

Only five days left? It's a basket case

With only five days to Christmas, we're down to the wire – time to turn to the experts. When you can't think of anything to give or have no time to go out and pick something, call a gift-basket company.

For any occasion and at the last minute, these fairy godmothers can save you. They will take into consideration your instructions, the personality of the receiver and, of course, your budget. The rest is easy; they select an assortment, wrap it beautifully and send it on its merry way. All you have to do is take out your charge card and call one of the following companies.

Alexander Fruit Baskets, 5219 Décarie Blvd. at Queen Mary Rd. Phone: (514) 489-7265. Hours: Monday to Thursday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and for Christmas only, this Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The mock-up fruit baskets on display help you select the size and price of a gift (\$35 and up) from these long-time experts, open since 1965. What a thoughtful and nutritious gift to give for Christmas, a birthday, anniversary, hospital stay, Mother's or Father's Day, or any other occasion.

You can add chocolates, nuts, caviar, champagne and other gourmet treats to your gift. And if you ever need to buy a wicker basket, this place is heaven.

Basket Greetings, contact by phone: (514) 323-7213. Hours: Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This weekend only, Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This company, located in the St. Léonard area, is used to requests for sweets like cookies, candies and chocolates for Christmas. Always popular are the baskets of fruit or the decadent gourmet baskets, but you can have coffee, tea, cheese and crackers, smoked salmon and toiletries, too. These are ready for all occasions, for \$35 plus tax and delivery. Corporate accounts are welcome.

Cornucopia, 85 de Castelnau St. W. at St. Laurent Blvd. Phone: (514) 276-4712. Hours: Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and by appointment.

Open since 1977, this company offers gifts (\$25.95 to \$230) in such creative holders as a magazine rack, wooden salad bowl, stainless-steel colander or wicker rocking chair. You can go in and customize your own basket, or choose one in the comfort of your home from their colourful brochure and then order by phone or online at www.cornucopiabaskets.com.

Send an anti-stress basket, a 100-

SMART SHOPPING SANDRA PHILLIPS

Thursday, December 20, 2001

per-cent Canadian one, an Italian assortment, a healthy fresh-fruit one, a personal-care kit, one for chocoholics or one just for the kids. Of course, there are gourmet choices as well. This company is also licensed to sell liquor and can add wine to your selections.

La Fromagerie Hamel, 220 Jean Talon St. E. at Casgrain Ave. Phone: (514) 272-1161. Hours: Monday to Wednesday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

This well-known cheese shop in the heart of Jean Talon Market since 1965 is always bustling. Baskets should be ordered at least two days in advance and can have other items added, such as jam, chocolate, crackers, olive oils, vinegars or pheasant terrines. You can add your own bottle of wine, or they can put in one of theirs.

Other locations: 2117 Mount Royal Ave. E., (514) 521-3333; 9196 Sherbrooke St. E., (514) 355-6657; 622 Notre Dame St., Repentigny, (450) 654-3578. You can order baskets online at www.fromageriehamel.com.

La Première Compagnie de Paniers, 300 Lakeshore Rd. at St. Joachim St., Pointe Claire. Phone: (514) 695-7038. Hours: Monday to Wednesday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday and Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

La Première Compagnie started out as a gift-basket company and became a gift shop, beating out 600 competitors recently in a competition for "Best Gift and Tableware Store in Canada." Baskets (\$29.99 to \$300) are easily assembled from the jams, hot sauces, flavoured vinegars, Godiva chocolates, scented soaps, golf gadgets, Ty products, toys and much more.

Come in and handpick your own, or choose one that is ready to go. Look for the little tasting bowls and crackers to try out new products, or feast on the pâtés, cheeses and breads. For the holidays, the store puts out a 200-item catalogue of fun gadgets and interesting gifts.

♣ Sandra Phillips is the author of *Smart Shopping Montreal*. Her E-mail address is sandra@smartshopping.net.