



Musician Lyle Lovett (right) prepares to record an ad for Joliet, with production assistance from Brian Bessler, last week. DAVID PIERINI/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

## Joliet turns on the welcome sign

City enlists celebrities in new tourism push that also includes what-to-see tips for jurors

By Alicia Fabbre  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Moments before he is to play to a sold-out crowd, Lyle Lovett stands on the stage at Rialto Square Theatre to promote the town, where he's performing.

"I played in Joliet, you should too," he says following a script. "Come play with us."

The promo, which will air on a local cable station, is Joliet's latest attempt to lure people to the former industrial town. And though Lovett acknowledges he hasn't seen much beyond the theater, he says if the "Ri-

alto speaks to the rest of Joliet," he has no problem recommending that people visit.

With attractions such as the Rialto, the Jackhammers minor-league baseball team, two casinos and the Chicagoland Speedway, Joliet has seen its fair share of visitors. State tourism figures showed \$585 million spent by tourists in Will County in 2007, an increase of 9.4 percent over 2006.

And the city is considering giving people even more to visit. The City Council next month will discuss

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### Popular stars promoting Joliet

Fergie Jenkins,  
Cubs Hall of  
Famer



Craig Ferguson,  
host of CBS'  
"Late Late Show"

Gavin DeGraw,  
singer-  
songwriter



## CHICAGOLAND EXTRA

### Celebrities urge tourists to play Joliet

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plans to convert the empty Collins Street Prison, featured in "The Blues Brothers," into a tourist attraction. The state tourism bureau has given \$100,000 to the Joliet City Center Partnership to begin the process.

The ad campaign featuring Lovett also has recorded spots with baseball Hall of Famer Fergie Jenkins, rock-pop musician Gavin DeGraw ("In Love With a Girl") and comedian Craig Ferguson of "The Late, Late Show," while they were at the Rialto or a Jackhammers game. Each tells people how they "played" in Joliet and others should, too.

Lovett said it's a tactic that just might work.

"If tonight's show is any indication, we're off to a good start," he said about his large audience.

The ads will start in March on a local cable station and print ads will run in magazines such as Midwest Living. The nearly \$80,000 campaign is being paid for by the city of Joliet and a \$36,000 grant from the Illinois Bureau of Tourism.

"We're trying to let people know about a number of different things that are fun to do in Joliet," said Tom Mahalik, vice president of City Center Marketing, which focuses on the downtown district. To help get the word out, potential jurors at the Will County Courthouse soon will be able to watch a 15-minute video that highlights downtown attractions. The \$1,200 video, covered through the City Center Partnership, gives an overview of the jury process as well as information about places to visit while in the city.

"We want to open their eyes to the many things that the city of Joliet has to offer," said Rebecca Lantka, the city's marketing director.

Menus from nearby restaurants, train schedules and other information will be available in the jurors' room, said Kurt Sangmeister, Will County court administrator. He said he is unaware of any other courthouses that have used similar videos.

"We're trying to make our jurors as comfortable as possible," he said.

Joliet Play Campaign  
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