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Cheryl V. Jackson

Give the Gift that Helps Lure Hollywood

Brenda Sexton, head of the state film office, thinks Illinois businesses could be more welcoming of movie and TV filers and celebrities when they show up to work on projects. She's calling on them to coordinate and fill gift baskets for presentation to movie and television stars in their hotel rooms.

"My hope is that someone on the outside or someone in public relations or a business association would spearhead assembling and coordinate that with us," she said, thinking out loud, after meeting with a group of Chicago publicists recently.

The baskets dramatize the support local businesses have for movie and television industries the state is courting. The stars could make use of restaurant gift certificates and the like; while the businesses would benefit from published or aired images of celebrities using their products or visiting their establishments.

Sexton already has assembled a few baskets. When "Ocean's 12" came to town to shoot in 2004, the film office left baskets for George Clooney and Julia Roberts that included Vosges chocolates, White Sox gear and individualized fragrances from the Aroma Workshop.

The Sox jumped at the chance to be included in the offering, providing a shirt and cap for Clooney and baby clothes for Roberts. The team routinely reaches out to lure celebs to U.S. Cellular Field to throw a first pitch and sing the national anthem, said Katie Kirby, team director of public relations.

"It ups our profile a little bit; anything we can do to get baseball off of the sports pages and into the news sections and magazines," she said. "Typically, we wouldn't end up on the pages of *Us Magazine*. But if Tom Cavanagh from [TV's] "Ed" comes to the ball park and he throws the first pitch, we're more likely to get that exposure."