

Visitors Spent \$326 Million Locally in 2012, Up 4.7%

They Are VIPs to Area Businesses & Regional Economy

Visitors to the Rockford area added a record \$326 million to the local economy in 2012, marking the fourth consecutive year of visitor industry growth following the recession. The economic impact of the local tourism business was up 4.7 percent over 2011 and is the highest total on record.

"The impact that travel and 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 museums and other attractions, many of whom are chamber members, we're all impacted by the success of our tourism industry," he added.

Jobs & Tax Revenue Also Up

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

These are new jobs and new monies for our community, which is the direct result of tourism. 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 products come on line. For example, the downtown sports complex, set to open in early 2015, will generate significant new revenue to the community.

Visitors Important to Bottom Line

Here are three chamber members who attest to the value of visitors to their business. Mike LaMonica Jr., president of **LaMonica Beverages, Inc.**, said, "It is very important for businesses like ours that an organization like the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau works to increase the number of visitors to our area. We have a large number of our customers like hotels, restaurants and recreational accounts that view tourism as their lifeblood...every success the RACVB creates is a win for them and us all."

David Anderson of **Anderson Japanese Gardens**, the number one Japanese Garden in North American as rated by Japanese Garden Journal, agrees. "About 60 percent of visitors to Anderson Japanese Gardens come from outside Winnebago and Boone counties, so tourism and the marketing efforts of the RACVB are very important to us," said Anderson. "In fact, in a recent month we had visitors from nine foreign countries. We continually add to and improve the gardens so that visitors can see and enjoy new features and amenities," he added.

Ann Marie Walker, marketing manager of **Discovery Center Museum**, confirms the value of visitors to its success. "Discovery Center brings in tens of thousands of people from outside the Rockford area each year. We are one of the top tourist attractions in the region, and we depend on out-of-town visitors to reach our attendance and revenue goals."

The stellar 2012 tourism outcomes in Winnebago County were announced by Jen Hoelzle, director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, on July 15 at Anderson Japanese Gardens as part of a five-day, 16-stop tour of the state.

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

Continued Tourism Success Predicted

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 attendance 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 for 2013 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, and others, 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.

D.K. Shifflet and Associates calculates the economic impact figures for the Illinois Office of Tourism, a state agency.