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FORWARD THINKING

Fashion Industry Gallery is looking toward building its future by attracting attention as a specialized resource in cutting-edge design.

By Rusty Williamson

Fashion Industry Gallery certainly knows the value of creating a buzz.

Open since January 2004, FIG continues to court buyers and wholesalers with a portfolio of events that tout the mart's focus on fashion-forward contemporary, bridge and young designer collections.

On Oct. 21, for example, FIG will build on the success of past guest appearances by hot designers such as Tracy Reese and Charlotte Tarantola by welcoming Trina Turk, the Los Angeles-based dress, sportswear and accessories designer. Her retro-inspired print dresses, houndstooth coats and body-conscious denim jeans and pants have given her a reputation for ladylike dressing with a clean, witty and contemporary edge.

Mattie Roberts, fashion, culture and entertainment reporter for the TXCN cable network, will host a Q&A session with Turk in the evening. The event is usually a big draw for FIG, especially among fashion design students.

"The Q&A session gives the students a chance to meet someone who's also young but who's made it big in the industry," explained J. Gavin Smith, executive director of FIG. "It gives the students hope and an invaluable chance to hear from a professional designer."

FIG works closely with colleges to help fashion design students find industry internships and jobs. "Since

January, we have assisted 15 college graduates in finding placement," Smith added.

On Oct. 18, FIG will also improve its atmosphere with the opening of the Henry S. Beck Jr. Park, which occupies the grounds surrounding the FIG building, located at 1807 Ross Avenue in the downtown Arts District. It will include lush landscaping, water fountains and public spaces sure to be an oasis for buyers wanting to chat, read or chill between market appointments. The 20,000-square-foot park, which cost close to \$1 million to build, is a collaboration between Brook Partners, parent of FIG, and the Beck family.

FIG is also going forth with plans to build out its Web site, fashionindustrygallery.com, which has been up and running

since shortly after the market opened, but has grown to include more information valuable to stores and vendors. Additions will include a line and showroom list, floor plan and guide to hotels, restaurants and cultural events.

"The Web site is yet another way that we are building our brand and providing valuable information to stores and vendors," said Smith, adding, "We are constantly learning and updating our marketing techniques."

And the strategies seem to be working. FIG is charting growth in buyer attendance and fashion lines wanting to show there, according to Smith. "We are seeing growth at every market, and I was very pleased with the August show. Our attendance was strong, with a

lot of repeat business from leading stores."

Smith said FIG is particularly appealing to bridge retailers. "[They] are responding to our growing number of bridge collections, including Dismero, Bill Burns Collection, Stephanie Schaich, Jennie Maag, Helena, Jon and others." Smith added that accessories lines, including Gerard Yosca, Eve Reid, My Flat in London, Lulu Guinness, Isabella Fiore, Shaesby, Julie Sandlau and Wendy Mink, are also proving popular.

According to Smith, the mart's floor plan of 50,000 square feet and 41 show spaces, including those used by reps who show multiple lines, corporate showrooms and five guest designer slots, is fully leased. Plans to open an additional floor of the same size are also on track for next year, possibly by January or March.



FIG is looking to build on the success of past events, like this one in which Mattie Roberts (right) interviewed guest designer Tracy Reese.