

Trade group, Enterprise Florida headed to Africa

By ZACHARY S. FAGENSON

A 13-person delegation organized by the Jay Malina International Trade Consortium and Enterprise Florida will hop the pond Friday on a weeklong trip to Africa in hopes of setting the groundwork for a direct flight between Miami and Johannesburg and to sign a sister-city agreement between the county and Dakar, capital of Senegal in West Africa.

The trip, to last until Oct. 27, will also stop in Cape Town, which is to host the World Cup in 2010.

While Miami is most widely known as the gateway to Latin America, the African continent, while troubled, has been widely identified as one of the world's greatest remaining untapped sources of demand.

But before American or Latin American companies can tap into the market, trade consortium Executive Director Tony Ojeda said, some kind of connection, such as shipping lanes or a direct flight, is needed.

"Unless you have air freight or water freight it's difficult to have trade," he said Tuesday. "One of the things we've been trying to do is to try to get a direct flight between South Africa and Miami."

The consortium has "been to South Africa before [and] the

airport has had a long campaign to get South African Airways to fly directly from Johannesburg to Miami," Mr. Ojeda added.

Miami-Dade County Commissioner Audrey Edmonson, who is leading the trip, as well as State Sen. Anthony Hill, will be along as government representatives.

Mr. Ojeda noted that Dakar is to become Miami-Dade County's first sister city on the continent and that the delegation will also press officials in Cape Town to solidify plans to add sister-city status with Miami-Dade.

And while government representatives press for closer relations between Miami and some African cities, Mr. Ojeda said the consortium is also facilitating meetings between business owners from Miami attending the trip and their counterparts in each city.

Opportunities for trade, he said, include telecommunications, power generation, construction equipment, medical equipment, computers, agricultural products, clothing and cosmetics.

The consortium, however, takes a hands-off approach to the private-sector meetings.

"All we do is coordinate the contacts," he pointed out. "What happens between each individual is a private matter."