

Location & Uniqueness Help GreenFire Attract Visitors

Many restaurants enjoy an increase in business when visitors come to the Rockford area. Picture hundreds of young soccer players and their parents, coaches and friends descending on restaurants before and after their tournaments, ready to eat!

Visitors spend \$330 million annually at Rockford hotels, restaurants and other businesses, like GreenFire, owned by Philippe Forcioli. In my series of highlighting local businesspeople who are Chamber members and understand the economic impact of tourism, here's Philippe's views on the visitor industry.

Location, Location, Location

"We are so close to I-90 and to Sportscore One and Two, we get a lot of sports business," said Philippe. "We cater to that clientele. For example, during the soccer tournament season we play the soccer channels on all our TVs and our sign outside says 'Welcome, Soccer Teams,'" he added.

"One of the best ways of getting more business is through Yelp and Trip Advisor on the Internet. The ratings we get from those guests really help. I get a weekly report of how many people looked at our website, asked for directions, made reservations, etc. Yelp alone sends us more than 100 leads a week," he said. GreenFire also advertises in the sports programs of the Sportscores and Carlson Ice Arena.

About 20 to 30 percent of GreenFire's business is from out-of-town visitors. "We attribute that to our location, that we feature organic and natural foods, plus the online ratings from Yelp and Trip Advisor," he shared. "I think people like that we have an open kitchen so you can see the chefs and our wood-burning oven. We are proud that we do not have microwaves or deep fryers," he added.

Importance of Visitor Industry

Philippe's two children, Laurent and Sophie, played soccer at Sportscore when they were younger, so he has always known that the visitor industry was important. He saw all the visiting sports teams. "Also, when I went to cooking school, one of my classes was about the tourism industry. Without tourism, we would not do as well. GreenFire is not just a restaurant for people who live in the Rockford area. Anyone who comes here for business or tourism can also enjoy us," he said.

He continued, "So many business people come to the Rockford region from all over the world because of our aerospace business, our healthcare organizations and other industries. For example, when UTC, Ingersoll or Taylor Freezer come to GreenFire, it's not unusual to have ten to twelve countries represented at the

table. I appreciate it and it makes me proud that these companies trust us to represent Rockford to their customers,” he said.

“And, when the new Downtown Sports Center opens, Rockford will do even better, and make more money from the sports visitors!” predicted Philippe.

Around the World to Rockford

Philippe was born in Marseille, grew up in Montpellier and started working in a pastry shop at age 14. Two years later he attended a cooking school in Montpellier. He then worked as a chef on two international cruise ships, the Orient Express train, The Lodge at Vail in Vail, Colorado and Harry Cipriani in New York City before coming to Rockford in 1991 to open Café Patou. In 2006 Philippe became the executive chef at Cliffbreakers before opening GreenFire in 2012. GreenFire provides employment for about 50 people. In 2012, the Rockford Region’s visitor industry supported 2,700 jobs that generated \$72 million in payroll. GreenFire and other restaurants are important partners in our visitor industry.

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