

Power of Partnerships

It's Key to Moving Rockford Forward

How often are we involved in projects where the volunteers turn out in such strong numbers and work so enthusiastically that the job gets finished ahead of schedule . . . and the later volunteer shifts have to be cancelled?

Well, that's what happened with the Rockford Sharefest/Forest City Beautiful 2015 project as 1,400 volunteers stepped up to strategically beautify downtown Rockford for the second consecutive year, May 29 – June 5. Add in the cooperative weather and a nine-day job finished 1-1/2 days early!

It's a beautiful example of the power of partnerships. Prompted by a strategic goal to further enhance and activate downtown in advance of the 2016 opening of Rockford's new riverfront sports complex, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau first joined forces with Rockford Sharefest in 2013 for Stroll on State. That year, Sharefest volunteers helped decorate downtown Rockford for the holidays and host the event. In June of 2014, more than 700 volunteers installed landscaping and streetscape enhancement as part of the RACVB's Forest City Beautiful launch to systematically beautify the downtown area.

This year Rockford Sharefest doubled down with Forest City Beautiful and brought their massive volunteer organization and strength to downtown. Here are some of the highlights of the Rockford Sharefest downtown project.

- Significant landscaping renovation of the riverfront area behind the Luther Center and Rockford Public Library
- Added 40 large planters arranged with flowers and greenery throughout downtown
- Prepped, primed and painted 28 street lampposts, along with garbage cans and utility boxes
- Planted 24 new trees
- Weeded and cleaned numerous areas
- Built and rebuilt retaining walls
- Laid down three semi loads of mulch
- Put down 11 pallets of sod
- Renovated more than 20,000 square feet of planted spaces

Studies consistently show that how a community looks is important to residents and visitors, and of course to employers and job creators. The results of the Sharefest and Forest City Beautiful efforts are impressive; please visit downtown Rockford to see the results.

RACVB wishes to express our deep and sincere thanks to Rockford Sharefest for choosing and embracing the Forest City Beautiful initiative. We are also grateful to other partners who made this effort so successful: City of Rockford for their planning and logistical leadership; Community Foundation of Northern Illinois for a \$45,000 grant to help purchase large planters;

many businesses, such as restaurants that donated food for volunteer leaders who worked all day; many donors to our Forest City Beautiful effort; and, of course, the 1,400 volunteers.

Sharefest: 'Forest City Beautiful is Great Example'

RACVB's partnership with Rockford Sharefest is unique and so meaningful that I asked Creig Day, director of Rockford Sharefest, what he thought about it. He said, "I feel like Forest City Beautiful is a great example of a partnership where we do more than just work with each other, but we trust one another and actually lean in to each other. We leverage one another's gifts and unique resources. We ask for help that requires other people's strengths and what they have access to. We lean into businesses that can do things we don't know how to do. So often we think only in terms of money, but people want to be able to contribute in a way that they feel they had an impact on the successful outcome of a project."

Creig continued, "The goal of Forest City Beautiful is not just to have a beautiful downtown, they want to have beauty in other areas too. So for the volunteers whose 670 shifts were cancelled, we hope they will find another project to get involved in. It's because of people's engagements and partnerships that we are a community on the rise," said Creig.