter. Swartz said city officials met those companies on the six-day European mission that primarily focused on Germany and France.
- The CEO of another German manufacturer that already has a small location here came to Philadelphia two weeks ago to visit its local operations and clients. While he was here, Commerce officials set up

meetings so the executive could evaluate whether it would be the right time for expansion.

- Two French companies have also visited. A software firm in the transportation field has been to Philadelphia three times and Swartz said it is close to making a decision about its U.S. headquarters. Also a retailer is seeking to expand here.
- An Irish software company has been to Philadelphia twice since Labor Day. Its officials met with prospective clients and toured co-working spaces.

In all, Swartz said 10 companies from six different countries — Germany, France, Italy, Ireland, China and Israel — visited Philadelphia within a two-week span.

Swartz said city officials have a few trips planned — one this spring and another in the fall — but declined to provide details.

“People [overseas] don’t know about Philadelphia,” Swartz said. “Could you name the fifth-largest city in the U.K., China or Mexico? So we have to be aggressive in getting the word out.”

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