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New Era Dawns As Obama Steps Into Presidency

By KRISTI ELLIS

WASHINGTON — On the eve of an historic inauguration, Barack Obama is poised to roll out a ground-breaking agenda that will test his leadership in the early days of his administration.

The president-elect has promised to set the country on a dramatically different course — and he is expected to usher in significant changes in business and labor regulations, taxes, international trade, cargo-container port security, jobs programs, health care and energy.

Amid a serious recession, Obama will first tackle a bold stimulus package, expected to cost \$775 billion and include \$300 billion in tax cuts for workers and businesses. Footwear firms are hoping to get in on the stimulus action by including the Affordable

See **OBAMA**, page 10

Boot Camp

Around town and on the trail, boots will be making tracks this fall in a variety of shapes and styles for female consumers. Here (from top right), outdoor looks from SALOMON, ULU and MERRELL.

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FACES: Finance's Annual Bash

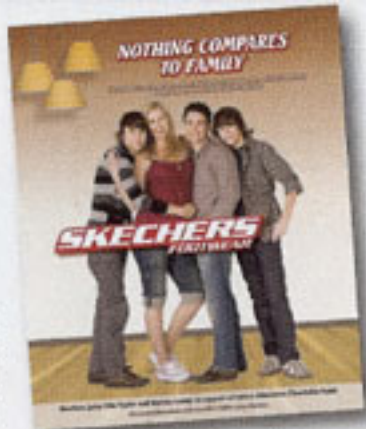
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PICKS: What to See at Sundance



All in the Family

Skechers is taking it to the runway for the latest edition of its "Nothing Compares to Family" campaign. The Manhattan Beach, Calif.-based company revealed exclusively to Insider that model (and expectant mom) **Niki Taylor** and her family — husband and NASCAR-star **Burney Lamar** and twin sons Hunter and Jake — will appear in the company's spring '09 print campaign (above, right). In keeping with the charitable bent of the series, Taylor's ads support Mercy Ministries' residential treatment centers for young women.



Golden Opportunity

With Hollywood's awards season well under way (starting with the Jan. 11 Golden Globes), there should be lots of high-fashion shoe buzz coming up as stars take to the red

carpet for the SAGs and the Oscars — and designer **Stuart Weitzman** is ready. Weitzman has upped his celeb outreach, making custom shoes available for those making the scene. The first client? **Angelina Jolie** (at left). "She looks so great in anything and is such a nice person," Weitzman said. The actress requested two custom peep-toes in metallic neu-



trals for the season. "This approach is now part of our accommodation to the actresses and stylists," he told Insider. "In good times and bad, consumers love to know and to see what the stars do and wear. The benefits [for us] are always there."

Giving Back

In these challenging times, **Ron White** of Toronto's Ron White shoe stores is positioning his charity endeavors a little differently. For the retailer's 13th annual winter shoe drive for the homeless and needy — which kicked off Jan. 8 — White said he wanted to make a low-key pitch to consumers.

"We're not asking for your money, we don't want you to pull out your checkbook," he told Insider. "We're asking people to go into their closet and find the gently worn winter shoes and boots they're not wearing." Signed shoes from celeb donors including actors **Michael Cera** and **Jeremy Irons** (above) help give the good cause a little sparkle. White spoke to Insider as he headed out for a meeting of the new Ron White Foundation's board — which, he hinted, could host a shoe-centric benefit gala this year.



Merrell Moves?

Insider hears from some credible sources that outdoor giant **Merrell** might be in the market for an acquisition — namely sandal-brand **Chaco**. Official word from Merrell: "We are not talking to third parties at this time about potential acquisitions." Stay tuned.