

CRAIN'S

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CRAIN'S | EXTRA

FORTY UNDER40



MEET THE AREA'S BEST & BRIGHTEST SECTION BEGINS ON **PAGE E1**

FORTY UNDER40

SOPHIA SISKEL

AGE: 33. Director of exhibitions and education, Field Museum Some museum curators bemoan their institutions' commercial focus and reliance on blockbuster temporary exhibits, but the Field Museum's Sophia Siskel embraces them.

That may be partly because her employer is faring so well with blockbusters, largely thanks to her efforts as the Field's director of exhibitions and education.

Among those she's helped to snare were exhibitions of the Dead Sea scrolls and artifacts from the reign of Cleopatra. Ms. Siskel also spearheaded Field-produced shows on chocolate and pearls, which drew huge crowds this year, and she helped land upcoming shows on China's Forbidden City, ancient Egypt and the White House fashions of first lady Jacqueline Kennedy.

With degrees in art history from Wellesley College and the University of Chicago and an MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, Ms. Siskel understands both art and commerce.

"I was 29 when I took on the role of director of exhibitions here," she recalls. "I would not have been given that opportunity if I were not able to design a beautiful exhibition and run the numbers."

In addition to helping her manage a staff of 100 and an annual budget of more than \$10 million, her business background helps her relate to the corporate leaders who dominate the Field's board, Ms. Siskel says.

In the competition for the best exhibits, building relationships in the museum world is job one, and Ms. Siskel's colleagues give her high marks.



"She is the consummate diplomat," says Audrey O'Connell, head of international business development and touring exhibitions at the Natural History Museum of London. Her institution is considering importing the pearl and chocolate exhibits, while the Field may take the London museum's touring exhibit on British naval history.

Ms. Siskel acknowledges that the Field has stretched the boundaries of its mission with shows on motorcycles and gowns worn in the White House, but she makes no apologies.

"Those who question us for doing the Jackie Kennedy show would have no problems if we were displaying Martha Washington's gowns," she says. "There is something about the contemporary that scares people, but I firmly believe that if we didn't jump on shows like this, we probably would not exist 50 years from now."

BRIAN McCORMICK