

ANOTHER FIRST FOR ROCKFORD

For the first-time ever, travel journalists came to the Rockford Region for a prestigious travel industry trade show called Travel Media Conference from August 20-23.

More than 100 travel writers, bloggers and broadcasters from North America – representing media such as the Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post, Midwest Living, Fox News Travel, Boston Globe, Golf Vacation Magazine and more – visited and enjoyed Rockford's unique sites and attractions.

Their experience here will help spread the word about Rockford in a highly positive way. This was a unique opportunity for us to shape the story being told about Rockford. These are the people who influence the perceptions of cities as well as the travel patterns and choices of leisure and business visitors.

The response from these travel professionals was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. They were very impressed with the seven different tours RACVB organized for them – the Great Gardens Tour, Historical Sites Tour, Arts & Culture Tour, Family Fun Tour, Rockford Originals Tour, Adventure Tour and Rick's Picks Tour.

The Historical Sites Tour had the most people signed up. It showcased Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, Erlander Home Museum, Laurent House by Frank Lloyd Wright and Midway Village and I heard rave reviews about all of those historical sites.

Jerry Heinzeroth, president of the Laurent House Board of Directors, proudly showed off the only home designed by the legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright for a person with disabilities, Kenneth Laurent, and his wife, Phyllis. "I told the travel writers that when the Laurents lived there, they frequently welcomed into their private home worldwide visitors who were Frank Lloyd Wright admirers. The travel professionals felt pretty special to get such an intimate look at this American treasure. In fact, some of them wanted to contribute to the restoration and renovation that we are undertaking now."

Briefly, the four other tours included the following attractions. The Great Gardens Tour featured Nicholas Conservatory, Klehm Arboretum, Anderson Japanese Gardens and LaPaloma Gardens. The Arts & Culture Tour included Starlight Theater, Rockford Art Museum, Coronado Theatre and local art galleries. As part of the Family Fun Tour, the travel professionals visited Burpee Museum of Natural History, Discovery Center Museum and Volcano Falls. Lastly, the Adventure Tour showed off the Forest City Queen, Paddle & Trail on the Rock River, Trolley Car 36 and Aldeen Golf Course.

The trade show with 75 exhibitor booths was held at Giovanni's Restaurant & Convention Center; meals were held there and at the Prairie Street Brewhouse and Anderson Gardens.

Bottom Line?

This is just a sampling of what these professional travel writers experienced of the Rockford Region, and as you can see, we have an abundance of outstanding sites, attractions and offerings for visitors and citizens.

The bottom line? This is the visitor infrastructure that helped the Rockford area visitor industry add \$326 million to the local economy in 2012, up 4.7 percent from the prior year. And with the travel writers' positive words about the Rockford Region after Travel Media Showcase 2013, the RACVB is confident that the economic impact of our visitor industry will be even greater in the years to come.