



Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau
102 North Main Street
Rockford, Illinois 61101-1102 USA

gorockford.com

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



RACVB Nets Top Awards at State and National Levels

The **Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB)** was thrilled to take home top honors at the state and national levels for excellence in the travel and tourism industry. The **National Association of Sports Commissions** named the RACVB **"Sports Tourism Organization of the Year"** at its annual conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. RACVB also took home two awards at the **2016 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism** held in Springfield, Illinois. Recognition was given for **"Best Social Media Marketing"** during Stroll on State, which attracted over 60,000 attendees, and for **"Best Visitor Guide Publication."**

The Sports Tourism Organization of the Year award is given to an active member of the National Association of Sports Commissions that has had the most outstanding impact on their local community

RAEDC Emerging Opportunities Fund Grant Awarded to RACVB

RACVB submitted a project to the **Rockford Area Economic Development Council Leadership Council** to create a strategic plan to manage and enhance the region's online reputation. The Council awarded the requested \$75,000 to manage the Rockford Region's Reputation & Recruitment effort via online and external media and influencers.

RACVB will utilize the funds for reputation and recruitment efforts online for the Rockford region. Efforts will focus on how to get the

through marketing and sales efforts, the growth of sporting events, community events and generating results and economic impact. In giving the award, the NASC judging panel said of the Rockford CVB: "The diversity of events hosted impressed us, along with the fact they hosted 200 events for 79,000 room nights."

The **Best Social Media Marketing** award honors the top tourism experience best promoted through online videos, viral promotions, blogs, e-mail marketing or creative use of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat. The **Best Visitor Guide Publication** award honors the best visitor's guide used to promote a tourism destination and incorporating more editorial story content with high quality photos.

good news and information about our region to rise to the top – online, in external media outlets and with key influencers. Efforts will be deployed to ensure that positive and balanced information is available in order to highlight the progress and momentum the region is experiencing. Managing the regional reputation online will also help local companies secure talented employees who in turn will help grow local businesses and advance our economy.

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Rockford, IL
Permit No. 781

Real, Original ROI

How tourism is benefitting our regional economy NOW

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



UW Health Sports Factory Opens With RACVB Annual Luncheon

RACVB's Annual Luncheon in conjunction with RPD's Grand Opening Celebration kicked off opening weekend at the UW Health Sports Factory.

The **Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau** showed love for our region and celebrated major tourism wins during the organization's Annual Luncheon presented by **SwedishAmerican**, a division of UW Health. The luncheon was the inaugural event at the new **UW Health Sports Factory** and more than 750 people turned out for the celebration.

"Years from now, we will look back on the opening of the UW Health Sports Factory as a catalytic moment that helped transform downtown Rockford and the region," said John

Groh, RACVB president/CEO. "Many individuals and organizations worked together to reclaim and redevelop this riverfront site into one of the country's premier sports facilities. Our visitors will be able to compete in a world-class facility and our residents will enjoy a higher quality of life and stronger economy as a result."

UW Health Sports Factory Ushers in New Era for Sports Tourism in Rockford

Tourism in Rockford took a huge leap forward with the opening of the UW Health

Continued on page 6 >



Riverfront Museum Park Celebrates 25 years

The bustling hub of museums and community groups that comprise the **Riverfront Museum Park** on the northern edge of downtown Rockford has been drawing crowds for decades, even during its former life as a big-name department store.

Yes, the home of **Discovery Center Museum, Rockford Art Museum, Rockford Dance Company** and **Rockford Symphony Orchestra** and the Rockford location for **Northern Public Radio** is a former Sears retail store. Sears donated the building, 711 N. Main St., to the art museum in 1985; the property was eventually turned over to the Rockford Park District so it could be redeveloped in part with museum tax funds.

The space was renovated by an arts consortia and reopened in 1991, which, if you do the math, means the museum park celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

Facility management and the museum park staff are responsible for the maintenance, repair and security of the facility and

the parking lot, Facility Manager Cyndie Howard said. They oversee scheduling of the facility, coordinating repairs, painting, emergencies, and set-up and tear-down for special events.

“Taking care of our member organizations – their infrastructure needs – and helping coordinate and facilitate collaborations, joint marketing and joint programming are all part of what Riverfront Museum Park does,” Howard said. “Our sole purpose for being is to help these organizations in every way we can, so that they may devote all of their resources to their outreach and programming to the community.”

On any given day, you can hear the laughs and excitement from children at Discovery Center, or see visitors perusing exhibits at RAM. The museums are the biggest draws. The Rockford Dance Company offers classes year-round for people ages 3 and up in five spacious studios located on the museum park’s second floor; the company also does some performances onsite.

The park is the administrative home for RSO; NPR’s official home base is in DeKalb, and the Rockford location houses the Northern

Illinois Radio Information Service operation along with auxiliary studio and office space.

“One of the things that’s so wonderful about us all being here in the same building is the synergy,” Art Museum Executive Director Linda Dennis said. “It’s the ability to easily collaborate and to work together on different projects, community outreach and classes for people of all ages.”

A wall of brochures and fliers about each organization greets visitors when they walk in the front doors. That means you might hear NPR playing on the speakers or notice an advertisement for a symphony production or dance camp that you didn’t know about.

Each group individually markets to communities outside Rockford, which means the park attracts visitors from across the region – and across the country. In 2015, Discovery Center Museum, which has more than 300 exhibits, served 182,075 people onsite. Marketing Director Ann Marie Walker said the museum typically sees visitors

from nearly every state and multiple foreign countries each year.

Essentially, there is always potential to attract new audiences. Walker noted special field trip options such as Terrific Tuesdays when groups get to spend time at RAM, the Rockford Dance Company and Discovery Center. The museum park’s website also gives a nod to its fantastic neighbors: Burpee Museum of Natural History, Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center, Coronado Performing Arts Center and Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens.

“The opportunity is there for visitors to have a complete day,” Dennis said.

How To Find Them

riverfrontmuseumpark.org	815.972.2800
discoverycentermuseum.org	815.963.6769
northernpublicradio.org	815.961.8000
rockfordartmuseum.org	815.968.2787
rockforddancecompany.com	815.963.3341
rockfordsymphony.com	815.965.0049

Things To Do

Discovery Center Museum: Family Fridays each Friday through Aug. 5, where each Friday has a different theme with science activities, live science shows and more; Harry Potter’s birthday bash on July 31.

Rockford Art Museum: The 2016 Rockford Midwestern is the 74th presentation of RAM’s juried exhibition. It’s a biennial competition that surveys contemporary art across the Midwest today. That runs through September 25. Art With a View is RAM’s new summer party held along the Rock River on Aug. 13, and the Greenwich Village Art Fair is Sept. 17 and Sept. 18.

Rockford Dance Company: Summer is filled with dance camps for children of all ages. Weeklong Princess Camps run through August, featuring ballet, folk and creative dance movements combined with games, crafts and select dance media. There are classes for older children and Boys Creative Movement Camp in July. RDC also hosts children’s classes and a summer class session, as well as drop-in classes for adults.

Rockford Symphony Orchestra: Catch “Musical Fresco,” featuring RSO musicians, at outdoor venues throughout the summer.



Discovery Center Museum



Rockford Art Museum



Rockford Dance Company



Rockford Symphony Orchestra



TRICKFORD USA



RACVB Spearheads Local Cheap Trick Celebrations

RACVB and the City of Rockford banded together to recognize and celebrate the long-overdue induction of local Rockford heroes **Cheap Trick** into the **Rock & Roll Hall of Fame**. For **Rick Nielsen**, **Tom Petersson**, **Robin Zander** and **Bun E. Carlos** April 8, 2016 was Heaven Tonight as they become the first Rockfordians to be so honored in a grand ceremony in Brooklyn, New York.

Rockford Becomes Trickford: The City of Rockford is also playing an active role in the celebration and recognition of the band's accomplishments. **Mayor Morrissey** has ceremonially "officially, unofficially" renamed the city "**Trickford**" in honor of its Hall of Fame artists and signed a proclamation to that effect. New "welcome to Trickford" signs were installed at the city's gateway entrances and the boyhood streets of the four band members were renamed in celebratory fashion. And a new **GoTrickford.com** website launched that will help visitors and residents alike learn about Cheap Trick's history and legacy in Rockford. The site features biographies, an interactive timeline, a Fan Trail, videos and more.



"Trickford" billboards and signage installed throughout the region proudly show support and recognition of local band Cheap Trick's induction in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.



RACVB Launches Enhanced Website

Figuring out what to do in the Rockford area just got a lot easier. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau re-launched **www.GoRockford.com** in May with a brand new design that focuses on telling the region's story through dynamic photos, comprehensive calendar and event listings, user generated content and feature articles from local bloggers and enhanced listings for our attractions, restaurants, shops and hotels.

One of the biggest enhancements is the usability of the website as the new design allows the site to be fully responsive across all platforms and devices. What that means is that users can easily access the same content from their desktop computer, tablet device or smart phone without having to download an app or change any settings.

GoRockford.com currently sees strong readership and usage and increased use is anticipated with the new responsive design. In 2015, the site saw 504,311 visits with 1.3 million page views.



Anything That Floats Is Back!

Thanks to a dedicated group of local Rock River enthusiasts, a former Rockford tradition and tourist draw will be reborn this summer, and RACVB is excited to be one of the partner organizations helping to make it happen.

The **Rock River Anything That Floats Race (RRATFR)** returns to the Rockford region Sunday, August 21 (rain date August 28) from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. This 1.6 mile race on the **Rock River**



begins at the north side of the Auburn Street Bridge (former coast guard station) and ends with a party at the **Prairie Street Brewing Company** following the race. Teams can sign up to build their own makeshift raft or floating device for the main event and there will also be plenty of water set aside for canoes (doubles and singles), kayaks (doubles and singles), and paddleboards to race as well.

Initially launched in 1976 (U.S. Bicentennial) as a US. vs. Brits race, after two years with only two teams, it was opened to the public. More than just an homage to the incredibly popular **WROK/ZOK** sponsored raft races of the '70s, '80s and '90s - the all new Rock River Anything That Floats Race will be a brand new tradition for generations of Rockfordians to love and experience.

For more information, go to www.rratfr.com.



Annual Luncheon
Continued from cover.



RACVB president/CEO John Groh (pictured above) and other community leaders discuss the importance of sports tourism in our region.

Sports Factory on June 1. The 105,000 sq. ft., multi-function facility features 96,000 sq. ft. of hard court surfaces which can be used as 8 basketball courts, 16 volleyball courts, or 42 pickleball courts, and can accommodate 16 wrestling mats with seating for up to 3,700 spectators. **Tournaments at the UW Health Sports Factory are projected to bring millions of additional visitor dollars.** And tourism means

the creation of more than 130 secondary jobs throughout the region and 46 jobs which will be created by the Rockford Park District to operate and maintain the facility. From June 2016 through May 2017, UW Health Sports Factory will host at least 46 basketball, 2 wheelchair basketball, 11 volleyball, and 2 table tennis tournaments.



Rocktown Adventures
"Recreation should be a critical part of people's lives."

Visitors Mean Jobs...My Job!

Kevin Versino

Job: General Manager, **Rocktown Adventures**, 313 North Madison St., Rockford

Rocktown Adventures opened in 2014 at 313 N. Madison St. in Rockford. The specialty outdoor retailer and adventure club offers sales, rentals, lessons, guided trips and related apparel for kayaks, canoes and stand-up paddleboards in the summer and Nordic skiing and snowshoeing in the winter. The store – which also has an Aurora location – carries camping equipment, lifestyle apparel and transportation equipment such as roof racks and trailers.

General Manager Kevin Versino took some time to tell us more about the store.

Q: What's your background?

A: I am an avid outdoor recreation enthusiast. Formerly I was a commodity trader in Chicago and a project manager for SupplyCore. Rocktown Adventures was established to promote our community's natural recreational assets while simultaneously promoting Rockford as a great place to work, live and play. For Rocktown owners, the company is an urban revitalization play, not a retail play. We want to use outdoor recreation to drive consistent, repeatable traffic to downtown.

Q: What's the response been like from the community?

A: RA opened Nov. 1, 2014. Response has been great when people find us! As we have moved along from our opening in 2014, we have

seen increased participation in our events and increased interest in outdoor recreation in general. People are excited a store like this exists in Rockford. Now it is up to us to promote the recreational opportunities available right in our backyard and provide the opportunities for people to engage in outdoor recreation.

Q: What sets your store apart from other retailers?

A: We carry brands that excite your outdoor passions. You can't find what we sell anywhere else in Rockford. The equipment and apparel we sell is also used by our staff in their own outdoor recreational pursuits, which provides authenticity when we speak with customers.

Q: What type of regional draw does the store see?

A: We do attract people from all over the region. Due to the unique nature of the products we carry, we have had customers from as far away as Ohio drive to our stores. Of particular interest to Rocktown, and by extension RACVB, is we want to attract from the Chicago market. Right now, these efforts are centered on advertising with RACVB, social media and select local print and online media. We will begin targeted digital marketing in early summer.

Q: What is the most popular item/service that people come to you for?

A: Most popular item is seasonal driven -- paddlesports in summer, cross-country skiing in winter. What has evolved as we have moved forward is an increase in participation on paddle trips. Should Mother Nature cooperate one of these years and provide a snowy winter, we would see the same for ski outings. So the thing that has stuck out the most in the almost two years that we have been open is people want to engage with the outdoors; they just need the platform in which to engage. This is where Rocktown provides value ... we sell, rent, instruct and lead trips.

Q: Why do you think recreation should be a critical part of people's lives?

A: Recreation should be a critical part of people's lives because studies have shown getting outside is good for you. Increased focus and reduced absenteeism are a couple of business-related benefits. Also, learning a new skill provides confidence, which can be applied to learning new skills in the workforce. Shared sense of accomplishment enhances bonds amongst team members.

Q: Why do you enjoy what you do?

A: I enjoy what I do because at the end of the day, we sell fun. We provide a vehicle for people to enjoy life, to engage in memorable, repeatable experiences.

Rocktown Adventures is open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sundays, as well as by appointment. For more information, go to www.rocktownadventures.com.

Tourism in Winnebago County Means...

- Visitors to Winnebago County spent \$340 million at area businesses in 2014 (the largest amount on record!)
- Visitors to Winnebago County generated \$5.57 million in local tax receipts in 2014 (funds that help local governments pay for services residents rely on).
- 7,662,205 guests visited attractions and events in Winnebago County in 2015.
- Visitor spending in Winnebago County supported 2,700 jobs in the hospitality sector in 2014.
- 504,380 total visitors and residents are anticipated to use the UW Health Sports Factory in the first year.
- \$16.5 million generated annually of new private sector economic activity and \$1.9 million generated annually in new tax revenue (combined with Mercy Sportscore 2 improvements)
- 225 permanent jobs upon opening (combined with Mercy Sportscore 2)