

Visitors Benefit All of Us Make Them Feel Welcome

Last month the Rockford Region welcomed the Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation (IKWF) State Championship. This was the eighth consecutive year the event was held in Rockford. It was a great sight to see 900 wrestlers – supported by their coaches and close to 2,000 fans – competing at the MetroCentre. IKWF recently agreed to extend its contract with the MetroCenter through 2014, giving Rockford the distinction of serving as the longest-running host for the event.

IKWF is just one of the hundreds of tournaments and meetings the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and its partners bring to the region each year. These events help grow the local economy by bringing outside money into our community.

Visitors that come to our area spend \$300 million each year at area businesses and support 3,000 local jobs. These visitors also generate more than \$5 million in local taxes. That's why we must continue to attract new events and ensure our current groups, like IKWF, have successful tournaments and continue to return.

From Great to Exceptional

What takes an event from great to exceptional is not the competition on the field or an excellent keynote address at a conference. It's what happens off the turf and away from the mats and hotel conference rooms that makes the difference.

It's the hotel clerk that takes a moment to suggest a favorite local restaurant, or the cleaning staff that stops to ask about the big game. It's the wait staff that keeps up a genuine smile while tackling a rather large, complicated order, or the person at the next gas pump willing to provide helpful directions. It's the sign in the retail shops front window or on the marquee extending a warm welcome to our visitors. Every one of us has the opportunity to help our region make a lasting impression.

These experiences ensure wonderful memories of the Rockford Region, which visitors will share with family and friends. It increases the likelihood they will return and also recommend us to others, helping to further grow our region's economy.

A Community Effort

These events involve the entire community. The Rockford Region is the host and the participants are our guests. We benefit greatly from their visit, and we need them to know we appreciate them and want them to return.

This year I challenge each of you to take notice when you see restaurants full of sports teams or spot out-of-town visitors at a local park or attraction. Make their stay memorable by reaching out and welcoming them to our community. Let them know you're glad they are here. Together we can create an inviting experience that encourages visitors to return to the Rockford Region.