

Milan opens chamber of commerce in Chicago

By Lisa Bertagnoli

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(Crain's) — Chicago's embrace of Italian food, fashion and design has inspired the city of Milan to open a chamber of commerce here to promote trade between the two cities and countries.

Promos Milan, as it is called, is sharing office space with the Italian American Chamber of Commerce on North Michigan Avenue.

"Chicago is not very well known in Italy," said Fulvio Calcinardi, executive director of the local chamber. "We want to bring businessmen to Chicago and show them the city."

The Milan chamber, to be run by Project Director Patrizia Gullo, also aims to open an Italian design showroom in Chicago and introduce Italy as an export market for small and mid-sized Chicago companies.

In mid-May, Promos Milan will bring 30 Italian interior design firms to Chicago for sightseeing and fact-finding, said Mr. Calcinardi.

The two groups also will reprise "Italian Style," a trade show open to the public and featuring Italian food, fashion, design and tourism companies. Last year's show attracted 24,000 attendees, making it the largest Italian trade show in the United States and raising interest in Chicago over Miami, Los Angeles and New York for the new outpost, Mr. Calcinardi said. This year's show will be July 17-19 at Navy Pier.

The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce was "deeply engaged" in bringing the office here, said Gerald J. Roper, the Chicago chamber's president and CEO. Some 30 countries have similar offices here, and Chicago has tried to establish an official business connection with Italy for several years, he said.

Neither Mr. Roper nor Mr. Calcinardi view the sagging economy as a barrier to Promos Milan.

"There are worries, but the U.S. market is still the U.S. market," Mr. Calcinardi said.
