

# NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



## John Groh Joins RACVB as New President/CEO

Nationwide Search Yielded More Than 65 Candidates;  
Proven Leader Will Focus on Growing the Economy by Growing Tourism

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 16, 2009

ROCKFORD, IL – The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau named John Groh as its new president and chief executive officer, after a six-month, nationwide search at a news conference held today at the bureau's office. The search yielded more than 65 candidates. Groh is currently executive vice president of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce. He will begin at the RACVB on July 6.

Mark Stefanic, RACVB board chairman and regional vice president for First Rockford Group, said, "We wanted someone who had extensive skills in many areas because the RACVB is a valuable contributor to our community's economy, to our quality of life and because the jobs of 3,000 people who work in the local tourism industry depend on visitors coming here and spending money. They count on a strong RACVB that does its job extremely well, as we compete against other destinations. The visitor industry pumps \$300 million each year into our regional economy. We must have someone who can build on this and make it even better. That's why we chose John Groh by unanimous vote. He can hit the ground running. His prior experience as an RACVB employee (from 1999 to 2007) will also be extremely helpful. He is ready to lead on day one."

Stefanic thanked the RACVB board members who served on the search committee that he chaired: Solomon Foley, Linda Heckert, Jim Ryan and Scott Sullivan. He also thanked the RACVB staff for their efforts during the transition, in particular Amy Trimble, interim manager. Furst Search Group, Rockford, assisted with the search.

### President/CEO Attributes

Stefanic said the bureau sought someone who had leadership experience in the tourism industry, particularly in the sales, marketing and new-product development areas; a proven collaborative style and outstanding communications skills; fund-development knowledge; experience working with a board of directors as well as creativity, innovation and vision.

### President/CEO's Background

John Groh is a Rockford native who returned to his hometown after graduating from Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn. He worked for the RACVB for eight years in marketing and communications positions, ending as executive vice president. He then joined the Rockford Chamber of Commerce in 2007 as senior vice president of marketing and public affairs, later as executive vice president.

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At the chamber, he helped the organization improve its member-retention rate by 13 percent. Today the chamber has nearly 1,600 members and is the second largest in Illinois. "John brings a strong combination of tourism expertise and business community knowledge," added Stefanic.

Groh and his wife, Kaylene, live in Rockford with their two sons.

## **Groh: "Honored, Humbled and Enthused"**

Groh thanked the RACVB's board for its vote of confidence and told the assembled tourism partners and stakeholders that he was "honored and humbled by this opportunity to continue to serve my hometown, at a new and dynamic time. And, I am enthusiastic about the days that are ahead for our community, and the RACVB." He noted the economic similarities of 1984, when the bureau was formed by then Rockford Mayor John McNamara, and 2009. Today the region is known for its gardens, golf courses, outdoor living and family attractions, as well as amateur sports tournaments, among other highlights. It was not so in 1984.

He said that the role of the RACVB continues to be to diversify the local economy and employment base, grow the economy and improve the region's quality of life. He said successful marketing programs, like Summeriginals and Winteriginals, will continue to promote seasonal events to local target markets of potential visitors, as will a commitment to securing meetings, conferences and tournaments for the region.

Groh commented that the bureau will lead efforts to grow the region's economy and find new ways to strengthen local industry partners while advocating for the continued growth and success of the visitor industry. "Today, CVBs are about more than promoting what a community has to offer. Bureaus are really destination architects that look down the road and spur conversation about what is needed long-term to grow the industry for the benefit of its citizens."

## **Call to Action**

He pledged to be open to new ideas and partnerships, and announced a series of stakeholder roundtables at which partners and citizen stakeholders could share ideas and suggestions with the RACVB. "This organization is at its best when our partners and stakeholders are at the table with us. We want to make sure our priorities match the needs of our communities," he said.

The stakeholder roundtables will be held Tuesday, July 14, 5:00 p.m., Giovanni's; Wednesday, July 15, 8:00 a.m., Anderson Japanese Gardens; and Thursday, July 16, 12 noon, Cliffbreakers Riverside Resort. RSVP to Wanda Figuerora, 815.489.1673, wfigueroa@gorockford.com.

He concluded by asking the community to recommend the Rockford area for their next meeting, conference or tournament. He urged everyone to let their friends and families know this is an ideal location for meetings of all sizes, with the ease of being just 60 miles from O'Hare International Airport, availability of affordable hotel room rates and abundance of unique attractions. He also encouraged residents to invite family and friends to the region for a summer visit, noting the summer's festivals, events and attractions.

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*RACVB is a private, non-profit organization established in 1984 to champion efforts to promote the Rockford Region as an overnight visitor destination. The RACVB generates positive economic impact for our community through investments in tourism. [gorockford.com](http://gorockford.com)*

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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