

Walesa named to board of Charlotte company

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Lech Walesa, the charismatic Nobel Peace Prize winner who led Poland out of communism, is joining the board of a fast-rising Charlotte technology company, NuTech Solutions Inc.

Walesa, the mustachioed former shipyard electrician who has long been interested in artificial intelligence, accepted NuTech's offer in one afternoon in Poland, after meeting the company's executives for the first time.

Justin Hunt, Charlotte Chamber vice president of headquarters and international development, said he wasn't aware of another Charlotte company with a former head of state on its board.



Former Polish President Lech Walesa

"He is one of the most internationally renowned figures to join a local board," said Jim Woodward, chancellor of UNC Charlotte.

NuTech writes software to analyze data, predict behavior and reduce waste in the manufacturing, finance, retail and government sectors. Some of its U.S. clients include Bank of America Corp., Ford Motor Co. and the Department of Defense.

Founded in 1999 in Charlotte, NuTech has a Warsaw office that accounts for 10 percent to 15 percent of its revenue and employs 60 of its 130 workers. Walesa, who received the 1983 Nobel Prize for Peace and led Poland as president from 1990 to 1995, learned of NuTech through his foundation, which promotes democracy and free-market reform across Eastern Europe.

He hopes joining NuTech's board will encourage more U.S.-Polish business partnerships, he wrote from his Warsaw office in an interview by e-mail.



*NuTech Solutions' CEO
Matthew Michalewicz*

"It is important that companies such as NuTech lead the way for other American companies to take advantage of the favorable business climate in Poland today," he wrote.

NuTech Chief Executive Matt Michalewicz credits the coup to NuTech's track record in Poland, the company's future potential and its Polish roots; Michalewicz and his father, Zbigniew Michalewicz, two of the company's founders with partner Dan Cullen, were born in Poland.

NuTech is looking to Walesa to aid in a strategy for further international expansion.

"This was of monumental importance to us," said Matt Michalewicz, who emigrated to the United States 20 years ago at age 6 and graduated from UNC Charlotte. "We're 3 years old, we're growing very rapidly. For us, it's very important to compete effectively, to make the correct decisions."

Walesa said his many years as a leader -- of Solidarity, the labor movement that fought the dominance of the communist government, and later as Poland's first directly elected president -- "have taught me the intricacies of international relations, business and complex social and economic transformations."

Walesa was a dramatic leader in a time of revolution, but lost support because of a confrontational style.

He lost the presidency in 1995 to a former communist. In a 1999 national opinion survey in Poland, he was shown to have become one of the least popular political figures in the country.

In Charlotte, Walesa's stature could win tech firms more attention from venture capitalists and potential clients, said Jim Roberts, founder of FirstRound.org, a Charlotte organization that helps tech companies get funding.

Walesa adds another high-profile member to NuTech's board, which lured former Bank of America Corp. CEO Hugh McColl Jr. as a member and investor last year.

Walesa is expected to attend board meetings in Charlotte, which he visited once in 1998 to speak at the Charlotte Foreign Policy Forum.

Like the company's other board members, Walesa will be compensated with an undisclosed number of stock options, Michalewicz said. NuTech will pay for his flights to Charlotte board meetings. After this year, the company may hold some of its board meetings in Poland, he said.

NuTech first started talking with Walesa's foundation three months ago, after doing much work in Poland. In 1999, NuTech won a contract to coordinate power-plant operations in Poland to reduce pollution. It has since worked with several of Poland's larger companies.

The projects won a lot of attention in Poland, and through them, NuTech established a contact with Walesa's foundation.

After several conversations between the foundation and NuTech's chief scientist in Warsaw, NuTech executives flew to Warsaw on April 12 to meet Walesa for the first time.

During the two-hour meeting, Michalewicz and his father offered Walesa a board position on the spot, and he accepted.

"We were on the ground for about 12 hours," Michalewicz said. "But it was the best 12 hours."