

WORD COUNT 768

Expect big things in 2016

2016 will be a big year for tourism in Rockford thanks to the opening of the UW Health Sports Factory, Tough Mudder and expanded MercyRockford Sportscore 2.

What a difference a year makes! It truly is amazing to see what can be accomplished when a community comes together to move forward initiatives that enhance our quality of life and grow our economy. Let's take a look back at 2015, and then forward to the growth in store for 2016.

UW Health Sports Factory – In January 2015, the Sports Factory was still being referred to as Sportscore Downtown and the construction tip-off wouldn't begin until May. Now, a year later, the City of Rockford, Rockford Park District and the RACVB are gearing up for the opening ceremonies that will come this May when the doors open for the first time.

The two huge announcements of UW Health signing on as the naming rights sponsor and the booking of 20 plus Rockford Hoops basketball tournaments catapulted this projects to new heights before the first ball bounces on the state-of-the-art courts. According to projections, this facility soon will be producing \$10 million in economic activity for the city each year.

MercyRockford Sportscore 2 – In 2015 five new artificial turf fields were installed to enhance the complex and extend the season for the facility. Now, tournaments can be booked with confidence from March to November and, in addition, additional sports will have the opportunity to play on the fields including 7 on 7 football tournaments, baseball, softball and rugby. Also at Sportscore 2 the continued development of the Indoor Sports Complex will extend the opportunities in the winter months for sports tournaments (and local use), which will complement the US Health Sports Factory offerings, as well.

Downtown Rockford development – With the Sports Factory currently leading the way, center city development will continue to be a big topic in 2016. As Rockford City Market set attendance records in 2015, we expect to see this great event for the city continue its ascent. In addition, new destination-style stores and restaurants are helping to bolster the downtown core. For instance, look at what Sienna's Kitchen has done by combining a dining experience with retail shopping, or how the latest addition coming this year in The Standard will provide an all new experience with roof-top dining. This should be an exciting and dynamic way to showcase downtown Rockford.

Tough Mudder and USA Ultimate – One of the RACVB's top priorities is to recruit amazing sports tournaments and events to our region. With mainstay events like the soccer tournament Puma Cup or the USSSA softball events helping to solidify our sports tournament market, we have increasingly pushed the envelope to bring in new and diverse sports programming. The USA Ultimate championships are coming to Rockford in fall of 2016, and with it will be ESPN. Live broadcasts of the ultimate Frisbee matches will be showcased across several of ESPN's stations and online.

And, this May, Tough Mudder will run for the first time in Winnebago County. This high intensity challenge course will wind its way through the Chicago-Rockford International Airport grounds south of the airport. The event is expected to draw up to 12,000 participants plus spectators who will leave an

estimated \$3 million in economic spending in our communities. And best of all, Tough Mudder has agreed to stick around through 2019 meaning this will be an annual boost to our area.

RACVB's New Website -- This past fall, we introduced the new Rockford Region Visitor's Guide with an emphasis on storytelling and utilizing our In Good Company theme as we showcase not just the places in our region but the people who make them so special. We will continue the storytelling as we transition to a new website that will be timed to launch this spring. Updated listings for all attractions, dining and hotels will make this site a great place to learn and plan your experiences. And, an updated Calendar section will make www.gorockford.com the "go to" location to see what is happening in the Rockford region.

Of course, there is so much more to look forward to in 2016 and beyond in the Rockford region. As we continue to ascend to new heights, it is only because the community continues to support and encourage each other as we take the steps to the future. Go Rockford!