

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Quarterly Report

FY16, Q2

October – December 2015



**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.



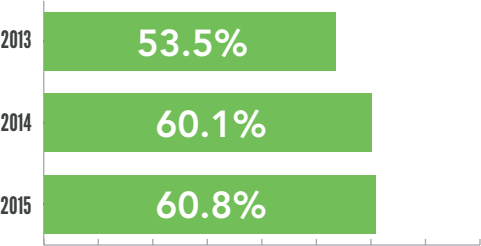
- Roberta Holzwarth** (Chair), Holmstrom & Kennedy PC
David Anderson (Vice Chair), Anderson Japanese Gardens
Bill LaFever (Secretary), Bill Doran & Co.
Gary Strakeljahn (Treasurer), Electroform Company
Stacy Bernardi, Representing Winnebago County
Robert Burden, City of Loves Park
Todd Cagnoni, City 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
Josh Albrecht, Director of Marketing & Public Affairs
Lindsay Arellano, Director of Sales and Service
Jenny Caiozzo, Group Services Manager
Jennie Hahn, Group Service Specialist
Fred Harris, Brochure Distribution Assistant
Janet Jacobs, Marketing Assistant
Lori Johnson, Executive Assistant to President/CEO
Andrea Mandala, Marketing & Communications Manager
Joanne Nold, Director of Finance & Administration
Katrina Peterson, Receptionist & Office Coordinator
Nick Povalitis, Sales Manager
Greta Spencer, Sales Manager
Tana Vettore, Director of Destination Development
Elizabeth Wood, Marketing Coordinator

Winnebago County Hotel Statistics (Jan – Dec 2015)

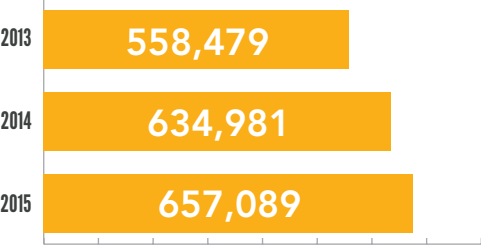
YTD Hotel Occupancy



YTD Average Room Rate



YTD Hotel Room Demand

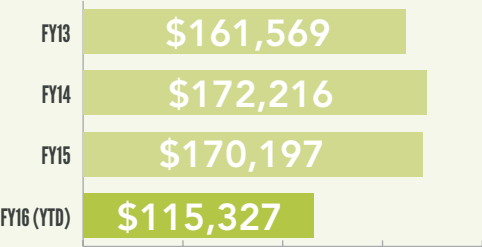


YTD Revenue (in millions)



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

CHINA — **Victor Fong** was announced as the new local representative for Sister City Changzhou, China.

A delegation of Chinese students from Rockford University attended the **US/China Sister Cities International Conference** in Chicago Oct. 22 – 23. A pre-reception at Burpee Museum was given as an introduction for the group. Students were able to connect with prominent Chinese delegates and business owners which could lead to their potential employment upon their return to China.

SWEDEN — Barbara Lunde, representative for Borgholm, Sweden, announced expansion of the **Swedish Cultural Center**.

Eight nursing students and two instructors from De la Gardigymnasiet, Lidköping, Sweden came to Rockford Oct. 14 – 28 to work with **SwedishAmerican Hospital**.

A delegation of business and elected officials from the county of **Skaraborg** in Lidköping visited Rockford and Madison, Wisconsin, from Nov. 15 – 20. They met with Industrial Partnership Agreement official partners and Rockford City leaders.



News & Notes

66,000 Stroll on State

Record-breaking crowds joined together to kick off the Merry & Bright holiday season at the third annual **Stroll on State presented by Illinois Bank & Trust**.

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau produces the annual event, which quickly became a Rockford tradition when it debuted 2013. Each year the event has grown in both size and scope, with this year's event attendance estimated at **66,000 visitors** (determined by aerial photography, feedback from crowd spotters, shuttle bus ridership and sales/participation numbers for local businesses and attractions throughout the duration of the event).

"Every year, I am overwhelmed to see the response from the community as we gather to light the tree," said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO. "So many smiling faces dot the crowd ... it instills great pride for our community."

“Stroll on State is definitely by the community and for the community.”

In a post-event survey, festivalgoers gave the event and downtown Rockford high marks. Of the nearly **800 responses to the survey**, 92 percent said the event was "Excellent," "Very Good" or "Good." And 91 percent said they would return to downtown Rockford in the future based on their Stroll on State experience.

Other Notable Survey Takeaways

- 85 percent made a purchase while attending.
- 60 percent of shoppers spent more than \$25.
- 92 percent of those attending were from Winnebago County, with 47 percent from Rockford.
- 37 percent said 2015 was the first time they attended Stroll on State.
- 89 percent said they would recommend Stroll on State to a friend.
- 70 percent said they experienced Stroll for more than 2 hours.



Sponsors & Partners

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, with the support of many partners, brings Stroll to the community. "We know none of this could happen without the amazing teamwork and dedication from all of our partners and sponsors who work for months putting this event together," said Groh. "Stroll on State is definitely by the community and for the community, and we look forward to many more years of merriment." Stroll on State returns in 2016 on **Saturday, November 26**.

(Refer to the Stroll on State By the Numbers on pages 10 – 12.)

Sponsors

Illinois Bank & Trust (Presenting Sponsor)

SwedishAmerican, a division of UW Health (Sponsor of the Merry & Bright Stage and Official City of Rockford Christmas Tree)

Comcast (Sponsor of MovieLand)

WilliamsManny (Sponsor of SkyLights Firework Display)

LaMonica Beverages (Official Beverage Sponsor)

Allstate Insurance (Sponsor of Horse & Wagon Rides and Fire & Ice)

Landstar Systems, Inc. (Sponsor of the Christmas Tree at Eddie Green Park)

River District Association (Sponsor of the Christmas Tree at Memorial Hall)

Partners

City of Rockford
Rockford Park District

Rockford Sharefest
Rockford First

Heartland Community Church

Media Sponsors

Mid-West Family Broadcasting
Northwest Quarterly
Rockford Register Star
Rock River Times
Rock Valley Publishing

Townsquare Media
WIFR
WREX
WTVQ/WQRF

News & Notes

Levitt Music Grant Finalist

RACVB was pleased to announce that Rockford was one of **25 finalists** hoping to receive a \$25,000 Levitt AMP matching grant to host a **10-week live music series at Davis Park** in downtown Rockford during the summer of 2016. The finalists were dependent on the number of online votes they received through community participation during the month of November 2015. Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, along with its grant application partners the YMCA of the Rock River Valley and the Rockford Area Venues & Entertainment Authority, hoped to qualify as one of the 15 winning organizations competing in the **Levitt AMP [Your City] Grant Awards**, but unfortunately was not awarded one of 15 the grants.



"Levitt's goals for reinvigorating public spaces through placemaking initiatives are right in line with our mission to showcase the Rockford region as a great place for residents to live and a destination for visitors to experience," said Josh Albrecht, RACVB Director of Marketing and Public Affairs. "While we are disappointed that we ultimately did not receive the grant, we were enthused by how much support we received for this project from the community and the community's willingness to help vote for us and put us in the Top 25 for the contest."

New Events add to Merry & Bright Season

The Rockford Region is filled with sites, attractions, eateries and organizations that joined together to enhance the holiday season with **"Merry & Bright"** festivities that took place between Nov. 28 – Jan. 31.

The RACVB launched two new events to add to the Merry & Bright calendar this year. **Shop on State** on Dec. 10 was a hometown holiday shopping experience. This event was a collaborative effort with the RACVB, River District Association and local area businesses featuring great shopping, live music and food vendors. The evening's signature event was **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** kicked-off Dec. 19 at Prairie Street Brewhouse and traveled through downtown Rockford to 12 local bars and restaurants. In its first year, 12 Bars was a **SOLD OUT** event with 300 guests attending.

"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."

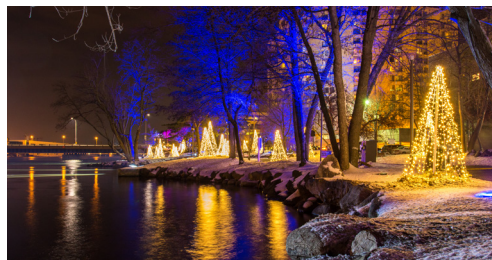


News & Notes

River Lights Brighten Downtown Rockford

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau introduced the newest attraction to downtown Rockford this past holiday season. **Rockford's River Lights** presented by MercyRockford Health System, debuted at Stroll on State presented by Illinois Bank & Trust. After the opening performance at Stroll on State, River Lights continued throughout December until the first weekend in January. Special performances were showcased on New Year's Eve, and spectators filled the riverbanks throughout the holidays to watch the great light displays. Another highlight was 13 WREX showcasing the River Lights on live TV from 9:45 p.m. – 10 p.m. on Dec. 3.

Set along the east and west banks of the Rock River between the State and Jefferson Street bridges, River Lights is a **synchronized light show** that lasts 8-15 minutes per show. The River Lights shows are choreographed and designed by Luxe Productions of Rockford.



The River Lights experience is designed to be viewed both from afar as well as up close. Residents and visitors will be invited to walk along the Esplanade on the west bank of the river and the Millennium Fountain path on the east side, between the State and Jefferson Street bridges. **River Lights will stay up and on year-round.** They will be programmed to change colors with the seasons and for special events and holidays. It will be possible to offer light shows for special events/occasions and holidays. Interested parties would work with RACVB to make this happen.

River Lights is funded through donations by local businesses, organizations and individuals. Individuals and entities wanting to learn more about supporting or sponsoring River Lights are invited to contact RACVB at **815.963.8111**. Donations are tax deductible when given through the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau Charitable Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization.

Phantom Regiment Sponsorship

RACVB is pleased to be a supporter and sponsor of the **Phantom Regiment Drum Corps**. Members of the Phantom Regiment continue to be great ambassadors for the City of Rockford throughout the country as they compete in showcases and events. Check out their great new trailer that helps them transport all of their instruments and equipment as they travel. We are happy to see the phrase **"Real. Original. Rockford IL gorockford.com"** on the back of the trailer!

River Lights Sponsors Donating \$1,000 or More

MercyRockford (Presenting Sponsor)

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Bergstrom Foundation

Rockford Area Realtors

Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP

Rockford Park District

SupplyCore

Northwestern Illinois Building &
Construction Trades Council

International Brotherhood of
Electrical Workers

Robert & Erika Holdmann

WilliamsMcCarthy LLP

Smith Amundsen

Loyd & Diane Koch

B&B Properties

Chartwell Agency

HolmstromKennedy

LaMonica Beverages

Savant Capital Management

SwedishAmerican - A division of UW Health

Prairie Street Brewhouse



Marketing

Advertising & Promotions

A strategic advertising plan highlights the continued efforts of the RACVB to market the Rockford region as a key destination for the sports tourism industry.

RACVB placed a half page island print ad in **Sports Travel**, a monthly publication that reached over 57,000 readers in conjunction with a super leaderboard digital ad on Sports Travel's website that reached over 50,000 targeted visitors to the site. A half page print ad was placed in both the **SportsEvents** "Fields and Facilities Guide" reaching 16,500 readers and the "Sports-friendly CVB Annual Planners Guide" reaching key decision-makers and planners interested in booking tournaments with a destination known for its long track record for hosting a variety of quality sporting events. A three-year sponsorship agreement with **US Sports Congress** allowed the RACVB to meet face-to-face with targeted tournament planners and directors and advertise directly to this group with customized printed signage at the conference as well as a full page ad in a printed program book. The aim of these ads was to promote venues in the Rockford region and the opening of the UW Health Sports Factory set for May 2016.

Leisure holiday promotions (including the **Merry & Bright** season, **Stroll on State** and **River Lights** events) were advertised through online, print, television, radio, billboard and social media channels. These events were highlighted on both a local and regional level with strategic stories pitched to various Chicagoland media outlets. They were featured in print and online advertisements in the Rockford Register Star, Rock River Times, Rock Valley Publishing, Belvidere Daily Republican, The Journals/Shoppers, The Herald, Gazette/Tempo/Shopper and the Northwest Quarterly/Smart Living Weekly. Other broadcast outlets include Midwest Family Broadcasting, Townsquare Media, WIFR, WTOG, WREX, Comcast, WLS and PBS.

Other partner outlets include **TripAdvisor**, **Tip Off Classic Event Brochure** and **Cherry Valley Sign Co. billboard** (located at the corner of Perryville Road and Newburg Road).



Website Statistics

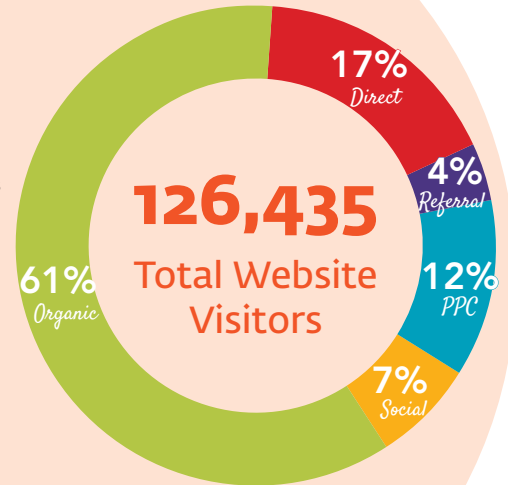
Most Searched Terms

Caldendar of Events
Things to Do
Stroll on State
Merry & Bright
Rockford's River Lights

Most Searched Events

OCT Locktoberfest Weekends at Lockwood Park
NOV Stroll on State
DEC Rockford's River Lights Performances

Website Traffic Sources



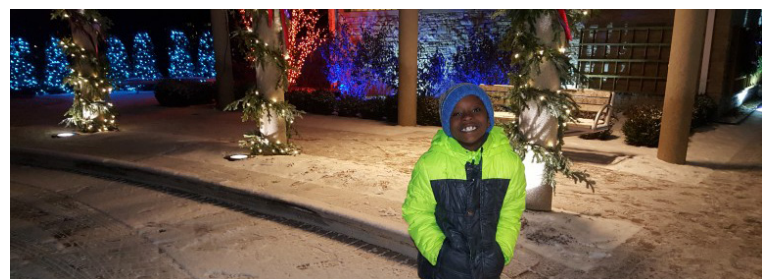
Most Searched Attractions/Restaurants

OCT Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden
NOV Rockfordnightout.com
DEC Discovery Center Museum

Travel Writer

Raijean Stroud with **Swa-Rai Media** based out of Chicago visited the Rockford region Dec. 18 – 20. Raijean has worked with numerous brands — her resume includes news segment on NBC, WGN & more. This was another beneficial partnership made from Travel Media Showcase 2015. While she was in the Rockford region she visited several local sites, attractions and eateries including Lino's, Don Carter Lanes, Discovery Center Museum, Burpee Museum, Midway Village Museum, Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens, Stockholm Inn, the Coronado Performing Arts Center and Woodfire Brick Oven Pizza.

Her website viewership is 75,000 people, and her social media includes over 6,000 Facebook likes, 917 Twitter Followers and 2,497 Instagram Followers.



Raijean's son at Nicholas Conservatory

Marketing

Promoting Rockford to Rockford

Rockford Community Partners

The RACVB staff continues to work with the **Rockford Community Partners** sub-committees, **New Narratives** and **Storefront Business**, to implement a placemaking strategy to define individual Business Districts through branding and storytelling initiatives. A key component of this is a marketing brochure that the RACVB is developing in-house that can be shared with community members.



RAEDC Event Presentaion

John Groh, RACVB president and CEO, was a breakout leader at the Rockford Area Economic Development Council's **"Attracting and Retaining Talent: Leveraging Resources & Lessons Learned"** event to assist business leaders with tools for successfully growing their companies, focusing on workforce and learning specific actions for growth planning. John's presentation "Selling Your Company & The Rockford Region" gave an overview of the Rockford region along with key businesses, sites, attractions, facilities, economic development initiatives, events and sports tournaments that positively impact the tourism industry.

US Health Sports Factory Tours

In an effort to educate the community about the value and benefit of the UW Health Sports Factory, the RACVB, City of Rockford and Rockford Park District launched **public tours** to educate citizens on the benefits and impact this indoor multi-use facility will have by bringing visitors to the Rockford region and hosting various events.

Snapchat Launch

The RACVB marketing department launched the **GoRockford Snapchat** account on November 16 prior to Stroll on State in order to reach a larger demographic and to be a resource for fun things to do in the Rockford region. Currently, we have approximately 97 followers.

Social Media



Facebook
16,140 followers
(1,452 increase)



YouTube
264,254 video views
(9,399 increase)



Instagram
4,171 followers
(546 increase)



Twitter
5,362 followers
(162 increase)

Earned Media

RACVB uses **Cision** a public relations management software to track and report the effectiveness of media mentions and their ad value through various outlets, e.g., television, online, print, radio and social media.

43,382,457

Total impressions by media type
(TV, newspaper, online, magazine, other publications)



October

741 news results

\$3,266,445 ad value

9,831,863 circulation



November

1,084 news results

\$2,135,415 ad value

25,917,241 circulation



December

696 news results

\$1,027,882 ad value

9,017,345 circulation

Earned Media (Oct. – Dec. 2015)

2,521 news results

\$6,429,742 ad value

44,766,449 circulation

Sports

Sports Sales Highlights

The RACVB sports sales team kicked off the second quarter in Frisco, TX, at the 2015 USA Ultimate Club Championships, where USA Ultimate announced that the Rockford region won the bid to host the **2016 Club Championships**. The winning bid marks the first time that USA Ultimate's most prestigious event will be held in the Midwest and the state of Illinois.

RACVB attended the **S.P.O.R.T.S. 2015 - The Relationship Conference** in Shreveport, LA, where staff met with more than 30 sports event planners. GoRockford then welcomed the **United States Fastpitch Association (USFA)** and **Game Day USA** for site visits to MercyRockford Sportscore 1 and 2. RACVB took its second sales mission of the month to Chicago on Oct. 21 to watch and assess **Nitro Circus Live North American Tour**. In addition to the 2016 USA Ultimate Nationals, other new sales bookings during the month included the **2015 Big Ten Universities Rugby Conference Championship** and the **2016 USA Track & Field Midwest Zone Championships**—an event yielded from an October 2014 sales mission to Indianapolis.



In early November, RACVB drafted a sales presentation for the **2017 NSSA Division I Show Ski Nationals**, which the Ski Broncs took to Florida for an NSSA board meeting. After presenting our region's case, the NSSA board voted to bring back this national championship for a ninth time in 2017 at Shorewood Park in Loves Park. While the Ski Broncs represented the region in the southeast, RACVB attended the **2015 TEAMS Conference** in Las Vegas, NV, where it again met with nearly 30 sports event planners. GoRockford capitalized even more during its trip to Las Vegas, when its creativity and planning generated a meeting at the world headquarters of the **Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)**. RACVB presented a 16"x 24" framed blueprint outlining

Rockford's case to host a future UFC event downtown at the BMO Harris Bank Center, where the RACVB is targeting a 2017 date. Of many new bookings, Game Day USA, after its site visit the previous month, was the first event owner to secure five tournament weekends on the new artificial turf fields at MercyRockford Sportscore 2.

RACVB opened December at the **2015 U.S. Sports Congress** in Fort Worth, TX, capping off a busy fall/winter trade show season. Upon its return, GoRockford welcomed the **National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)** to the Forest City for its second site visit in as many years. RACVB, in partnership with Rock Valley College, bid to host the **2017-19 NJCAA Division III Women's Soccer Championship** earlier in the fall. RACVB and the region—which also bid on the 2016-18 NJCAA Division III Volleyball Championship last year—remains a finalist until the winning women's soccer site is unveiled in Spring 2016. On the heels of a joint press conference with the Rockford Park District, RACVB closed out the quarter with a milestone **Rockford Hoops** booking—a three-year agreement that includes 11 basketball tournament dates during 2016 at the UW Health Sports Factory.

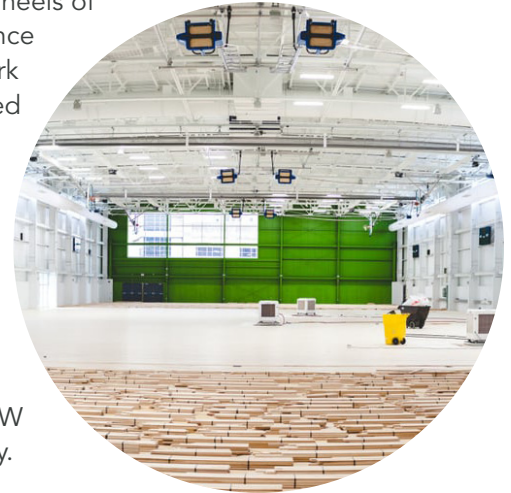
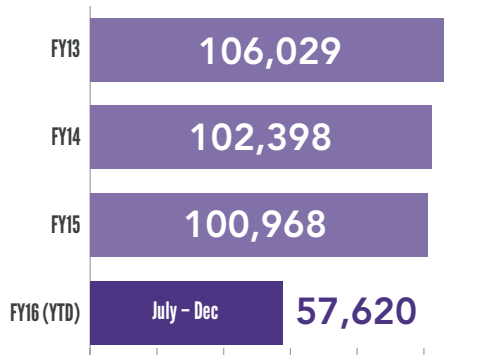


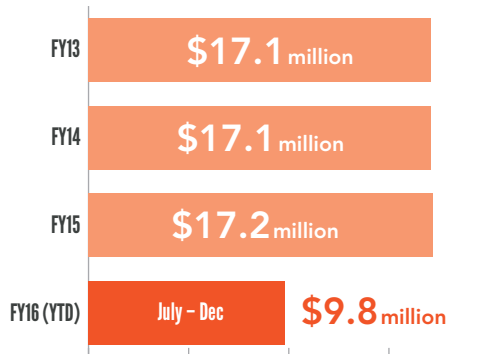
Photo credit: Rockford Park District - Photo by Jesse Fox

Meetings, Servicing & Bookings

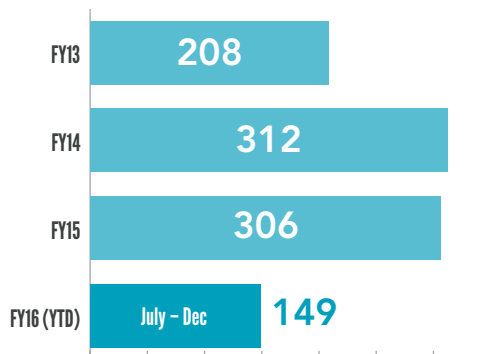
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



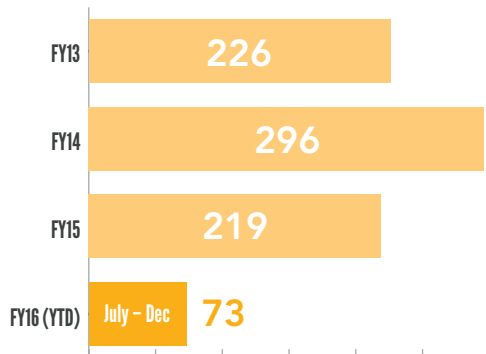
Estimated Economic Impact



Number of Event Bookings



Events Serviced by RACVB



Meetings Sales Highlights

Greta Spencer, Meetings Sales Manager, attended the **Small Market Meetings Conference (SMMC)** in Little Rock, AR, from Sept. 28 – Oct. 1, 2015. SMMC is a trade show designed for travel industry experts to meet with meeting planners who prefer to host their events in small to medium sized cities. SMMC consisted of a variety of networking events, as well as 27 pre-scheduled appointments with qualified planners. RACVB was a proud sponsor of this event for the second year in a row, which gave the extra benefit of having an impact throughout the conference with customized 4' x 4' floor stickers on the trade show floor, a dedicated table stocked full of Rockford information for attendees to browse and the RACVB logo on all conference materials.



In November, thanks to a generous donation from the Rockford Area Hotel/Motel Association (RAHMA), Spencer was able to attend **Rejuvenate Marketplace** from Nov. 2 – 5 in Dallas, TX. Rejuvenate is a trade show intended for meeting planners from a variety of faith based organizations to meet with travel industry experts from around the country. In addition to 24 successful, fast-paced appointments, Spencer had the opportunity to attend a variety of educational sessions.

Meetings Bookings

Booking highlights from this quarter include the return of the annual **RRCNA Convention**.

A successful site visit with Tamara Masterson of the **National Trappers Association (NTA)** resulted in securing a host hotel and banquet location for the NTA's 2017 conference, which Rockford will host July 23 – 31, 2017.

Booking Highlights for the Region

Big Ten Universities Rugby Conference — 2015 BTU Rugby Championship

November 13, 2015
325 room nights | \$58,000 EEI

Townsquare Media — Insane Inflatable 5K

August 2016
395 room nights | \$71,100 EEI

USA Ultimate 2016 Club Championships

September 2016
1,500 room nights | \$196,500 EEI

Blue Knights Law Enforcement Motorcycle Club of Illinois — Spring 2016 Great Lakes Conference

March 2017
320 room nights | \$41,920 EEI

USA Waterski — 2017 Division I Show Ski Nationals

August 2017
1,600 room nights | \$209,600 EEI

Total Q2 Booked Estimated Economic Impact = \$577,120

STROLL on STATE®

Brought to you by the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Presented by
ILLINOIS
BANK & TRUST

NOVEMBER 28, 2015

By the Numbers

Photo credit: Rockford Park District Curt Johnsen, edited by Jesse Fox



66,000

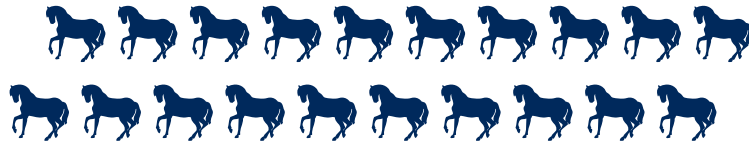
people attended Stroll on State

307 large ornaments



1,640

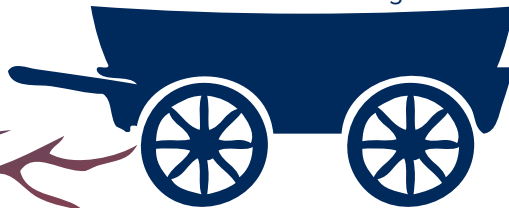
photos taken in the photo booth



20 horses leading wagons

9,000

people who rode in the horse and wagon



3,000

families visited Santa

20

city blocks covered in the expanded grounds of Stroll on State



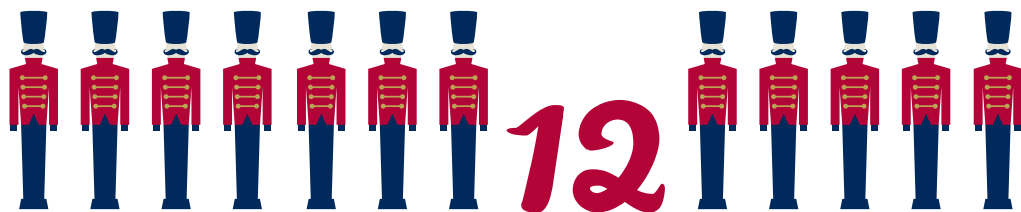
120

LED lights used for River Lights

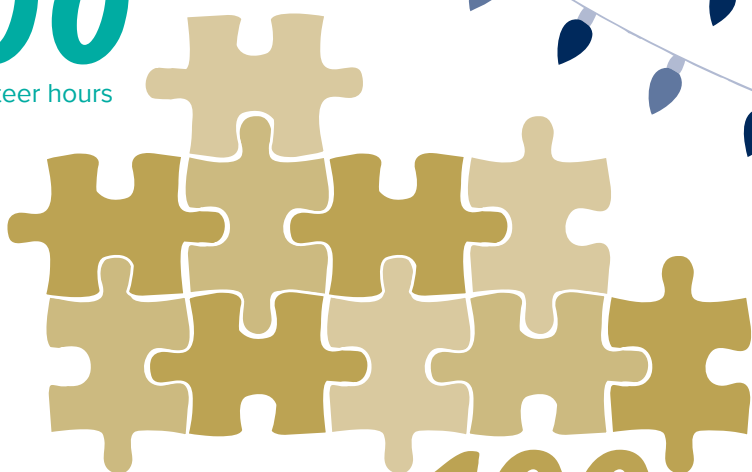
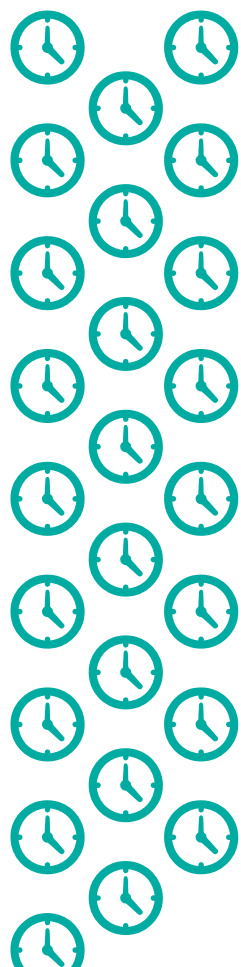
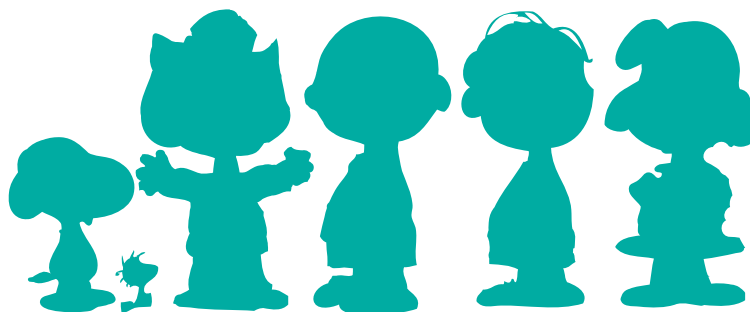
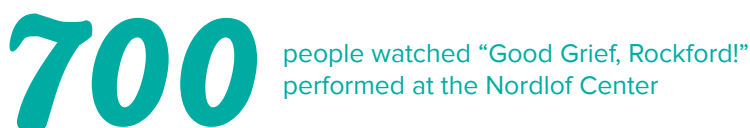


100

lighted string trees



Nutcracker decorations created specifically for Stroll on State



organizations partnered
to put on Stroll on State



individual lights on the official city
Christmas tree and additional 2 trees



STROLL on STATE®

Brought to you by the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



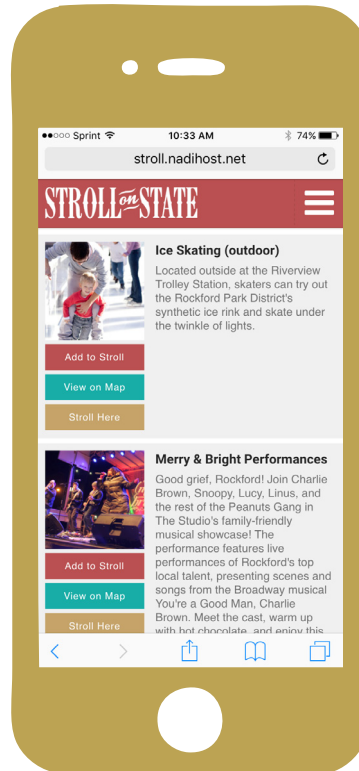
Presented by
ILLINOIS
BANK & TRUST

NOVEMBER 28, 2015

Advertising

2,133,903

combined news circulation audience of Stroll on State media



6,478

"Plan Your Stroll" app users



111,797

total reach on **Facebook**
with Stroll on State posts



97

total followers on
Snapchat (launched
November 16)



3,324

people viewed the
2014 Stroll on State
video on **Youtube** on
November 28

33,077

pageviews of
strollonstate.com

92,426

Trip Advisor
impressions



237

stories in the media about Stroll on State
(a total **ad value of \$242,438.59**)
Reported by Cision