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RACVB  
February VOICE column  
Theme: Real. Original. Lovely.

Isn't it great to be in love? In fact the only thing better than being in love may be getting to talk about how "in love" you are at that moment. Of course, this is the season of love with Valentine's Day making romantics out of everyone.

But love isn't just for the people in our life, it's also for our hometowns and the places we frequent with friends and the places that help make us who we are.

Love as a term of endearment is important in the tourism industry as visitors will return to a community when they "love" their experience. Now more than ever, people share their love for a place on social media (checking in on Facebook, posting photos on Instagram, live-Tweeting or rating their experience on Trip Advisor).

Sharing our love for the Rockford region is important to the vitality and success that we will achieve in the future. We are the front lines in promoting our communities. Our passion and love for our favorite restaurants, shops and attractions that we frequent with our friends and family will help to shape the image of our region. If we don't tell our good news, who will?

As we continue to explore our love for Rockford and the communities of Winnebago County, RACVB has embraced the people of our region through our In Good Company promotional campaign. As we continue that exploration, we have discovered Peter Kageyama, economic development guru and author of the book "For the Love of Cities."

In his book, Mr. Kageyama examines how those that love their city are ordinary citizens who "somehow go above and beyond typical levels of citizenship and do extraordinary things for their places." These actions are derived from a need and desire to make their hometown better, to enhance the quality of life for everyone and to find ways for the community to experience their city together.

We are excited to announce that Mr. Kageyama will be our guest speaker at the RACVB Annual Luncheon in early June, and he will share with us his findings from studying how communities all over the world work together and improve their lives by enhancing and elevating the "love" for their city.

In his book, Mr. Kageyama writes: "Why is love out of place in community dialog? For something so central and common to our humanity, it is odd that love, beauty and happiness are not part of our everyday community conversation."

This statement speaks volumes to the focus and vision at the RACVB. More and more, our team has made love, beauty and happiness a priority in our work – Forest City Beautiful and initiatives such as River Lights, the Sculpture Stroll and our partnerships with Rockford Sharefest, and, of course, Stroll on State. We strive to help elevate our community through our love affair with it.

I challenge you to help spread the love you have for Rockford. Post on social media (#gorockford #lovelyrockford) about all the great places that you frequent each week. Not only will you encourage

your friends that live outside of the region to come for a visit, but you will likely help to inform your friends and neighbors about the great gems that you have discovered in your own backyard.

And, now is the perfect time to do it! From February – April, the RACVB will be promoting our seasonal marketing campaign of Real. Original. Lovely. The theme is simple ... what makes our region a “lovely” destination to enjoy time and time again. Our staff has made some great picks as the places they love and you can take a look at their recommendations at [www.gorrockford.com/lovely](http://www.gorrockford.com/lovely).