

Bookings Up in Down Economy

Like every other industry, the visitor industry has faced some setbacks over the past year. But it has also taken steps forward – some big and some small. It's time now to recognize those successes and acknowledge there is reason to be cautiously optimistic.

RACVB Bookings Up 42%

Despite the down economy, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau finished strong in its fiscal year ending June 30, 2010. RACVB's group sales team generated 42 percent more business in fiscal year 2010 than it did during the preceding year. The team worked with industry partners to attract sports tournaments, conventions, meetings and other events that will fill hotel rooms and generate money for restaurants, retailers, and other businesses in the Rockford Region. These events will fill an estimated 78,000 hotel rooms compared to 54,900 rooms booked during FY09.

The CVB exists to grow our region's economy. One significant way we do that is by getting groups to say "yes" to Rockford. Our team is really gratified we were able to achieve such strong results for the community in a tough economy. Shifting our strategy and leveraging our existing sports reputation resulted in achieving a significant increase in the results we produce for Rockford.

Hotel Occupancy Up

The hotel industry in Winnebago County has seen consistent improvement lately, with two of the three key indicators in the hotel industry showing positive momentum. According to Smith Travel Research, the hotel occupancy rate in Winnebago County for July 2010 (the latest figures available) was 65.6 percent. That's 17.2 percent higher than July 2009 and marks eight consecutive months of upward movement.

Hotel revenue has also trended upward for the past five months as a result of the increased occupancy. However, average hotel room rates remain down year over year; therefore, we won't see a true recovery until rates begin to increase. Overall, these numbers tell us people are traveling more than they were last year. Additionally, hotel indicators are often viewed as an early indicator of overall economic conditions, making me hopeful that these positive signs foretell better days ahead for our region.

Visitors Create Jobs

At RACVB we'll continue to reach for higher goals. In the coming year our sales team intends to increase its results by another 20 percent. As our community struggles to retain jobs and increase revenue for local municipalities, it's important to recognize that visitors are part of the solution. They generate business for local attractions, shops, restaurants and hotels. They support jobs and pay taxes, adding money to city coffers. By increasing the number of visitors, we multiply their impact and everybody wins.

We'll do our part. And, you can help as well. If you know a group that could bring their event to the region, please call us and we'll follow up on your idea. You can reach the CVB at 815.963.8111.

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