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Merry & Bright Rockford Region Transforms into a Winter Wonderland

Family-friendly events fill the holidays with fun from November 28 to January 31

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 20, 2015

Rockford, IL – The holidays mark a special time of year when families and friends gather to establish traditions by attending community events and participating in local activities. The Rockford Region is filled with sites, attractions, eateries and organizations that have joined together to enhance the holiday season with “Merry & Bright” festivities happening from **November 28 to January 31**.

Along with the region’s largest holiday celebration on November 28 in downtown Rockford, **Stroll on State presented by Illinois Bank & Trust**, Rockford has also launched two new events to add to the Merry & Bright calendar this year. **Shop on State** is a hometown holiday shopping experience happening Thursday, December 10 from 5 – 9 p.m. This event is a collaborative effort with the RACVB and River District Association and local area businesses that will feature great shopping, live music and food vendors. The evening’s signature event will be **Wine at Waterside**, an elegant wine tasting reception located at the Waterside building across from the City Market Pavilion. The **12 Bars of Christmas Pub Crawl** kicks off Saturday, December 19, 2 p.m. at Prairie Street Brewhouse and will wind its way through downtown Rockford to 12 local bars and restaurants. Tickets can be purchased and additional information can be found online at gorockford.com/merryandbright.

“The Merry & Bright season gives visitors and our residents a chance to partake in local holiday events that are unique to our region. The Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens is **All Aglow** with festive lights along the Rock River, while local makers display original handcrafted items at events like the **Rockford Handmade Market** and spectators admire spectacular performances at timeless venues like the **Coronado Performing Arts Center**,” said Josh Albrecht, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau Director of Marketing. “It’s great to be among hard-working, talented and inspiring people that give back to our community in such a merry and bright way.”

As the winter season brings an accumulation of snow, our outdoor parks and recreational spaces bustle with adventurous activities. **Rocktown Adventures** hosts snowshoeing tours throughout various Rockford Park District facilities and Rock Cut State Park. **Alpine Hills Adventure Park** offers snow tubing, skiing and snowboarding, including a magic carpet lift that gives rides back to the top of the runs. Parks throughout Rockford and Winnebago County such as Klehm Arboretum, Severson Dells and The Natural Land Institute’s Nygren Wetlands have beautiful hiking trails and thousands of acres perfect for exploring and enjoying luminary lights and festive features.

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Other events that are part of the Merry & Bright Season include:

- **Holiday Festival of Lights** – Sinnissippi Park (Nov. 29-Dec. 27) – A holiday presentation and family tradition since 1989 features 50 holiday displays sponsored by various local businesses and organizations throughout the region.
- Swedish Historical Society – **Lucia Concert** (Dec. 4) – This cultural celebration takes place to light the darkest time of year and ring in the holiday season with Swedish delicacies and traditions.
- **Rockford Symphony Orchestra and Rockford Dance Company** – The Nutcracker (Dec. 5 - 6) – This timeless family tradition has been completely reimagined to reflect Rockford with a special performance including top local dancers and musicians.
- **Rockton Christmas Walk** (Dec. 5) – Experience the Candy Cane Craft Fair, the official lighting of the Park, lighted Parade, horse drawn wagon rides, a visit from Santa, carolers and more.
- Winnebago Buy Local – **A Local Holiday Market** (Dec. 5) – Support local businesses while shopping some of the area’s best makers selling handmade goods. This event is hosted at Rockford University and includes a free goodie bag to the first 200 people that arrive.
- **J. R. Sullivan’s “Hometown Holiday”** (Dec. 11-13) – Laugh along at this popular seasonal variety show featuring holiday-inspired storytelling, comedy and seasonal songs. This year’s production features Rockford native and nationally-known actress and singer E. Faye Butler along with returning and new members of the company.
- **Holiday Pops Concert** (Dec. 19-20) – Coronado Performing Arts Center celebrates the holiday season as the Mendelssohn Chorale joins the Rockford Symphony Orchestra to bring the best music of the season, from popular to traditional and sentimental to serious.
- Burpee Museum – **New Year Around the World** (Dec. 31) – Celebrate the last hours of 2015 by watching performances of folk dances from different countries, viewing displays of items from various cultures and participating in activities to celebrate and welcome the new year.
- Discovery Center Museum – **Countdown to Fun!** (Dec. 31) – Design a party hat, create a noisemaker and get showered with confetti during the countdown to midnight each hour.

To close out the Merry & Bright festivities in a big way the **2015 Snow Sculpting Competition** will take place from January 20 – 23 at Sinnissippi Park. Teams from around the state will compete in Rockford for the right to represent Illinois in the 2017 U.S. Nationals Snow Sculpting Competition. High school teams from the Rockford area will compete in the high school level the same week. As many as 70,000 visitors view these massive works of snow art each year and have a chance to cast their vote for the People’s Choice award. Sinnissippi Park is open daily to the public for sculpture viewing while weather permits.

River Lights, a new attraction in downtown Rockford, will illuminate the Rock River in new and bold ways this holiday season. Imagine the banks of the river awash in lights. Imagine those lights dancing and moving, synchronized to music. River lights will debut at Stroll on State presented by Illinois Bank & Trust. Following Stroll on State, the lights will stay on and the music will continue every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night until January 2, 2016. There will be three light shows per night at 5:30/6:30/7:30 p.m. Viewing is best from the walking path that makes its way through the light show on the west bank of the Rock River between the State and Jefferson Street bridges. There is no admission fee to watch the light show. For more information on River Lights, go to rockfordriverlights.com.

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For more information to help you plan your itinerary or to download the complete schedule of our recommended Merry & Bright events and activities go online to www.gorockford.com/merryandbright.

RACVB exists to drive quality of life and economic growth for the citizens of Rockford and Winnebago County through tourism marketing and destination development. gorockford.com

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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