



Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
102 North Main Street
Rockford, Illinois 61101-1102 USA

gorockford.com

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Visitors Mean Jobs...My Job!

Name: **James Purifoy**
Job: **Owner of 15th & Chris Burgers & Ice Cream**
Years in Tourism: **1 year**

What My Job Means To Me:

"I've had a lifelong passion for cooking and bringing this neighborhood restaurant back to life means a lot to me. It was an ice cream parlor when I was a kid growing up here."

"We have four employees. We make a real effort to buy our food from area suppliers. So if you're looking for a great home-cooked burger from a local mom and pop restaurant, come and try us," he said.

James studied culinary arts at Lincoln Trail College in Robinson, Illinois. To support his wife and family of five children, he had a trucking business. But his passion to cook won out and he took the entrepreneurial plunge last year. Check out 15th & Chris at 201 15th Avenue, Rockford. It's open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.



Try Chef Purifoy's own "Boogie" Burger

An 'Aha' Moment Reinforces Customer Service Training

In Good Service, RACVB's new customer service training program for area hotels and attractions, was made available in January. More than 177 people have been trained so far, with the goal of offering the training to all hospitality-related businesses. Graduates of the training are eligible for the "In Good Company" Service Award of the Year in December.

Anderson Japanese Gardens Gift Shop Manager **Stephanie Burley** felt that the training was very beneficial. "It's the first time we've had this type of training for our gift shop and volunteers. Our 'aha' moment happened when we realized how many people are affected by great service. When one customer leaves happy, they tell lots of people and spread the fact that they had a great experience!" she shared. For information on the training, contact Lindsay Arellano, larellano@gorockford.com

New Board Officers Elected; Bryan Davis Joins Board

The RACVB board of directors elected new officers and welcomed a new board member, effective May 2015.

Roberta Holzwarth, Chair **David Anderson**, Vice Chair
Gary Strakeljahn, Treasurer **Bill LaFever**, Secretary

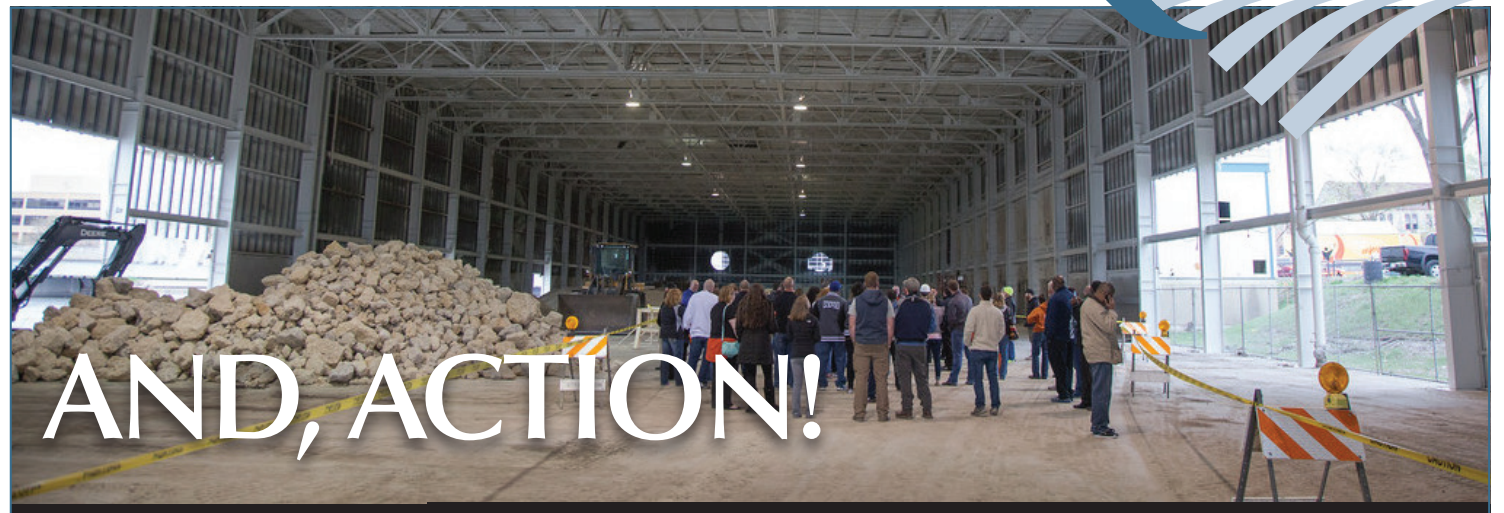
Roberta (Bobbie) Holzwarth is a partner and attorney with **HolmstromKennedy, PC**; **David Anderson** is a founding family member of **Anderson Japanese Gardens**; **Gary Strakeljahn** is chief financial officer of **Electroform Co., Inc.**; and **Bill LaFever** is president of **Bill Doran Company**.

Outgoing Chairman **Darrell Snorek** will serve as immediate past chair. He is vice president of sales at **LaMonica Beverages**. **SupplyCore** Director of Government Affairs and Contracts **Bryan Davis** joined the board.

Real, Original ROI

How tourism is benefitting our regional economy now

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Construction of the new Sportscore Downtown is expected to finish in May 2016.

Officially called "**Sportscore Downtown**," construction began February 9 on the **state-of-the-art indoor amateur sports complex** that will be **one of the largest sports facilities in the Midwest**. **It is on track to be completed in May 2016.**

"Now, with construction underway, prospective tournament customers are talking to us, and many of them have never hosted events here," said RACVB President/CEO John Groh. "In addition to selling and marketing, we are in a readiness phase to prepare for tournaments. The beautification efforts, public sculptures and customer service training for businesses that will benefit from Sportscore Downtown become more meaningful now, both to residents and visitors," added Groh.

The new facility will be operated by the **Rockford Park District** and marketed for tournaments and events by the RACVB. The **first booked tournament** is a girls national basketball championship in mid-2018, with **3,500 attendees generating \$750,000 in economic spending**. The event is managed by the **Amateur Athletic Union** for 6th graders.

Progress of New Downtown Hotels

Both the **Joseph James Partners hotel**, 134 North Main, and the **Gorman & Co. hotel**, 416 South Main, are also moving forward. Construction should begin in the fall for the **\$16 million, 76-room boutique hotel by Joseph James** and will be completed next summer. "Both residents and visitors can unwind in this unique, specialty hotel which we see as becoming

the 'living room' of Rockford," said **Bryan Davis, Joseph James Director of Government Affairs and Community Relations**. The **\$67 million, 160-room Gorman project** is expected to open in spring of 2017. Gorman now owns the former factory building and has begun the site remediation work inside to renovate it into a hotel/conference center.



A rendering of the proposed 76-room boutique hotel.

Sportscore Two's Outdoor Expansion Underway

Construction has begun on the **Rockford Park District's Sportscore Two**, the **124-acre, 40 sport-surface site** that hosts numerous tournaments at 8800 E. Riverside Boulevard. One turf field has been completed and excavation is underway for **five more fields** to be completed this fall, as part of the **Reclaiming First** initiative to re-establish the region as the premier amateur-sports center in the Midwest. SC2's indoor expansion is on hold until the State of Illinois passes its FY16 budget.



VISITOR SPENDING UP!

Rockford Region Growth Outpaces State Average. Attendance at sites, events, and attractions exceeds 7.6 million.

Visitors to Winnebago County spent \$340 million at area businesses in 2014, the largest amount on record. That level of spending is a 6.3 percent increase over the prior year and is the highest percentage increase in any of the state's metro regions.

"These numbers show that Rockford's appeal as a place to visit is growing. Word is getting out and folks are not only taking notice, they are taking action and traveling to the region," said John Groh, president and CEO of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The \$340 million spent by visitors generated \$5.57 million in local tax receipts – funds that help local governments pay for services residents rely on – a 6.1% increase. In addition, tourism in Winnebago County supported 2,700 jobs in the hospitality sector, generating nearly \$45 million in payroll. State tax coffers were filled with \$18.94 million, a 7.3% increase. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Office of Tourism announced the economic figures during an event at Rockford's Prairie Street Brewery on July 30.

"When you hear that our increases outpaced growth in every metro region of the state, we think that's impressive and worth celebrating," said RACVB Board Chair Bobbie Holzwarth. *"Our region's focus on tourism has resulted in sustained economic growth. The steps RACVB is taking and the investments public and private partners are making ensure that this growth will continue in years to come."*



State Tourism Director Cory Jobe addresses the audience at the Illinois Tourism Roadshow event in Rockford.

In 2014, the State of Illinois hosted more than 109.4 million visitors, an increase of 3.5 percent over 2013, generating more than \$36.3 billion in travel expenditures. This marks the fourth consecutive year of record-breaking tourism industry numbers for the state.

Attendance and Visitor numbers up in Winnebago County

In addition to the economic impact numbers announced by the IOT, Groh announced strong growth in attendance for sites, attractions and events in Winnebago County for 2014. The region's tourism attractions and events welcomed 7,604,578 guests in 2014, an increase of 300,000 people over the prior year. That growth is thanks in large part to the Rockford AirFest returning after a one-year hiatus (in 2013) and the increased second-year attendance for Stroll on State.

"Once again, Rockford's designation as 'Sportstown USA' lives up to the name," said Groh. *"Sports tourism has a major impact on our region and will only continue to rise thanks to the soon to be open Sportscore Downtown and expanded Sportscore Two."*

The Top 5 attractions in the Rockford Region in 2014 were:

- 1) Sportscore Complexes / Indoor Sports Center – 2,867,173
- 2) Rock Cut State Park – 1,059,183
- 3) Ice Facilities (Carlson & Riverview) – 477,590
- 4) BMO Harris Bank Center (includes IceHogs) – 292,210
- 5) Forest Hills Baseball Diamonds – 280,000

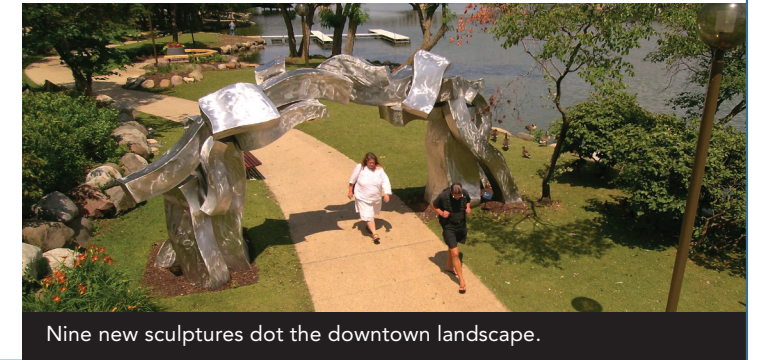
The Top 5 Events in the Rockford Region in 2014 were:

- 1) Rockford AirFest – 135,000
- 2) Fourth of July Celebration – 125,000
- 3) Winnebago County Fair – 93,000
- 4) Stroll on State – 60,000
- 5) Festival of Lights – 45,000

Forest City Beautiful Sculpture Stroll:

Boaz Vaadia and Hans Van de Bovenkamp

Building on the success of the Forest City Beautiful initiative and the success of Stroll on State, RACVB announced its first public sculpture initiative, with a long-term goal of creating a program that installs art each year on a rotating basis. Nine sculptures, created by artists Hans Van de Bovenkamp and Boaz Vaadia are on loan to the community for one year. The pieces were installed in late May and early June. The artists and sculptures were vetted and approved by Rockford's Arts in the Parks group, which is led by local businessman and art patron Dick Behr.



Nine new sculptures dot the downtown landscape.



Forest City Beautify enlivens downtown Rockford.

Hello, Gorgeous!

RACVB's Forest City Beautiful Initiative is Succeeding, Additional Sponsors Are Welcomed

Looks count, and more areas of downtown Rockford are looking attractive, thanks to a powerful partnership between the RACVB and Rockford Sharefest, the volunteer organization that leverages resources for the greater good.

As part of RACVB's Forest City Beautiful, more than 1,400 volunteers converged in downtown Rockford from May 29-June 6 to beautify the central city. Through its partnership with the City of Rockford, RACVB maintains these public spaces year-round.

Forest City Beautiful is supported by the generous donations of individuals and organizations in the community. Funders and supporters to date include:

Forest City Green Sponsor \$10,000 and above

City of Rockford
Community Foundation of Northern Illinois
David & Colleen Anderson Family
HolmstromKennedy, PC
Rockford Park District

Red Maple Sponsor \$5,000 - \$9,999

LaMonica Beverages with Darrell & Bobbie Snorek

Blue Oat Grass Sponsor \$2,500 - \$4,999

CoyleKiley Insurance Agency, Inc.
Illinois Bank & Trust
Reno & Zahm LLP

Purple Coneflower Sponsor \$500 - \$2,499

B&B Properties
LawnCare by Walter
Rockford Bank & Trust
WilliamsMcCarthy LLP
Wipfli LLP
Urban Equity Partners

Citizens Voice Support For Tourism

Winnebago County residents expressed overwhelming support of the tourism industry in response to a survey conducted by Health Systems Research of the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford.

The survey feedback is intended to help RACVB's board and staff understand residents' thoughts and opinions about the importance of tourism and industry related initiatives.

Highlighting the survey was 97 percent of respondents reporting that tourism was "very important" or "important" to the overall economy of the region. In addition, 98 percent said tourism has a "positive effect to improve the economy" or a "positive effect through limited visitor spending."

"In 2012, citizens voiced their desire to see the Reclaiming First initiatives become a reality, and now three years later construction of Sportscore Downtown is 50 percent complete," Groh said. *"We will keep the responses to this year's survey in mind as we plan and advocate for future projects."*

The survey respondents showed great support for several specific tourism projects. Growing ecotourism (including outdoor activities such as hiking, canoeing, biking) had 91 percent in support; amateur sports facilities had 90 percent in support; downtown Rockford revitalization had 84 percent support; and bike paths had 80 percent support; enhancing gateways into the community had 70 percent support; and the idea of a whitewater rapids course had 57 percent support.

In addition, 60 percent of respondents would support additional funding for downtown Rockford revitalization, up significantly from 2012, and 55 percent said they would support additional funding for promotion of ecotourism.

