

Fashion struts to Tampa

By Jennifer Kaye
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Los Angeles and New York are not the only cities that have models strutting down the runway in the latest fashions. In a proclamation Monday, Mayor Pam Iorio declared Sept. 24-27 as "Fashion Week Tampa Bay."

Established and emerging fashion and accessory designers will showcase their most recent designs at several locations throughout the Tampa Bay area this week. The main goal of the event is to promote local talent and ensure that it remains in the area contributing to Tampa Bay's fashion scene.

Ivanka Ska, St. Petersburg fashion guru and winner of *Creative Loafing's* 2008 Best of the Bay for Best Designer, said she believes that a fashion week in Tampa Bay is absolutely necessary.

"You don't have to go to New York or Miami anymore — we've got it here," Ska told Media Talk Radio.

Tampa Bay's fashion week will differentiate itself from other fashion weeks around the nation by focusing on community involvement.

The fashion week plans to promote organizations that encourage a commitment to servicing the world and

the future. Proceeds from this year's show will go to Best Buddies, an organization dedicated to those living with mental disabilities, as well as the YWCA of Tampa Bay, a group that encourages women's growth and leadership.

The organizers of Fashion Week Tampa Bay recognize that an individual's sense of style and beauty is closely related to other things, like the way one sees the world and contributes to its overall welfare, according to fashionweektampabay.com.

Among the designers featured at the show will be Bebe Ziegler, president and CEO of Ice It by Bebe Z, whose work can be seen on TLC's reality shows *Miami Ink* and *LA Ink*. Her style includes the use of crystals, rhinestones and nail heads.

"I think that is such a classier look than screen print, so much more edgier," Ziegler said. "It's a walking billboard."

"I am very proud and honored to be presenting in the inaugural fashion week in Tampa Bay," she said. "I'm really excited to celebrate the

styles and scene that make Tampa very unique."

Another designer, Essence Flowers, who graduated from the International Academy of Design & Technology (IADT) will also take part in the show. She is known for her elaborate swimsuit designs and haute couture clothing.

Seasoned designers won't be the only ones dominating the runway: Four IADT students, chosen after submitting collection concepts, sketches and fabric swatches of their designs, will also showcase their work Thursday at the Ritz Ybor.

"All the designers at the school were inspired by painters," said Nina Verklas, one of the students chosen to present a collection. "Many of the colors and fabrics I used were inspired by Hans Holbein the Younger's Renaissance paintings."

Fashion week will also double as an opportunity for Verklas to promote her new company, Bambina by NV. Verklas is completing her final year of IADT's three-year Bachelor of Fine Arts program in fashion design and marketing and plans to move to Miami after graduating.

Though she intends to leave Tampa Bay, she has some suggestions for boosting the area's presence in the fashion world.

"I think that this show and Fashion Week Tampa Bay is the first step, but we need to incorporate other Miami designers and bigger names like Roberto Cavalli — my favorite designer — or Donatella Versace to give an incentive to people in other Florida cities, like Orlando, to come to Tampa to see fashion."

For further information on schedules and tickets or additional questions, visit the event Web site at fashionweektampabay.com or contact Senior Event Publicist Nancy Vaughn at 813-451-6750.

Additional reporting by Candace Kaw.



Bebe Ziegler's company Ice It makes T-shirts for companies, sports teams, TV shows and charities like Susan G. Komen for the Cure. Her fashions will be on display during Fashion Week Tampa Bay. Photos special to the Oracle