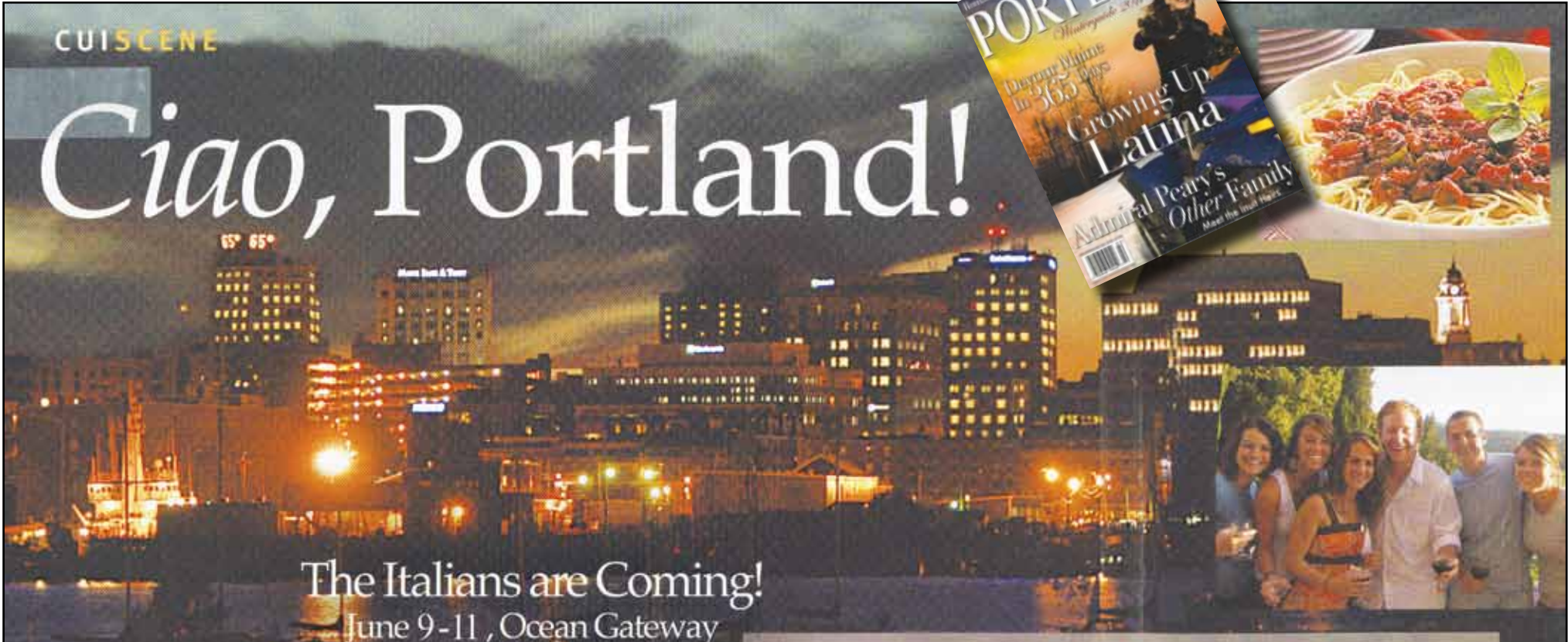




CUISCENE

Ciao, Portland!



The Italians are Coming!

June 9-11, Ocean Gateway



This won't have a 'big-tour-bus' feel," says Midge Vreeland of the upcoming Italian Life Expo, a three-day celebration of Italy's boisterous culture and bold cuisine. Co-sponsored by the Spannocchia Foundation—a Portland- and Siena, Italy-based group dedicated to "encouraging global dialogue about sustaining cultural landscapes for future generations," of which Vreeland is president—the event will provide a 'small-town-Italy' experience for much less than a plane ticket.

For roughly \$30, attendees will enjoy sipping a deep, velvety Barolo from the family-owned Salvano vineyard nestled in the Piedmont region; tucking into an egg lasagna "au gratin" with beef, fennel seed, and Tuscan sausage ragu by Chef Pino di Cicco of Antica Osteria Da Divo in Siena; speaking with Tuscan artist Ferro Battuto Biagiotti about his handcrafted iron wares; and imagining themselves on an "agriturismo" vacation, exploring a romantic, centuries-old organic farm under a brilliant Tuscan sun.

For Vreeland, the eponymous co-owner of a Yarmouth marketing firm, the journey is a sentimental one. "My husband, Stew, and I fell in love with Italy and eventually

bought a house in the Umbrian hilltown of Panicale. When we are there, we are always thinking of the season and eating accordingly. When our friends, Peter and Gail Cinelli (the Cinelli family has owned Castello di Spannocchia in Siena since 1925, when author Delfino Cinelli acquired the property to use as a place to write) offered me a spot on Spannocchia's board, I didn't hesitate." The organization boasts 700 Mainers on their mailing list (spannocchia.org), and the event is expected to draw about 1,500 attendees.

"We chose to host this event in Portland rather than someplace larger, like Boston, because we wanted an intimate, personable feel. It's been our experience that the smaller regions and organizations get overwhelmed at the bigger shows by Milan fashion shows and huge auto companies, et cetera. This is about real people."

Sponsors include Auto Europe and the Institute for International Studies. For more information, visit italianlifeexpo.com.

- March 27 EAT THE HEAT CHILI COOK-OFF**
Professional and amateur cooks vie for the title "Best Chili Cook." White Cap Base Lodge. 824-3000, sundayriver.com
- March 27 MAINE MAPLE SUNDAY**
Sugarhouses throughout the state invite the public to join in making maple syrup. 287-3491, getusalmaine.com
- April 1-3 PARROT HEAD FESTIVAL**
Featuring a margarita mix-off and Key Lime pie-eating contest. Sunday River. 824-3000, sundayriver.com
- April 22-24 FISHERMEN'S FESTIVAL**
A fish fry, lobster trap hauling, and dory bailing. Boothbay Harbor. 633-6280, boothbayharbor.com
- April 29 AN EVENING WITH FRIENDS**
Fine dining with paired wines to support scholarships for Southern Maine Community College and other rotary-club charities. SMCC. 799-2314, breakwater-rotary.org