

VOICE COLUMN – March issue

The Value of Competitive Cooperation

By John Groh

Dedication and perseverance through teamwork are the hallmarks of Tough Mudder events. Those same traits are present in our regional sites and attractions and are vital to success in the tourism marketplace.

At a recent Sites & Attractions meeting hosted by the RACVB each month for our partners in the tourism industry, Discovery Center Museum, Klehm Arboretum and Botanic Garden, Burpee Museum of Natural History, Rockford Art Museum and Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens announced their plans to create a Museums for Moms joint event for Mother's Day on May 8.

Wondering how Museums for Moms works? Here's the scoop: "Celebrate Mother's Day with free admission for all mothers and grandmothers at five area museums! Pick up a passport at one museum, then visit three more museums and be entered in a drawing to win free memberships to all five museums!"

This fantastic idea shows how attractions can work together to promote the region as a whole, which in turn benefits each attraction individually. And even better, this provides a fantastic experience for visitors and residents on a special occasion.

Another great joint effort was executed by Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, Erlander Home Museum and the Ethnic Heritage Museum last November when they worked together to create and promote the Holiday Happenings event that was a successful way to highlight these southwest Rockford attractions during the holidays.

It is so great to hear about cooperative efforts by our sites and attractions in the region and it is great to hear that they value the hard work and dedication that each brings to their attractions. Mutual support and understanding goes a long way to creating a thriving and vibrant future.

Teamwork is Essential to ROI

Just as we are seeing cooperation competition among our sites and attractions to create a vibrant tourism industry that draws visitors to their facilities, Tough Mudder is built on the idea of cooperative competition where participants help each other throughout a 10-12 mile obstacle course that values teamwork over finisher rankings.

And the effort to bring TM to the region was a cooperative effort, as well. A lot of things have to go right, and a lot of work goes into securing an event of this magnitude.

The process began several years ago when RACVB Director of Sales Lindsay Arellano made a connection with TM representatives at a sports industry trade show in 2012. RACVB staff attends many trade shows

throughout the year to meet potential event directors face to face, which helps bring familiarity and trust to those looking to bring their events to the region.

After the initial meeting with TM, RACVB kept in contact with representatives the last few years to let them know we were still interested in hosting their event. Finally, after years of pursuit, the opportunity came up in 2015 to bid on bringing the event to the region. Our team quickly went to work putting together tours of regional sites that could be a fit. The search was narrowed to three options that TM staff thought might work and RACVB set up tours of those facilities: Winnebago County Fairgrounds, Williams Tree Farm and the Chicago Rockford International Airport.

RACVB received great support from all three locations as our staff gave tours of the facilities, as well as attractions throughout the area, to the TM representatives. Eventually, the airport was chosen by TM and since then, the airport, along with city and county, administration and police and fire departments have been helping to plan and execute this great event for the region.

The timing of TM proved to be even more valuable when the Chicago Rockford International Airport recently announced the cancellation of the 2016 Airfest because of routing issues with the main aircraft that would headline the show.

The airport was given an alternative date that would have put Airfest on the same weekend as the 45th Annual Young at Heart Festival in Loves Park. Rather than competing with this community tradition, the airport recognized the impact it would have had on that event and opted to cancel the Airfest for this year. That was likely a very tough call by the airport, but a very respectful and teamwork-focused decision that was best for the community as a whole.

The final challenge!

So, with Tough Mudder still about two months away on May 21-22, I challenge you to get a team together and to take part in this fun-filled event. As someone who has braved a TM course in the past, I can definitely say it is a great time. Find out more about TM at www.gorockford.com/toughmudder.

As we continue through the year, consider how your organization can find value in competitive cooperation to enhance your ROI. I think you will find that it leads to even greater success in the future.