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Tourism Economy Continues to Rise

Earlier this year, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau partnered with local coffee roaster JavaMania to create a Real. Original Rockford-inspired coffee flavor called “Rockford Rising.” What we challenged ourselves with was identifying a way to tell the story of Rockford through a fun and engaging medium – a medium that people use every day and would be easy to put into prize bags at sports tournaments and conferences that RACVB hosts.

The coffee has been a huge hit. The bold and daring flavor of the coffee is exactly how we want to portray our community as we are a city rising for a new day and ready to enliven the experiences of those traveling to our community.

And the proof that people are coming is in the numbers.

Rockford and Winnebago County continue to see a rise in tourism spending expenditures – the total amount of money travelers spend during their time in the region – **reaching \$349.91 million in 2015, a 3 percent increase over the prior year’s record-setting numbers**, according to data released by the Illinois Department of Commerce’s Office of Tourism.

The RACVB is extremely proud that tourism spending has reached new heights. But even more important are a few additional numbers related to overall spending.

Locally, tax revenue from tourism – funds that help local governments pay for services residents rely on – reached \$5.9 million, a 6 percent increase over the prior year. In addition, local tourism and hospitality industry **employment increased 4 percent to 2,810 jobs**.

A rise in local tax revenues and jobs is always something to smile about.

These numbers are even more encouraging when we see what the future can hold. These current record-setting numbers are from 2015 – before the UW Health Sports Factory and the expansion projects at Mercy Sportscore 2. These are numbers reported before what will be a record-setting summer for the Rockford City Market and the success of the first Tough Mudder.

How can one event like Tough Mudder have a big impact on the rising of our tourism economy? A post-event survey conducted by Tough Mudder gives some great insight about the impact on our community. Here are a few key takeaways from the post event survey:

- 17,222 total out-of-market visitors attended the event as a participant or spectator.
- 3,648 visitors for TM stayed in a local hotel
- \$6.1 million of total economic impact was generated with \$3.3 million in direct spending.
- \$184,232 generated in taxes and fees.

That is some amazing impact to our community.

But there is one big factor that these visitors cited in the survey that I think truly encompasses the value of tourism and the RACVB's efforts to bring events like Tough Mudder to our region: "Of the total visitors, over 93 percent claimed they would not have visited the area were it not for the Tough Mudder event, and their visit to the area was solely related to Tough Mudder."

Wow, what a great illustration of the impact of tourism and how it helps to define and showcase a community to the world.

This is why the image that we present to visitors when they are here is crucial to the continued development of the overall Rockford brand. A single event like Tough Mudder that brings in 17,222 people who do not reside in Rockford provides a tremendous opportunity for our community to tell its story. Each one of those participants is a potential new resident, new business owner or a return tourist.

In addition to the record breaking economic impact in 2015, our region saw increased attendance overall for our sites and attractions as more is added to our community's bevy of tourism resources. It's fun to see how in just a few short years many of Rockford's traditions have really just gotten started. From Stroll on State to Dinner on the Dock to Tuesday Evening in the Gardens coming online as premier events and Alpine Hills Adventure Park, West Rock Wake Park and Rockford City Market all becoming positive and popular attractions, Rockford is poised to continue rising for years to come.

And the best part is that we know we are just at the dawn of a new day.

#gorockford #rockfordrising #rockfordexplorer