

# NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



## **RACVB Annual Luncheon Highlights 30 Years of Sports Tourism Success**

*New Inductees to Tourism Hall of Fame Announced*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 29, 2013

**ROCKFORD, IL** — The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau hosted its annual meeting today with a trip down memory lane and a glimpse into the future of sports tourism for the Rockford region. It was the first time the public got a sneak peak at the future Downtown Sports Complex – expected to open in late 2014 or early 2015. The event offered tourism partners and the community an opportunity to celebrate a strong year of tourism advances and recognize decades of successful sports marketing tourism. Additionally, new members were inducted in to the RACVB Tourism Hall of Fame along with the announcement of the Spirit of Tourism Award recipients.

Recognized as the Amateur Sports Capital of the Midwest, the Rockford Region boasts world-class sports facilities that host major tournaments year after year. During the meeting, RACVB celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the region's most significant sports assets, Sportscore One. A video featuring Wendy Perks Fisher and Webbs Norman gave the audience some insight on how the region happened upon this industry in the 1980s.

"If it weren't for that strategic and happy accident, we wouldn't be where we are today," said John Groh, President/CEO of the RACVB. "In the late 80s when we were just getting started, visitors spent about \$100 million each year. Today, visitors spend more than \$310 million each year, directly supporting more than 3,000 jobs."

The timeline of Rockford's success continued with video interviews from Sunil Puri and Jim Keeling on how private and public sectors came together to build Sportscore II. Puri and Keeling discussed how they collaborated with and expanded on Norman and Fisher's vision for amateur sports in the Rockford Region. Today, just over a decade later, more than 2.5 million people visit the Sportscore Complexes each year.

Looking into the future and building on the legacy, tourism leaders shared their excitement for what is to come. Hosting this event in the future Downtown Sports Complex allowed attendees to visualize the space and how it will be used.

"It is here at this site that, over the next few years, we will see new life breathed in to our community," noted Groh. "We wanted to share this space with everyone - as it is, raw with potential and overflowing with possibility."

The Downtown Sports Complex will be one of the largest indoor sports facilities in the Midwest with more than 85,000 sq. ft. of basketball and volleyball courts, guest amenities, riverfront access and more. The complex will host 30+ tournaments per year, in addition to being available for use by local citizens.

"This facility is going to be a real game changer for Rockford," said Groh. "I can't help but think of the Field of Dreams line, 'if you build it, they will come.' We are going to be driving thousands of people to our downtown, which will spur economic development and additional dollars for our community."

This year, the region will welcome more than 200 sports tournaments. In the future, with the facilities being proposed, that number will grow to nearly 300.

"Timing is key in community transformation. Sometimes opportunity doesn't knock twice," said Groh. Our time to Reclaiming First could not be better."

The State of Illinois showed its support and recognition of the Rockford Region's efforts and success. Jen Hoelzle, the Director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, spoke to the crowd on behalf of the Governor and gave an update on tourism in Illinois.

In keeping with the spirit of celebrating success, the RACVB announced the Spirit of Tourism Awards and the 2013 Tourism Hall of Fame inductees. These individuals and organizations were honored and recognized for taking bold steps to make this region an even better version of itself. The Spirit of Tourism Award was given to three groups this year – Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center, Anderson Japanese Gardens and Rockford Art Deli.

The 2013 inductees into the RACVB's Tourism Hall of Fame are the Art in the Park Committee, Doc Slafkosky and Jerry Kortman, and Marianne Larson.

#### **Art in the Park Committee:**

The volunteer Art in the Park Committee has been an advocate for public art for more than 30 years. Its membership consists of community leaders who give of their time, talent and treasure to help enhance the Rockford area by making art more accessible to all. Some of the works of art that these individuals have been responsible for include the Inlet Markers, Rockmen Guardians and Flame, each on the Rock River Recreational Path; Cape Variations at Beattie Park, and Sinnissippi Guardian at Sinnissippi Park. Also, Sight Seeing by Seward Johnson, now at the Nicholas Conservatory.

#### **Doc Slafkosky and Jerry Kortman, JR Kortman Center for Design:**

Their unique gift shop and art gallery has been an important anchor of downtown Rockford for nearly 30 years. Without the steadfast advocacy and active leadership of Doc and Jerry and others like them, the coalition that worked on the Downtown Sports Complex may not have campaigned for the complex to be downtown. As champions of downtown Rockford, Doc and Jerry led the effort to eliminate panhandling in downtown Rockford and remove the mall, both important steps that made downtown more attractive to citizens and visitors. They worked with the Historic Preservation group to save the landmark 205 West State Street building, as well as make the surrounding square block a historic landmark.

#### **Marianne Larson:**

For more than 20 years, Sportscore One Manager Marianne Larson, has demonstrated exceptional customer service. And because of her high level of service, initiative and dedication, she is an important

reason why the Rockford area is a leader in amateur sports tourism. She personifies what differentiates Rockford from other communities, an exceptional commitment and focus on the customer. She personally prepares meals and other goodies for umpires and referees, and hands out her business card to visiting coaches so they can call her cell phone at any time.

*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 adds wealth to the region's economy by investing in marketing programs that grow tourism. [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com)*

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