

Voice – December 2015 issue

By John Groh

Throughout the past year, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's In Good Company marketing theme has placed an emphasis on the people that make our region special and unique.

We began this new marketing approach in the fall of 2014 to help celebrate the RACVB's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and we have extended the theme into our nation-wide advertising, in our brand new Rockford Region Visitor's Guide and as part of our new and improved website coming in early 2016.

During this process of highlighting not just the places and attractions that makes Rockford a Real. Original. destination, and shining the spotlight on the people that make those places what they are, we have found that being In Good Company resonates with not just our customers, but with the citizens of Rockford, as well.

Outside of the region, our advertising is seeing tremendous response with pictures of our In Good Company featured citizens leading the way. For instance, an ad featuring Mary Gulbrantson, owner of Urban Farmgirl, piqued the interest of several thousand readers of the travel magazine "American Road" who requested more information on the Rockford region. Another ad, featuring Louis and Frank Mateus and local youth soccer players, has not only generated much feedback from our sports tournament customers, but it also prompted one promoter to book an event in Rockford this past summer.

Within the region, the In Good Company theme was on display through the great community partnerships that the RACVB forged this year. The RACVB's Forest City Beautiful (FCB) initiative continued to build and expand its scope and reach in the community, thanks to many generous business sponsors and individuals who helped make our first-ever Paint the Downtown Green fundraiser a success this past spring. And, we saw an expanded reach through the program downtown as Rockford Sharefest once again brought hundreds of volunteers to the community's core for a week-long clean-up effort.

Our partnerships continued as we brought in the first FCB Public Art Initiative and worked with numerous art enthusiasts in the community to make it happen. Those same friends and many more have eagerly jumped on board during our latest public art initiative: Rockford River Lights. And we continue to see magical and overwhelming support for Stroll on State presented by Illinois Bank & Trust from community partners like Heartland Church, Rockford First and the thousands of Rockfordians eager to be a part of something bigger than them by volunteering to help make it all happen.

In addition, we continue to be In Good Company with all the amazing partners involved with the UW Health Sports Factory -- partners that have been involved with development of this state-of-the-art sports complex that will catapult the downtown revitalization efforts. The City of Rockford, the Rockford Park District, and so many others have played a crucial role in this amazing new building that shows progress and ingenuity are alive and well in the Rockford region.

Of course, I would be remiss not to mention all of the dedicated and hard-working tourism professionals (more than 2,700 in Winnebago County) that helped our region host more than 7.5 million visitors this past year who brought \$340 million worth of economic spending to our region.

The In Good Company theme goes far beyond a simple marketing theme, it is truly becoming a way of life at the RACVB and throughout the community. Partnerships and the people who make our communities hum with activity provide the heart and soul of a destination. In 2016 the RACVB will continue to highlight as many of our great citizens as we can and we will continue to place ourselves In Good Company with community partners that strive to lift Rockford up to new heights.