

# NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



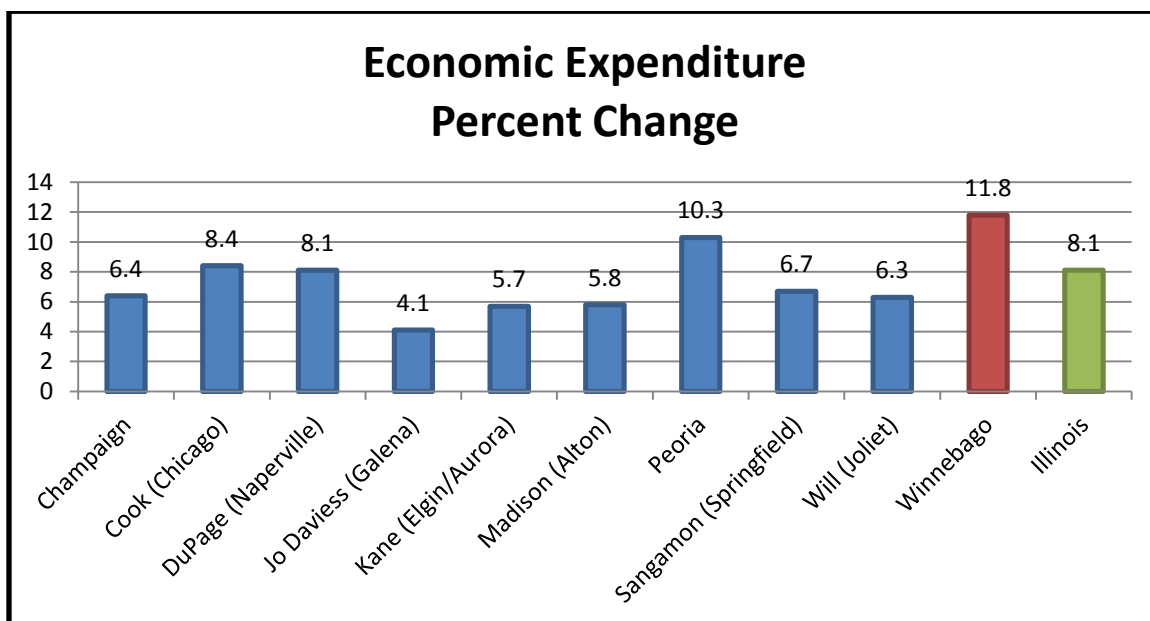
## Visitor Spending Up 11.8% in Winnebago County; Expenditures Total More than \$310 Million *Local growth rate exceeds statewide rate*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 26, 2012

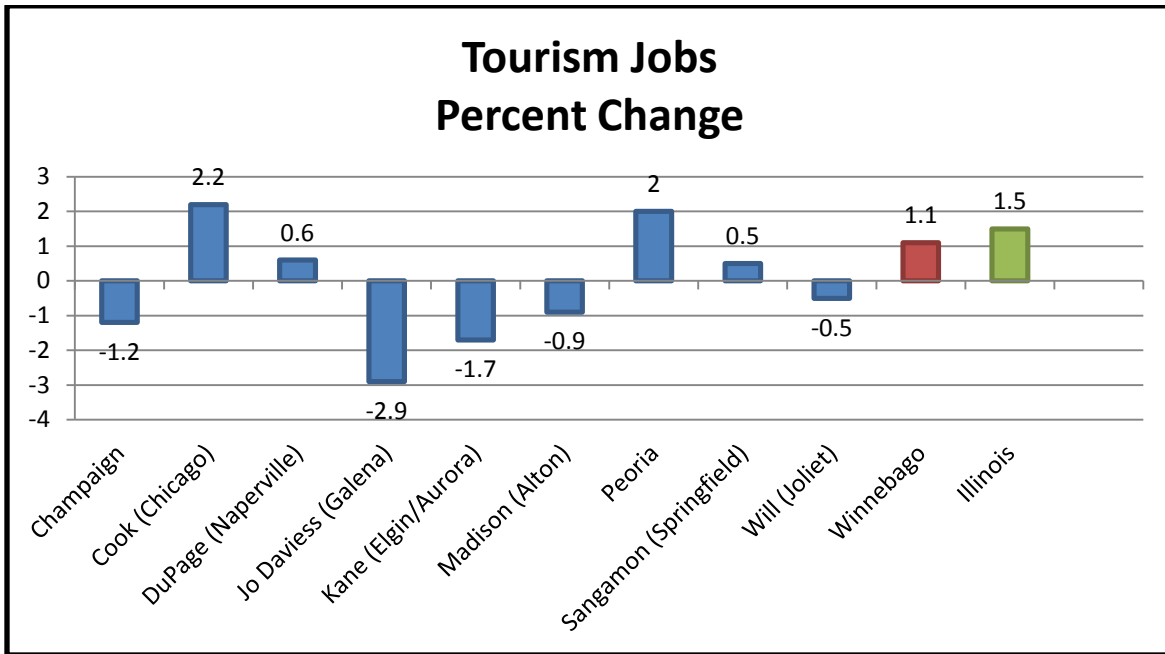
**ROCKFORD, IL** — According to new figures released by the State of Illinois, visitor spending in Winnebago County increased 11.8 percent in 2011, totaling more than \$311 million dollars. This is the first time expenditures have topped the \$300 million mark since the pre-recession level of \$300.6 million in 2007 and is the highest amount ever recorded.

The rate of growth in Winnebago County exceeded that of the State of Illinois and all of Rockford's comparative markets. Visitor spending in Winnebago County went up 11.8 percent, while the State of Illinois saw an 8.1 percent increase, and most of Rockford's comparable markets increased at rates slower than the state average. Champaign saw visitor spending go up just 6.4 percent, while Springfield, in Sangamon County, saw a 6.7 percent increase. Winnebago County's was the highest increase of all major metropolitan areas.



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Tourism supported more than 2,620 jobs in Winnebago County in 2011, up 1.1 percent over 2010. That's just slightly below the state increase of 1.5 percent, and better than most of our comparative set, many of which saw a decrease in the number of tourism supported jobs. Only two counties in our comparative set, Cook and Peoria, saw increases of greater than two percent.

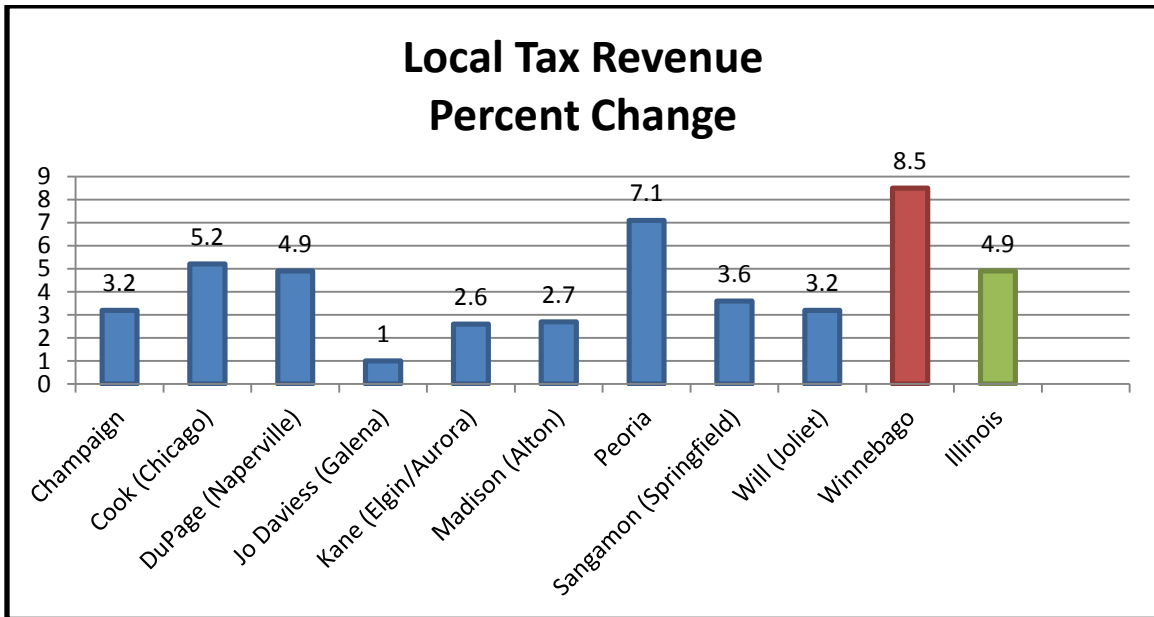


“RACVB exists to grow the region’s economy through tourism. It’s exciting to see visitor spending exceed pre-recession levels and out-pace growth at the state level. It means the tourism industry has recovered and is growing even stronger,” said RACVB Board Chairman Linda Heckert.

The economic growth can be attributed to several factors. RACVB’s sales team continues to meet and exceed aggressive sales goals, booking nearly 95,000 future hotel room nights in FY11 and more than 102,000 in FY12. Rockford Region sites and attractions reported an increase in visitors in 2011. We’ve also seen significant investments in the Rockford Region’s tourism product, including the opening of the Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens, the recent expansion of the Discovery Center Museum and the Burpee Museum of Natural History, and the continued investment in downtown with Rockford City Market and Friday Night Flix. Additionally, the third and fourth quarter of 2011 saw a surge in business travel due to the re-tooling of the Chrysler plant in Belvidere and the refueling at the Byron nuclear plant.

The growth in spending benefits local municipalities. Local tax revenue resulting from visitor spending in Winnebago County grew 8.5 percent, totaling \$5.07 million dollars in 2011. This increase was greater than our region’s comparative set and the state average of 4.9 percent.

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“This is money that wouldn’t exist in our community without visitors. When you invest in tourism, you import money. That money cycles through local restaurants, hotels and retail outlets, creating jobs and tax revenue,” said RACVB President/CEO John Groh. “That is why it is important that we continue to grow the tourism product by investing in projects like the Reclaiming First sports plan. In this way all residents of Winnebago County benefit from tourism.”

Rockford Mayor Lawrence Morrissey said, “The City of Rockford and our regional partners have worked hard to rebound from the recession. We’ve invested in the tourism industry and now see the positive impact of visitor spending, with its resulting job growth and increased tax revenue. This helps further energize the local economy.”

The figures come from a report by D.K. Shifflet and Associates for the U.S. Travel Association, commissioned by the Illinois Office of Tourism, a state agency.

*The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is a private, non-profit organization that champions efforts to promote and further develop the Rockford Region as an overnight visitor destination. RACVB generates positive economic impact for the community through investments in tourism marketing, sales, promotion and advocacy. [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com)*

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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