

# MSI capitalizes on geographic, product diversity

By Tanja Kern

[ATLANTA] Natural stone importer and distributor M S International (MSI) hosted an open house here August 21 and 22 at its newly renovated, 175,000-square-foot distribution facility.

The building includes a 10,000-square-foot showroom that features large granite panels, generous sample boards, and a countertop/slab area that displays 200 different stones.

"Fabricators and kitchen and bath stores will send customers to that location so they can pick out their actual slab," said Al Pacheco, vice president of sales.

The company imports natural stone floor-



**Large sample boards make it easy for customers to see the details of each natural stone.**

ing, countertops, landscape products and last year began distributing porcelain tile and engineered stone countertop materials. Its customers include small and mid-sized distrib-



**M S International celebrated the remodel of its 175,000-square-foot distribution facility in Atlanta last month.**

utors, tile retailers, fabricators, kitchen and bath showrooms, builders, architects and landscape contractors.

After emigrating from Bombay, India, Manu Shah and his wife Rika started MSI in 1975 in Fort Wayne, Ind., as a granite headstone supplier. In 1981, the company won the contract to provide black granite for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. — a major expansion point for the business. Three years later, the Shahs relocated the business to Orange, Calif.

Today, the company owns 10 distribution centers located in Orange, Calif; Oakland, Calif.; Atlanta; Phoenix; Dallas; Houston; Brain-

tree, Mass.; Edison, N.J.; Baltimore; and Chicago. Houston, MSI's newest location, opened in June with a 180,000-square-foot distribution center. In addition, MSI has sourcing offices in Turkey, Brazil, India and China, which collectively employ more than 50 people.

"Our geographic diversity has really helped us," said the couple's son Raj Shah, who serves as executive vice president. "The Baltimore and D.C. areas continue to experience significant growth, and the region has a high penetration for natural stone. Houston is also an extremely strategic market as an entry port for Turkish and Brazilian products."

Raj also credits the company's extensive product selection for MSI's growth in light of the current economic downturn. "By having product diversity, we also have customer diversity," he said. MSI regularly carries more than 2,000 products; last year the company imported 16,000 container loads and usually has between 45 and 50 million square feet of product on hand in its distribution network.

"The tile side has seen some pretty good growth, such as tile dealers and home centers," Pacheco said. "The fabrication side of the business is still strong, but in certain pockets, like Florida and California, we've seen a slowdown." **FCW**