

Voice article for June 2014: visitors mean jobs

Each May the tourism and hospitality industry comes together to celebrate the power of travel. We have a lot to celebrate.

Governor Pat Quinn recently announced that Illinois welcomed more than 103.5 million U.S. residents to the state in 2013, the largest number of domestic visitors to Illinois ever and the third consecutive year of record-breaking numbers. Our local figures will not be out until later this summer however, it's exciting to see tourism continue to grow for the State of Illinois.

These numbers were released just before National Travel and Tourism Week, May 3-11, which was marked by events taking place in cities across the state. We held our own Travel Rally, celebrating travel and tourism. The travel rally was an opportunity for us to thank our hospitality and industry partners, as well as the community, for welcoming visitors to our region.

Tourism is an integral part of our economy, and regionally provides approximately 3,000 jobs and \$326 million in economic impact*. This is why we often say 'visitors mean jobs.' Visitors don't just put 'heads in beds', they also spend money at restaurants and gas stations, and go shopping while they're here. That's tax revenue back into our community and the generation of jobs for the region.

Two years ago we started an awards program called "Great Day in Rockford," which recognizes hospitality industry employees for outstanding customer service. The winners of these awards go above and beyond to provide exceptional experiences for their guests.

Some of the winners include:

- A housekeeper at one of our hotels was nominated for the Great Day award for going above and beyond in helping a guest in need. The guest was getting ready for a wedding and noticed part of the hem of her dress had fallen out. The housekeeper not only brought a sewing kit to the guest, but helped mend the dress for her.
- A waiter at a restaurant overheard an elderly couple discussing how to find transportation to their hotel. The couple had walked to the restaurant from the bus terminal. The waiter was at the end of his shift and drove the couple to their hotel.
- In anticipation of a large group of visitors in town, a locally owned retailer extended the store's hours, added extra staff and provided fresh flowers with every purchase.

These small moments of exceptional customer service leave memorable experiences with our visitors. And memorable experiences often lead to return visits. If you'd like to nominate someone for a Great Day in Rockford Award, visit gorockford.com to submit your nomination.

One nugget to leave you with – there are about 3,000 hotel rooms in Rockford. Let's assume that on a given night 50 percent are occupied. And, for tonight let's assume everyone is sleeping alone. That translates in to 1,500 visitors in town eating at our restaurants, spending money in our stores and conducting business in the region. Together, they have a big impact – and collectively that's the Power of Travel.

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