

## **Giovanni's Owner Reflects on RACVB's 30 Years**

Joe Castrogiovanni, co-proprietor of Giovanni's Restaurant & Convention Center founded 37 years ago, thinks that the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary is "quite monumental and what they've accomplished in Rockford is amazing."

As a board member of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce, Joe understands the economic impact of the nearly \$320 million that visitors spent in Winnebago County in 2013. He acknowledges that tourists who come here do so in part because of the marketing efforts of the RACVB.

"Giovanni's has benefited from the RACVB's work. Especially in recent years after we added Alchemy and the Woodsmoke Room with our artisan pizzas and live music, we now get lots of visiting tournament teams and bowling leagues that come with their families and friends. We see a lot of revenue from what the RACVB does," said Joe.

"But it's more than that. You have to look at the entire community. What does an organization like the RACVB do for all the businesses here? When the RACVB is on their game, we have hotels that are full, also movie theatres and other businesses in our community, everybody benefits. These visitors shop, they have free time to go to Midway Village, Magic Waters, grocery stores and definitely the malls. The RACVB is not just about filling the hotels and restaurants, their work helps the entire community. All these visitors are filling up at the gas stations," he declared.

"The RACVB is a well-oiled team. I wish John Groh and his staff all the luck in the world so we can all continue to benefit," he added.

### Visionary Leaders in 1984 Saw Tourism as Economic Development

On September 27, 1984 visionary community leaders made the bold decision to pursue tourism as an economic development strategy. Under longtime director Wendy Perks Fisher, the RACVB became known as one of the country's top destinations for amateur sports, and the number of hotels on East State Street grew from three in 1984 to 19 hotels today.

RACVB has partnered with organizations to help improve the quality of life for residents as well as to attract visitors. Some of the successes include the development of Davis Park and Sportscore Two, and the restoration of Shumway Market and Memorial Hall.

### Next 30 Years

As remarkable and valuable as tourism growth in Winnebago County has been, particularly with \$320 million in additional annual revenue, future growth must be even stronger as competing communities want what we have, visitors. This spring, the RACVB will host a series of “Big Ideas Learning Labs” for tourism industry partners. We want to find new ideas and new ways of partnering to promote the region so we can all continue to enjoy success.

I encourage Chamber members to save the date of Tuesday, May 5 for the RACVB Annual Luncheon. We will have a nationally known authority on the power of hospitality as a keynote speaker and introduce the newest inductees to the Tourism Hall of Fame.

Thanks for being part of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce, a key partner in growing the region’s tourism industry and adding \$320 million annually to the local economy.

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