

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Visitor Industry Records Banner Year in 2012 Spending by Visitors Tops \$326 million, up 4.7%

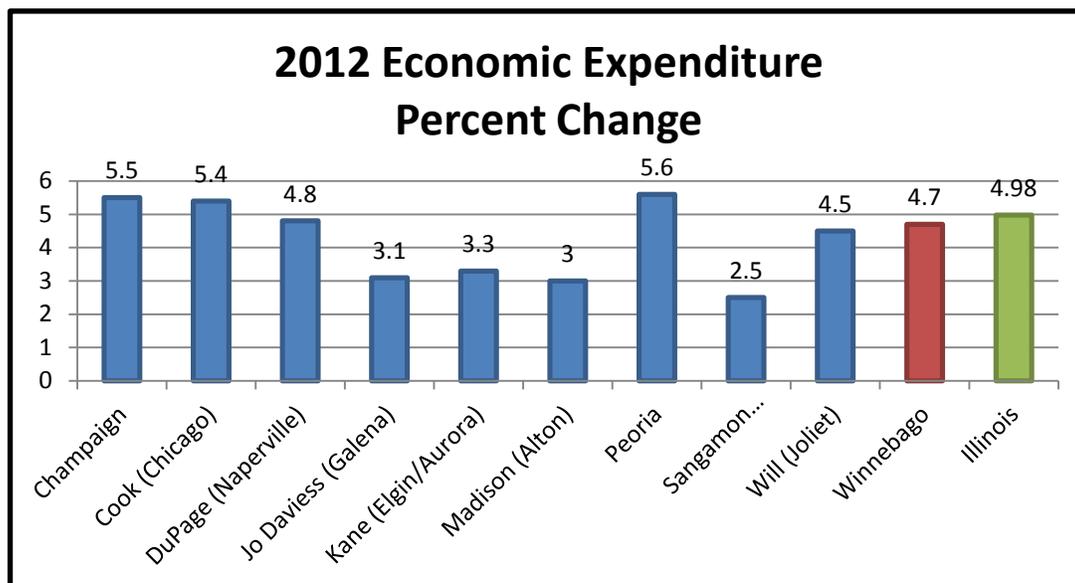
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 12, 2013

ROCKFORD, IL — The Illinois Office of Tourism and the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau announced today that the economic impact of tourism in Winnebago County was up 4.7% over 2011, topping \$326 million.

The 2012 results mark the fourth consecutive year of growth following the recession and reflect the highest total on record. Jen Hoelzle, director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, announced the results at Anderson Japanese Gardens as part of a five-day, seven-city tour of the state.

Total visitor expenditures for the state topped more than \$31 billion, which was a 4.98% increase from the previous year. Winnebago County's totals are in line with other large communities across the state.



"The impact tourism has on our economy is significant, and not just to the venues, restaurants and hotels visited by our guests," said Darrell Snorek, RACVB board chairman. "From the HVAC company that maintains the air conditioning in the restaurant to the printer that produces brochures for the museums, we're all impacted by the success of our tourism efforts."

The success is also reflected in the jobs created and supported. Tourism supported 2,659 jobs, up 1.6% from 2011. These jobs generated \$71.68 million in payroll, up 4.1%. Additionally, the tax revenue generated at a local level was \$5.4 million, up 6.2%, and \$18.3 million for the State of Illinois, up 4.6%.

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"These are new jobs and new money for our community, which is the direct result of tourism," said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO. "The results point to the impact that a sustained tourism marketing and promotion effort generates. As a region, we will continue to see these results grow as new product comes on line. The downtown sports complex, set to open in early 2015, will generate significant new revenue to the community, as an example."

Looking forward, RACVB is optimistic about the continued success of local tourism. The growth of smaller events and the establishment of weekly rituals have ignited a new sense of excitement in the Rockford region.

- **Anderson Japanese Gardens'** Tuesday in the Gardens is already showing significant growth in its second year with a 72% increase in attendance in the first six weeks of the season.
- **Screw City Beer Festival** sold out of 200 VIP tickets in 30 minutes.
- The **Rockford City Market** saw 20,000 visitors in just the first four weeks compared to 57,000 visitors all last season.
- There is additional excitement and support of other events, including Weekends in the Park at Davis Park, the Field of Blues Festival, and Tour de North End.

These events add variety to our existing attractions and events. Coupled with museums, Rockford Park District facilities, sports teams, hotels and restaurants, the region has a rich tourist offering.

"The weekly offerings like City Market, Friday Night Flix, Dinner on the Dock, and Tuesday Evenings in the Gardens are wonderful additions to region's tourism calendar," said Winnebago County Chairman Scott Christiansen. "These recurring events allow out-of-town and local visitors to come back again and again over the course of a season and help create traditions we can all enjoy, and in-turn continually reap the economic benefits."

Also at this morning's event, Jen Hoelzle presented John Anderson, founder of Anderson Japanese Gardens, with a Lincoln Award. The Lincoln Award is given to individuals who have made significant contributions to tourism. Hoelzle presented one award at each of the seven locations visited during the Illinois Road Show. During the presentation, the state tourism director outlined Anderson's dedication to making Anderson Gardens one of the top rated Japanese Gardens in the nation. David Anderson accepted the award on his father's behalf.

Economic impact figures are calculated by D.K. Shifflet and Associates and 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

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