

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Visitors to Winnebago County Boosted Economy By Nearly \$320 Million in 2013; Attendance at area attractions at all-time high of 6.8 million visits

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 11, 2014

ROCKFORD, IL – Visitors to Winnebago County in 2013 spent \$319,580,000 at area hotels, restaurants and other retail businesses, according to the Illinois Office of Tourism.

In related results, tourism in Winnebago County supported 2,640 jobs in the hospitality sector; those jobs generated \$71,290,000 in payroll. The tax revenue produced by the local visitor industry was \$5,240,000 while at the state level it was \$17,650,000.

"These numbers are down slightly, -2.1 percent, from 2012 which was a banner year for Winnebago County at \$326,000,000," said RACVB Board Chairman Darrell Snorek. "In 2011 and 2012 Winnebago County's tourism increases outpaced that of other metro regions in Illinois. In fact, in 2011 it grew at a higher rate than the State of Illinois," added Snorek.

"Part of the reason for strong performances in 2011 and 2012 was the Chrysler Belvidere Assembly Plant's retooling and the Exelon Byron Generating Station's refueling, both of which added significant corporate long-term business to area hotels," explained RACVB President/CEO John Groh.

In related news, sites and attractions in the region recorded record-breaking visitation during 2013. In total, area sites and attractions welcomed 6,765,917 visitors, up about 1 percent over 2012. Individual events in the region grew, however total attendance for festivals and events dropped due to the cancelation of On the Waterfront and cancelation of the 2013 Rockford Airfest due to federal sequestration (Airfest subsequently returned in 2014). Event attendance was 795,245 in 2013 versus 1,062,634 in 2012. When these two events are removed from the calculation, overall event attendance grew approximately 5 percent.

RACVB Productivity Remains Very High

"Within what we control, the RACVB's productivity in securing more conventions, sports tournaments and leisure visitors remains very high. We are seeing better hotel activity in 2014. And, with the new Downtown Sports Complex opening in 2016 and the hotel and conference center complex in the Amerock/Ziock building scheduled for an early 2017 opening, the visitor industry will continue to grow and be an even stronger economic engine for our community," predicted Groh.

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2013 Highlights

In addition to the 300 sports tournaments and other events and conferences influenced by RACVB, the following new events added new economic impact to the local economy.

- New “Stroll on State” holiday event brought more than 30,000 to downtown Rockford on November 30 to kickoff the holiday season. Decorations from the event lit up downtown throughout the holiday season.
- The region hosted its first national lacrosse tournament and attracted more than 3,000 players, coaches and fans over a June weekend. The tournament has committed to return for three more years (2014-2016).
- Rock Valley College hosted a new robotics competition, drawing 400 students from 20 robotics teams in the Midwest. The event, Rock River Off-Season Region (R2OC), grew in its second year (2014) and drew 600 participants.

Factors for Strong 2014 Performance

In addition to many returning tournaments and conferences, the factors below point to a strong economic impact by the local visitor industry.

- Countywide, for 2014 through June, hotel occupancy is up 12.8 percent to 59.6 percent, compared with 52.8 percent at the same time last year. Corresponding hotel revenue is up 15 percent year over year.
- With the help of strong partners, during its most recent fiscal year (July 2013 – June 2014) RACVB booked 312 events (meetings, tournaments, seminars) for future dates. Additionally, RACVB has already serviced more than 100 events this year through June.
- The Kenneth & Phyllis Laurent House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, held a grand opening on June 6. The newest FLW museum expects 10,000 visitors annually, with more than half from out-of-town.
- A beautified Rockford will help visitors feel more welcomed, as RACVB launched “Forest City Beautiful” in June. Forest City Beautiful is a new public-private partnership between RACVB and the City of Rockford focused on downtown.

Economic impact figures are calculated by D.K. Shifflet and Associates and the Illinois Office of Tourism, a state agency. Attendance figures are self-reported to RACVB by area sites/attraction managers and event producers.

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is a private, non-profit organization that champions efforts to promote and further develop the Rockford Region as an overnight visitor destination. RACVB generates positive economic impact for the community through investments in tourism marketing, sales, promotion and advocacy. www.gorockford.com

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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