

## **We Welcome YOUR Ideas as You Travel**

“Travel broadens the mind” is a familiar saying. As my family enjoyed our summer vacation last month visiting Arizona, I had many positive experiences that made me feel welcomed as a visitor. That led me to wonder . . . what more could we do to make the Rockford area even more inviting and attractive, to ourselves and to visitors?

For example, when we visited the Grand Canyon, I was impressed that the bus drivers who took us to various stops along the South Rim were super knowledgeable about the Canyon and very friendly. In downtown Sedona, we encountered outdoor musical instruments that drew us in and helped us explore our inner musician.

As I watched our kids play on the marimbas, I thought, “we could do that in Rockford to make visitor feel more welcome.”

A visitor from Toronto recently commented that they noticed how the front doors of many homes were decorated with wreaths and how nicely kept the lawns were in many of Rockford’s neighborhoods. I always took these things for granted, but apparently this is very different from her hometown of Toronto, a TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice® 2013 Winner.

## **Looks Count**

So how a community looks is important. The Rockford area is ahead of many others with our national status as an America in Bloom winner in both 2005 and 2007. Winning these types of awards brings many residual benefits, as the achievements spur us to continue to improve in ways small and large. More neighborhood associations are making an effort to have their blocks look good. Businesses are showing more pride with their plantings year-round. The many entrances to our city are being upgraded with significant capital improvements. It’s contagious, and that’s a good thing.

## **Welcome Signs**

Several years ago RACVB decided to make sure that participants in large tournaments felt welcomed by greeting them with custom, welcome signs at key points throughout the area. I hope you’ve seen them, as we use them year after year.

## **Some First-Ever Tournaments**

There are many reasons why the Rockford area is chosen for tournaments and meetings. The attractiveness of our area often factors into being chosen. Here are two first-time tournaments that chose the Rockford area this summer.

- The International Senior Softball Association World Championship tournament for the Central region was held August 9-11 at Sportscore One. We benefited from 16 teams from Midwest that visited us, and an economic impact of \$135,000 as they stayed at our hotels, ate at our restaurants and shopped at our stores.
- We hosted another first-time event, the Rock River Cup, a national boys lacrosse tournament on June 15-16 at Sportscore Two. More than 3,000 players came and spent \$585,000 at our hotels, restaurants

and shops. To land this tournament took nearly two years; the RACVB first met the presenters at a sports tradeshow in 2011 and in 2012 they responded to our invitation to tour our venues. Partners Are Essential to the “Courtship”