

## Many “Stars” at RACVB Annual Lunch

There were many “stars” at the RACVB annual luncheon on May 29 held at the soon-to-be new Downtown Sports Complex, 301 South Water Street.

As nearly 400 people stood in the former Ingersoll building and looked at the renderings of what will be one of the largest indoor amateur sports complex in the Midwest, it was readily apparent that this new facility will be a huge star. Both visitors and citizens will enjoy the air-conditioned complex that will boast 16 volleyball courts, 8 basketball courts and more.

The new director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, Jen Hoelzle, expressed her admiration for the Rockford area’s impressive and unique sites and attractions, and urged us to continue to exceed expectations. With her background of working for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Presidential Inaugural Committee and other high-level assignments, Jen has high expectations of and hopes for us.

I gave an update on the economic impact of the visitor industry for the Rockford area. The work that our partners and we do helped add \$311 million into our local economy and supported 2,620 jobs right here in Winnebago County. That’s good, solid economic impact for our hotels, restaurants, retail and other businesses.

An important highlight of our annual meetings is the opportunity to throw the spotlight on to people who help make the Rockford region “original” and show visitors what’s so very special about Rockford. These are the people whom we induct into the RACVB Hall of Fame.

We had the honor of inducting into the Hall of Fame Marianne Larson, Manager of Sportscore One; Doc Slafkosky and Jerry Kortman, co-owners of JR Kortman Center for Design; and the Art in the Park Committee.

### Marianne Larson, Manager of Sportscore One

For more than 20 years, Marianne has demonstrated exceptional, above-and-beyond customer to everyone at Sportscore One. 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. For example, she makes homemade barbecue pork, desserts and other goods and brings them to the umpires and referees at Sportscore One tournaments!

### Doc Slafkosky and Jerry Kortman, Co-Owners of JR Kortman Center for Design

These two visionaries opened their unique gift shop and art gallery in downtown Rockford in 1986. Through thick and thin, they have been vocal and ardent champions of Rockford for nearly 30 years, with their shop as an important

downtown anchor. When the Downtown Sports Complex opens next year, Doc and Jerry will see thousands of new visitors in downtown Rockford during 30-plus weekends. 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.

#### Art in the Park Committee

This is an under-the-radar committee of community leaders who are arts patrons and experts and have volunteered their time, treasure and talent to enhance the Rockford area by making art more accessible to all. Most people recognize that public art is an important part of a community's identity. The Art in the Park Committee has served our community for more than 30 years. Some of the works of art this group is responsible for include the *Rockmen Guardians* and *Flame* along the Rock River Recreational Path as well as *Sight Seeing* at the Nicholas Conservatory by Seward Johnson, the internationally known American sculptor. Members of the loose-knit committee have included John and Linda Anderson, Patty Atwood, Stu Bagus, Dick Behr, John Cook, Bob Funderberg, Tom Furst, Allison Goddard, Barbara Morris and Rolf Thienemann.

Thank you all, for enriching the Rockford area with your passion and talent.