

RACVB John Groh June 2015 Voice

Thank You, Leaders!

Apple founder Steve Jobs once said, “. . . if you do something and it turns out pretty good, then you should go do something else wonderful . . . just figure out what’s next.”

Leadership

Over the past 30 years of the RACVB’s existence, the bureau has done something pretty good . . . we’ve had great leaders. They have pushed our organization to do more, try more and ultimately succeed more so that we have a community that is more appealing to both residents and visitors.

The bureau’s successes are due in large part to the astute and long-term focus of the leaders who founded the bureau -- initially as the Tourism & Conventions Committee of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce that became the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau in 1984 – and the RACVB boards of directors who had both the vision and sense of urgency to set a speedy pace.

Leadership Inducted Into Tourism Hall of Fame

In recognition of their legacy and contributions, the RACVB founders, represented by former Rockford Mayor John McNamara, and the RACVB board of director chairs were inducted into the RACVB Tourism Hall of Fame at our recent annual luncheon meeting. In addition, On The Waterfront, represented by its longtime CEO Becky Genoways, was also inducted into the Hall of Fame. All three groups personify the concept of leadership.

Among the names on the official incorporation document dated Sept. 27, 1984 were Vance Barrie, Brian Blair, Mark Bonavia, Jody Cicio, Paul Logli, Martha Mitchell, Carl Nelson, and Carol Pollack. Additional leaders instrumental in creating the RACVB were Mayor McNamara, Winnebago County Board Chair Gene Quinn, Mayor of Loves Park Joe Sinkiewicz, Roy Fridh, John Holub, Doug Logan, Earl Palmer and Rex Parker.

The 13 past RACVB board chairs are Brian Blair, Vance Barrie, Mark Bonavia, Jim Pirages, John Nolte, Brian Brown, Shawn Carney, Jeff Smith, Bob Rhea, Rena Cotsones, Mark Stefanic, Linda Heckert and Darrell Snorek. Nine were represented for the induction.

The RACVB is profoundly grateful to those who came before us, leaders who were instrumental in leading our bureau. We’ve had exceptional volunteer board members and chairs. They helped craft and shape the vision of the RACVB.

Successful Outcomes: More Visitors, More Jobs

How has the bureau done? How are we doing? Back in 1984, 4 million visitors

came here to see our sites and attractions. Now, 6.7 million people visit the region annually for our sites, attractions and events. That's the most visitors yet in our history.

Since 2011, the hospitality and leisure industry has led the Rockford area as the fastest-growing sector in job creation, with a more than 11 percent growth rate. Locally, leisure and hospitality jobs are at a record level with about 13,900 jobs. Put another way, one in ten working adults is employed in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations or food service sectors. We often say that "Tourism Means Jobs" and these statistics confirm that.

Enhanced Quality of Life for Residents

Perhaps what we are proudest of is the enhanced quality of life for residents that comes with a strong visitor economy. A place a person wants to visit is a place a person wants to live. Cities that prioritize destination promotion, and also coordinate these efforts with economic development initiatives, are better positioned to compete for new investments, corporate relocations and a talented workforce.

Our board has always pushed us to encourage the development of new products that appeal to residents and attract visitors.

Thanks to an invaluable group of leaders, many worthy products and projects have moved forward that now or soon will enhance our quality of life and draw more visitors. Recent examples include the now-under-construction downtown sports complex, expansions at Sportscore Two, our Forest City Beautiful initiative to beautify the Rockford Region, world-class sculptures to enhance downtown Rockford and much, much more!

PHOTO CAPTION: Jim Pirages, the longest-serving chair of the RACVB board of directors, represented the past board chairs when the group of 13 former chairs was inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame.

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