

*Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau*

# Quarterly Report

FY16, Q1  
July – September 2015



Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

News &  
Notes

Marketing

Sports

Meetings

Bookings

The mission of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.



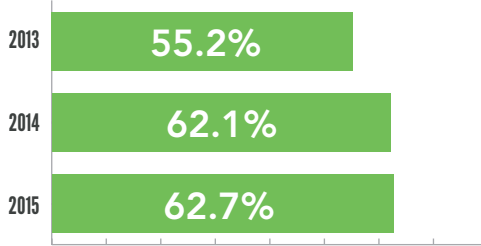
- Roberta Holzwarth**, (Chair) Holmstrom & Kennedy PC
- David Anderson**, (Vice Chair) Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Bill LaFever**, (Secretary) Bill Doran & Co.
- Gary Strakeljahn**, (Treasurer) Electroform Company
- Stacy Bernardi**, Representing Winnebago County
- Robert Burden**, City of Loves Park
- Todd Cagnoni**, City of Rockford
- Patrick Curran**, Curran's Orchard
- Bryan Davis**, SupplyCore
- Tim Dimke**, Rockford Park District
- Dave Fiduccia**, Winnebago County Board
- Einar Forsman**, Rockford Chamber of Commerce
- Jamie Getchius**, City of Rockford
- Patrick Hoey**, Village of Rockton
- Ben Holmstrom**, William Charles Construction
- Marco Lenis**, Vocational Rehabilitation Management
- Tim Myers**, WIFR-TV
- Michael Nicholas**, Rockford Area Economic Development Council
- Ted Rehl**, City of South Beloit
- Darrell Snorek**, LaMonica Beverages, Inc.
- Ken Strawbridge**, Pella Windows & Door, Inc.



- John Groh**, President/CEO
- Lori Johnson**, Executive Assistant to President/CEO
- Katrina Peterson**, Receptionist & Office Coordinator
- Tana Vettore**, Director of Destination Development
- Lindsay Arellano**, Director of Sales and Service
- Nick Povalitis**, Sales Manager
- Greta Spencer**, Sales Manager
- Jenny Caiozzo**, Group Services Manager
- Josh Albrecht**, Director of Marketing & Public Affairs
- Andrea Mandala**, Marketing & Communications Manager
- Elizabeth Wood**, Marketing Coordinator
- Janet Jacobs**, Marketing Assistant
- Joanne Nold**, Director of Finance & Administration
- Fred Harris**, Brochure Distribution Assistant
- Jennie Haun**, Group Service Specialist

## Winnebago County Hotel Statistics

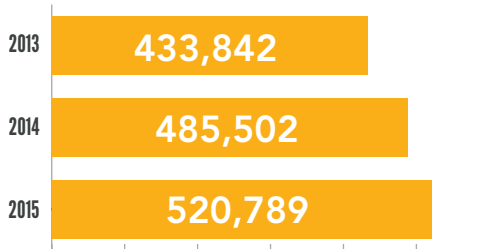
### YTD Hotel Occupancy



### YTD Average Room Rate



### YTD Hotel Room Demand

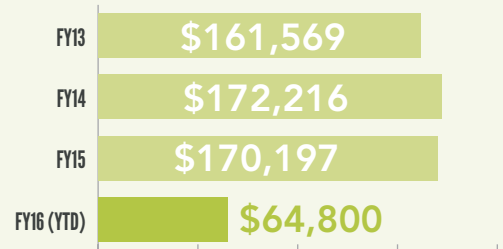


### YTD Revenue (in millions)



### Regional Challenge Grant

RACVB continues its efforts to grow relationships with local municipalities outside the City of Rockford by increasing targeted communications and initiating individual meetings in those communities. Funds received by municipalities other than the City of Rockford are matched by the City's Regional Challenge Grant.

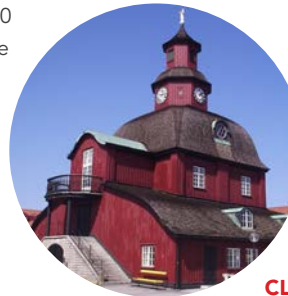


## Sister City Reports

**LIDKOPING, SWEDEN** — A group of 8-10 nurse students and two instructors from De la Gardiegymnasiet, Lidköping came to Rockford on October 14-28 to work with SwedishAmerican Hospital. A business and elected officials delegation from Lidköping and the County of Skaraborg is coming to Rockford and Madison November 15-20. They will meet with Industrial Partnership Agreement's official partners and make company visits.

**BORGHOLM, SWEDEN** — On September 21, the new Nordic Cultural Center opened and revealed their new peace pole and opened for touring. They are working to develop a Swedish park adjacent to the new center. The Swedish American Foundation is offering a furnished home available to cultural travelers. Currently the home is occupied.

**FERENTINO, ITALY** — The Italian Sister Cities Association is currently working on By Laws for their organization. Holly Mathur has been chosen as Chairman for the Youth Committee by Sister Cities International.



### CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA

Ramona Cornea is working with Lindstrom Travel for a tour of Romania in 2016. There will be 16 participants necessary to obtain the best price. A Romanian who applied for a visa to come to Rockford to teach Romanian cultural dancing to student was denied, in spite of all the formalities being met.

**TOKMOK, KYRGYZSTAN** — Chuck Howard reported the many positive relationships he enjoys with students, and commented on the diversity of Rockford University. He also recently met a new doctor from Kyrgyzstan who will work for Crusader Clinic. Ties with Tokmok and all of Kyrgyzstan are weakening due to the political unrest in their country.

## Rockford Region Visitor's Guide

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's official **Visitor's Guide for the Rockford Region** debuted recently, featuring unique stories as we continue the "In Good Company" theme in our marketing efforts.

"In a magazine style, the new guide highlights the region through engaging stories about the people and places of the Rockford area," said Josh Albrecht, RACVB director of marketing and public affairs. "We want to continue to showcase and celebrate our In Good Company featured residents by having their stories help visitors and residents embrace the entire region."

In addition to the stories, the guide features listings of area restaurants, attractions, hotels and more, making the guide a resource for travelers new to the region, as well as locals looking for fresh ideas on how to experience their community.

"We want the people of the Rockford region to tell the story of how unique, amazing and inspiring our communities are for everyone," Albrecht said. "A destination – from restaurants to museums to adventure sports to accommodations – is truly great when the people living and working there every day aspire to make the destination the best it can be. In Good Company celebrates those people."

More than **100,000 copies** of the visitor's guide will be distributed. Guides are available in person at the RACVB office, 102 N. Main Street, Rockford, and available at area sites, hotels and attractions throughout Winnebago County. The guides also are distributed to Illinois Office of Tourism Travel Information Centers throughout the state and at the Tollway oasis plazas in the Chicagoland area.

In addition, RACVB staff distributes the guides throughout the country at trade shows, conventions and sales missions, along with providing copies to the thousands of visitors who come to the region as part of sports tournaments and other conventions and events. Request a copy online at [gorockford.com/vguide](http://gorockford.com/vguide).



## DMAI Honors

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau CEO/President **John Groh** and Marketing Coordinator **Liz Wood** received honors at the annual Destination Marketing Association International Convention held July 14-17 in Austin, Texas.



Groh, whose term on the DMAI Board of Directors concluded this year, was officially voted onto the **Destination & Travel Foundation Board of Trustees** during the convention. He will serve a three-year term. The D&T Foundation board focuses on pressing travel-related issues and help the industry address its ever-changing business environment.

DMAI, along with founding program partner SearchWide, and supporting sponsors IMEX and USAE, named Wood as a 2015 recipient for its **"30 Under 30" program**.

The 30 Under 30 award focuses on identifying and developing the talent of destination marketing professionals, 30 years of age and under. A year-round program, the honorees convened for the first time at DMAI's Annual Convention where they networked with peers who will help them with a capstone project on tourism marketing.

In addition, each member will be paired with an industry veteran for the next year who will help to educate and mentor the honorees.



The new Rockford region visitors guide takes a storytelling approach.

# News & Notes

## Illinois Road Show

Visitor numbers were highlighted during the **Illinois Office of Tourism Road Show** that was held at Prairie Street Brewhouse. The space was turned into a fun “coffee-lovers” paradise as local coffee vendors displayed and served their Rockford

blends during a coffee tasting. Culture Shock Clothing & Records was on-hand playing all Real. Original. Rockford music throughout the event. Kegel Harley-Davidson and Rockford Auto Museum showcased their rides, as well.

IOT Director **Cory Jobe** was the keynote speaker and highlighted the State of Illinois Tourism numbers during his presentation. In 2014, 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.



## Visitor Spending at Record Levels!

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.

Attendance to sites, attractions and events in Winnebago County also grew in 2014. The region’s tourism attractions and events welcomed **7,604,578 guests in 2014**, an increase of 2.9 percent or about 300,000 visits.

“Our region’s focus on tourism has resulted in sustained economic growth.”

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 \$75 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 today during an event at Rockford’s Prairie Street Brewhouse.

“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.”

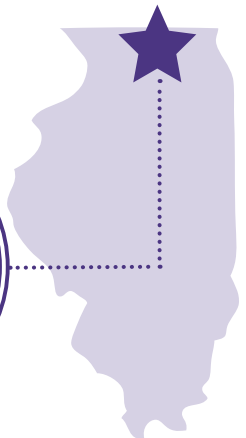
## Attendance and Visitor numbers Up in Winnebago County

The region’s tourism attractions and events welcomed 7,604,578 guests in 2014, an increase of 300,000 people over the prior year.

Individual event attendance in the region grew from 2013, with a **133,597 increase**; as event attendance was reported at 928,842 in 2014 versus 795,245 in 2013. 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.

Economic impact figures are calculated by D.K. Shifflet and Associates and the Illinois Office of Tourism, a state agency. Attendance figures are self-reported to RACVB by sites/attraction and events managers.

**\$340 million**



## Special Event Support

RACVB was a sponsor of and helped with marketing for the **2nd Annual Midtown District Ethnic Festival and Parade** on August 30. Staff helped Midtown District representatives execute their press conference for the event, along with managing and promoting the event on social media. RACVB was excited to once again lead promotions for **Rockford City Market** this past summer. RACVB staff did weekly vendor videos, email newsletters and social media promotion of the event as part of the RACVB’s sponsorship of the popular community event.



# Marketing

## Advertisements

A large goal of the RACVB's strategic advertising and promotional efforts is to showcase our position as a leading amateur sports destination. This is accomplished by focusing our advertising efforts on the current and highly anticipated multi-use sports facilities and the people we are IN GOOD COMPANY with in the Rockford Region. In July the RACVB placed a half page ad with **Sports Travel** and **Association News** which reached targeted audiences with over 1k at trade shows, 40k sports travel readers and 80k association news readers. A half page print and digital ad package placed with **Premier Travel Media** in September reached 10,000 event planners, 6,000



facilities/ rec parks, 25,000 digital views, US Sports Congress and NASC conference attendees. RACVB participated in a sponsorship package at the **Sports Relationship Conference** hosted by SportsEvents in September, that reached over 240 attendees. These targeted ads focused

on retaining strong relationships we've maintained over the years with tournament planners and directors. **The aim was also to attract new sports events to our region with our current sports facilities and the much anticipated opening of the UW Health Sports Factory set for May 2016.**

As part of a long-term commitment to attract leisure visitors to the Rockford Region, newly developed initiatives have been added to our advertising message. A targeted ad was placed in **Art in America** to help promote the RACVB's "Sculpture Stroll," a public art initiative launched Summer 2015. This print advertisement featured in the September issue reached 180,000 loyal readers including 50,000 paid subscribers. The publication is also available in newsstands internationally and in all Barnes &

## Website Statistics

### Most Searched Terms

- Things to do
- Rockford, IL
- Calendar of Events
- Dining
- Family Fun

### Most Searched Events

- JULY** Cherry Valley and Rockford - July 4th Independence Day Events
- AUG** Cherry Valley Festival Days
- SEPT** Rockford Labor Day Parade

### Website Traffic Sources



**133,672**  
Total Website  
Visitors

### Most Searched Attractions/Restaurants

- JULY** Discovery Center Museum
- AUG** Anderson Japanese Gardens
- SEPT** Edgebrook

Noble bookstores nationwide. Additionally, a seasonal **"Fall Into Fun"** digital marketing campaign promoted the fun things to do, places to go and events to attend in the Rockford Region. RACVB developed a list of fall activities and events that partners could also share. This list was used for an editorial in the Northwest Quaterly called "Experience Fall Traditions in Rockford."



# Marketing

## Promoting Rockford to Rockford

RACVB hosted a **TweetUp! EatUp!** event for marketing partners in the Rockford region on September 16. The group gathered together to learn more about the power of Twitter and social networking. The theme for this event was "Fall Into Fun" where partners responded to questions related to the season and local things people can see and do during Fall.



In preparation for the opening of the **Sportscore Downtown facility**, RACVB, Rockford Park District and the City of Rockford partnered to host tours of the building as it celebrated a milestone with 50% of the construction completed. Key local/regional partners and current/potential customers toured the facility and were given informational materials to educate themselves and others in preparation for the opening in May 2016.

Three **guest bloggers** submitted posts to the gorockford.com site sharing personal experiences enjoying fun leisure activities in the Rockford region. **Gabrielle Torina** interns for an aerospace corporation and focuses her blog posts on food and nightlife. Local freelance writer, **Melissa Westphal**, writes about non-conventional activities such as Rockford Roller Derby. Photo blogger, **Tyler Yomantas** specializes in capturing the moments and beauty of the Rock River Valley.



## Earned Media Via Travel Writers and Tours

**Karen Dawkins** (familytravelsonabudget.com) came back to visit Rockford from July 22 – 23 as part of a fly/drive stopover trip through various Illinois Destinations. This was a great partnership with other area CVB's including Elgin, Lake County, Alton, Springfield, Elsau and Casey. Some highlights from her time in Rockford were wake boarding at West Rock Wake Park, playing Frisbee golf at Anna Page Park, enjoying a private tour of the Laurent House and eating at Fresco's with a special interview of owner, Franchesco Salamone. Since her trip in July she has written 4 articles about her experiences in the Rockford region.

**Jody Halsted** (jodyhalsted.com) is a Midwest based freelance writer specializing in family travel and visited the Rockford Region from July 29 – 31. As part of her visit she was able to take advantage of the outdoors exploring Rock Cut State Park, watching the Ski Broncs perform at Shorewood Park and also visiting family-focused museums like Midway Village Museum where she learned how to make a sock monkey. Rockford was recently mentioned in three articles written by Jody that were picked up by Minitime Travel, Community Table and Huff Post Travel. These articles were also shared with her 10k website following and over 5k followers via social media sites.



The RACVB represented the Rockford region at **Travel Media Showcase** in Bloomington Indiana August 11-14. The purpose of this conference is to increase tourism by directly matching destinations with travel writers, bloggers and broadcasters. This is a great networking opportunity and the RACVB booked nearly 30 appointments with writers and promoters that visit destinations all over the world.

The Illinois Office of Tourism partnered with Rockford to host **Tom Stevenson**, International writer for **About Time**, an online magazine with approximately 65,000 unique monthly visitors. During his visit in August he toured Anderson Japanese Gardens, one of the highest rated Japanese Gardens in North America. About Time grew from a food-centric publication to include travel and lifestyle articles as well. Tom's writing is predominantly focused on the food and spirits scene, but he has also written several travel features. He live tweeted his trip from the About Time Twitter profile, which has 18K followers.

## Social Media



**Facebook**  
14,688 followers  
(691 increase)



**YouTube**  
254,855 video views  
(4,203 increase)



**Instagram**  
3,625 followers  
(729 increase)



**Twitter**  
5,200 followers  
(136 increase)

## Sports Sales Highlights

The sports sales department kicked off FY16 with strong activities and results across the board in Q1. In July, the RACVB conducted site visits with **Red Eye Rhino Darts, US Sports Congress, Sports Planning Guide** and **JP Sports**. The Rockford Region also welcomed the **USSSA 14U B National Championship** and the **AABC Willie Mays 10U World Series** for national softball and baseball tournament play. Additionally, RACVB continued a leading role in supporting and planning the third annual **Rock River Off-season Competition (R2OC)**, an annual robotics showcase at the Rock Valley College PE Center.

## Big Wins In August

Site visits to Rockford Region venues continued in August, when RACVB welcomed representatives from **Tough Mudder, Bison Sporting Events** and **Big Dogs Baseball**. Throughout the month, RACVB also drafted bids to host the 2016 USA Ultimate Club Championships, 2017 USA Ultimate High School Central Regionals, 2017-18 IBA Men's State Bowling Tournament and the 2019-21 National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Women's Soccer Division III Championship. On Aug. 27-30, RACVB attended **Connect Sports Marketplace** in Pittsburgh, PA, meeting with more than 35 sports tournament rights holders. From attending Connect Sports, GoRockford subsequently secured two national site visits and one national championship booking that next month.



## September Scores!



In September, the RACVB submitted bid proposals to host the **2021 National Travelers Bowling League Annual Convention and Tournament** and **2017 USA Badminton Junior Nationals**, as well as a multi-year renewal proposal to bring back the **IHSA Girls Bowling State Finals** to The Cherry Bowl. Significant interest in the Reclaiming First projects continued, as RACVB welcomed **Baylor Youth Basketball Foundation** for a tour of Rockford that featured Sportscore Downtown and the RPS 205 field houses. Moreover, USA Ultimate sent two staff members to tour Sportscore Two in preparation for its site selection of another national event. New event bookings highlights included the **2016 National Softball Association (NSA) North B State Championship** and the **2017 IBA Men's State Bowling Tournament**, the first time since 1973 that the region has been selected to host this five-weekend bowling event. The RACVB wrapped up the month and quarter when USA Ultimate awarded its most prestigious event—the **2016 USA Ultimate Club Championships**—to the Rockford Region. This 38-year championship event, which has not previously been held in the Midwest, will be featured across various ESPN platforms during semifinal and championship play at Sportscore Two.

## Tough Mudder

Since 2012, Tough Mudder and the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau have been in discussions to bring the famous obstacle course team challenge to the Rockford region. And now, RACVB is pleased to announce that **Tough Mudder** will call Rockford home from 2016 thru 2019. Tough Mudder events typically draw up to 12,000 participants plus 4,000 spectators, and will generate more than **\$3 million in economic impact** for its host community.

Chicago Rockford International Airport will host the event in **May 2016**. The 10+ mile course will feature more than 20 new and updated obstacles, for the first time at this unique venue.

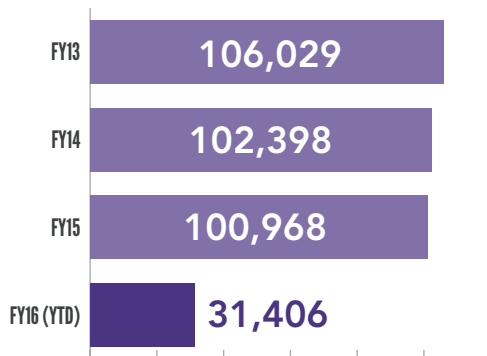


Lindsay Arellano, RACVB's director of sales, hosted Tough Mudder representatives in June and together visited several sites throughout Winnebago County that could potentially host the event. Ultimately, the airport was chosen by Tough Mudder because of the amount of land available, convenient access to amenities and the relationship built with the airport.

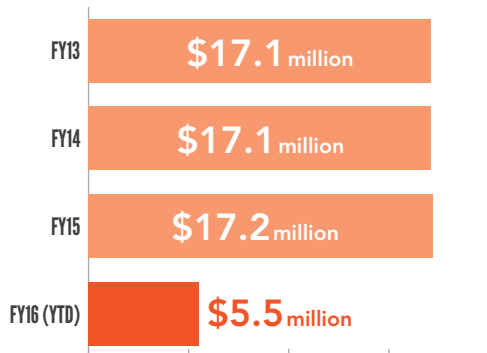
Coming to the **Chicago Rockford International Airport** for the first time, this unique venue allows participants to explore a sprawling landscape of open meadows, thick woods, and riverside trails while taking on close to 20 obstacles.

# Meetings, Servicing & Bookings

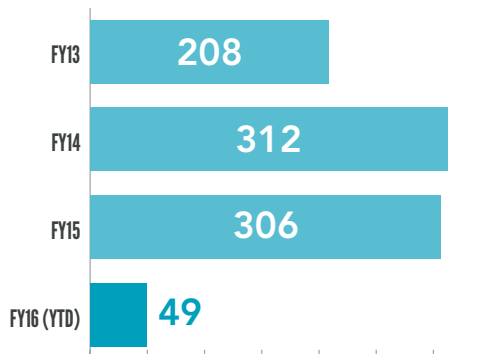
## Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



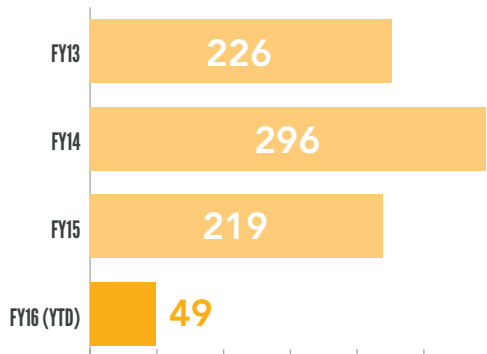
## Estimated Economic Impact



## Number of Event Bookings



## Events Serviced by RACVB



## Meetings Sales Highlights

Greta Spencer, Meetings Sales Manager, had a successful time at the **Going on Faith** trade show, which took place in South Bend, Indiana, August 4 – 6. 28 appointments were pre-scheduled with meeting and tour planners that represented a variety of faith-based organizations from around the country. A great connection was made at Going on Faith with Cammie Bridges, a meeting planner who works with **Humes McCoy Aviation**, as well as operating a private event planning business for a variety of small to medium-sized associations. This connection resulted in the meeting planner traveling to Rockford for a site visit on August 26. Bridges enjoyed visiting a variety of hotels, venues, sites and attractions,



as well as restaurants throughout the Rockford region. She plans to schedule a meeting in the Rockford region soon.

## Meetings Bookings

Booking highlights from the quarter include assisting Alignment Rockford's **"Alignment Institute" – Midwest Region 2015 conference**, as well as the **Illinois Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials** booking their 2016 State Conference. A major win for the meetings market in the Rockford region also included the **Blue Knights Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club** accepting a proposal that was submitted to host their **2017 Great Lakes Region Conference**. The Blue Knights LEMC Great Lakes Conference will bring together active and retired law enforcement officers who enjoy riding motorcycles from all around the region including Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Ontario. The event is scheduled for March 2016 and is expected to produce 320 room nights throughout the 4-day conference.

## Booking Highlights for the Region

### Alignment Institute Midwest Region

October 19-20, 2015  
75 room nights | \$9,825 EEI

### NXT Sports Fall Classic Lacrosse Tournament

November 1, 2015  
150 room nights | \$27,000 EEI

### Illinois Bowling Association Men's State Bowling Tournament

March-May 2016  
1025 room nights | \$184,500 EEI

### United States Bowling Congress, Illinois Youth State Bowling Tournament

April 15-29, 2016  
675 room nights | \$121,500 EEI

### 2nd Annual "FC3" (Forest City Comic Con)

May 14-15, 2016  
150 room nights | \$19,650 EEI

### Tough Mudder

May 21-22, 2016  
5400 room nights | \$3 Million EEI

### Blue Knights Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club, Spring 2017 Great Lakes Conference

March 24-25, 2016  
320 room nights | \$22,270 EEI

### Illinois Association of NAHRO (National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials) State Conference

August 10-12, 2016  
125 room nights | \$16,375 EEI

**Total Q1 Booked EEI = \$3,401,120**