

Malina Consortium targeting Eastern Europe, Latin America

'08 focus is on regions with economic growth

BY LOU ORTIZ

Countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America boasting some of the world's fastest growing economies are on the agenda this year for Miami-Dade County's Jay Malina International Trade Consortium.

The missions to Warsaw, Prague and Istanbul in May, and Chile and Peru in August, could result in increased business for local companies, Miami International Airport and the Port of Miami.

"It's about planting the Miami-Dade County flag," said J.A. "Tony" Ojeda Jr., the consortium's executive director. "We promote the opportunity for trade to take place."

In 2006, Poland ranked 76th and the Czech Republic 87th among Miami-Dade's 100 top trading partners, while Turkey came in at 38th, according to consortium statistics.

Chile, meanwhile, was eighth in trade in 2006 with Miami-Dade, and Peru was 13th.

The area's top five trading partners are Brazil, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Colombia and China, according to the consortium.

Mr. Ojeda is quick to point out that the consortium doesn't judge the success or failure of its missions based on sales or contracts that may or may not result from the local business representatives who accompany the group.

He said he doesn't even ask the business representatives after the missions whether they sold anything. "We don't ask our participants: 'What did you sell and whom?'" he said.

Mr. Ojeda added that the missions promote what Miami-Dade has to offer in terms of business, culture, tourism and trade, along with its airport and seaport.

Miami International lists 32 foreign airlines providing passenger service from the airport, with destinations to Central and South America, the Caribbean, Europe and Israel, according to Miami-Dade County Aviation Department statistics.

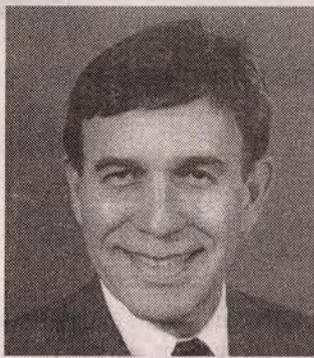
The airport boasts 10 foreign cargo carriers, mostly to Latin America but also Canada, China, Taiwan and Uzbekistan.

On the seaside, the Port of Miami has "sister seaport" arrangements with 36 foreign ports – to increase cargo and cruise trade between them – in Europe, Latin America and Africa. China was the port's top trading partner in 2006.

"We typically have someone from the airport and the seaport" as part of the mission delegation, said Dimitrios Nares, the consortium's assistant director.

The consortium's mission meets with government officials, Miami-Dade's counterparts in the city or country's airports and seaports, local chambers of commerce and others, he said.

"We try to match our busi-



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Natacha Seijas

nesses with their businesses," Mr. Nares said adding that 15 to 20 people typically accompany a consortium mission trip.

The consortium's announcement on the trip to the Czech Republic, Poland and Turkey, which is expected to take place from May 21 to May 31, says that "business matchmaking sessions will be arranged, as well as networking opportunities."

Commissioner Natacha Seijas, who chairs the consortium, will lead the mission.

"The objectives of the mission are to explore ways to increase bilateral trade between countries in Europe and the Middle East and Miami-Dade County, as well as to promote Miami as the 'Gateway of the Americas' and a platform for international trade," she said in a prepared statement.

Last year consortium missions visited South Africa and India.

Mr. Ojeda said the purpose of the trip to South Africa was, in

part, to increase trade and to get the government there to resume direct flights from Johannesburg to Miami.

The World Cup soccer championship is being held in South Africa in 2010 and with direct flights there is "the possibility of using Miami as a hub," he said. "That is under discussion."

In India, Mr. Ojeda said the mission sought to expand flight and cargo routes and to urge that country to use Miami as a gateway for its goods to Latin America.

The US ambassador to India said "we were the first city in the United States to take a delegation" there, Mr. Ojeda said.

"What I'm doing is opening the doors for others," he said. "What we offer these countries is a platform for trade."

Businesses interested in participating in upcoming trade missions should contact Roberto Fabricio at the consortium for more information, at 305-375-4695 or email him at robfab@miamidade.gov

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