

# Chicago Shows Highlight Kids, Brides

By Beth Wilson

COME 2010, ORGANIZERS OF CHICAGO'S STYLEMAX WILL MAKE ROOM FOR the kids — kids' clothing, that is.

Starting in January, Chicago's Stylemax, the Midwest's largest women's apparel market, will add a children's component called Kidz at Stylemax, which is scheduled for Jan. 30 to Feb. 2 at the city's Merchandise Mart.

Expected to involve about 100 booths, representing several hundred lines, the Kidz at Stylemax section on the Mart's seventh floor will feature resources including clothing and accessories for babies to tweens.

"The Midwest has been underserved in children's wear," said Susan McCullough, senior vice president of apparel at Merchandise Mart Properties Inc. "This was something that needed to be done. We just kept getting phone calls about people who wanted to show here."

McCullough noted some children's resources have been available in sixth-floor showrooms across the street from the Merchandise Mart at Chicago's Apparel Center. "We just started paying attention and adding up the number of inquiries we've been receiving."

And the January show — the first Stylemax of the year, which acts as a summer and fall preview — seemed the right opportunity to launch the concept. "It will be a new year and it was just time," McCullough said. "We were shaking up the floor plan anyway."

Stylemax, which runs four times a year — January, March, August and October — typically spans 100,000 square feet and features about 4,000 resources.

In January, organizers will be moving and expanding the Stylemax accessories component. The section of jewelry, handbags, footwear and other items will grow to one-third of the market space from one-fourth, and move to the northwest side of the floor from the northeast side.

"It's such an important category now," McCullough said, noting how prominent scarves and handbags have been in past seasons. "We thought it [accessories] needed a new look. It needs to be fresh and hopefully this will give us the opportunity to show new lines and attract more lines."

In these troubled economic times, accessories have been a key part of business for retailers. "It's been a go-to category for people who can't or don't want to redo their wardrobes," she said.

McCullough said she hopes to attract 50 to 60 new accessories lines to the market. New confirmed vendors include Dian Malouf, Cataluna de la Torre, Leather Impressions, Vieta Handbags and Dallas Maynard.

Besides offering expanded accessories and children's sections, Stylemax will also take place at the same time as the men's market, Chicago Collective, staged on the Mart's eighth floor from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2.

Organizers said they decided to overlap the markets in response to the growing number of retailers carrying men's and women's fashions, allowing buyers to shop both markets.

Special events at January's Stylemax include "Stylewatch," models walking around the seventh-floor Stylemax Cafe from 12:15 to 1:15 p.m. on Jan. 30, 31 and Feb. 1, and the "Accessorywatch" fashion show at 8:30 a.m. Jan. 31, following a continental breakfast at 8 a.m. at the seventh-floor special events area.

Markets also will collide in March when Stylemax, running March 20 to 23, coincides with the National Bridal Market, set for March 21 to 23.

The National Bridal Market, which organizers claim is the nation's largest and longest-running bridal trade fair, features moderate and designer bridal gowns, bridesmaid, flower girl and mother-of-the-bride dresses along with accessories, prom, quinceañera and special occasion resources. Highlights of the market include a 6:30 p.m. "Best of Bridal" fashion show on March 21, and an 8:15 a.m. seminar and 6 p.m. market party on March 22. The seminar presentation, in which the topic has yet to be determined, will follow an 8 a.m. continental breakfast at the eighth-floor special events atrium.

On the seventh floor, Stylemax is expected to showcase a larger contemporary section and a larger Kidz at Stylemax area focused on back-to-school fashions and accessories. Special events include the "The Collections" fashion show, featuring bridge and designer clothing, at 6:30 p.m. on March 20, at the eighth-floor special events atrium



after a 6 p.m. cocktail party. The "Montreal Collections" fashion show, sponsored by the Quebec Delegation Chicago, will highlight Canadian resources at 8:30 a.m. on March 21, in the eighth-floor special events atrium following an 8 a.m. breakfast.

In June, Chicago hosts its showroom-based event, the Women's and Children's Apparel Market, from June 8 to 10 at the city's Apparel Center.

