

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Stroll on State 2016 Breaks Records with 75,000 in Attendance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 8, 2016

ROCKFORD, IL – Rockford’s Merry & Bright holiday season kicked off with another record-breaking year as crowds gathered together on November 26 for Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau produces the annual event, now in its fourth year.

Each year the event has grown in both size and scope, with this year’s event attendance estimated at **75,000 visitors**. Aerial photography, feedback from crowd spotters, shuttle bus ridership and sales/participation numbers for local businesses and attractions throughout the duration of the event help determine the number.

“As we wrap up another record-breaking Stroll on State, our team at RACVB is incredibly inspired by this community and the hard work that so many put in to create this awe-inspiring night. The common theme I’ve been hearing is that Stroll instills a great sense of *love* for and *pride* in our community as well as optimism for the future,” said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO. “Stroll is more than just an event - it’s a feeling, it’s a memorable moment, it’s a tradition that our community shares together.”

The event spans more than 15 blocks in downtown Rockford, showcasing locally owned retail shops and eateries. It also features an abundance of family-friendly activities highlighted by Randy Finch and the Ice Brigades’ interactive ice sculpting performances, visits with Santa, horse and wagon rides, ice skating, drinking hot chocolate and watching the magical tree lighting of the City of Rockford Christmas Tree.

Stroll on State by the Numbers (complete list attached):

- 10,000 people rode on the horse-drawn wagon rides (an 11 percent increase over last year).
- 7,000 guests utilized park and ride shuttles to/from the event (a 40 percent increase over last year).
- 3,500 children visited Santa Claus (a 16 percent increase over last year) and 500 letters were written to him noting their wishes for Christmas.
- 103 performers entertained throughout the night on the Merry & Bright stage.
- 30,000 lights adorn Rockford’s Christmas tree.
- 1,260 ice skaters experienced the indoor ice skating rink at the Rockford Park District’s Riverview Ice House (a 20 percent increase over last year).
- 5,000 cups of hot chocolate were enjoyed at the Hot Chocolate Express station and 2,350 S’Mores were eaten (an 80 percent increase over last year).

—MORE—

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



STROLL/Page 2 of 4

- 1,400 guests attended The Studio's performance of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at The Nordlof Center.

What downtown businesses say about Stroll:

- "Magic was in the air as the Christmas spirit spread all over Downtown Rockford. Stroll was a huge success, leaving Rockfordians excited to enjoy all of the other awesome shops our city has to offer," said Jennifer Lancaster, owner of Bath and Body Fusion. "This event is the perfect advertisement for small local businesses downtown, giving us new customers throughout the entire year that wouldn't have known about us if it wasn't for Stroll on State."
- "It's incredible to see the crowds of people supporting local businesses during Stroll on State each year. We've participated since year one and have learned how to make the shopping experience that much greater at our bakery," said Pauline Happach, owner of Bella Luna Bakery. "With a more streamlined approach our sales were up 60% during the event this year. It's amazing to get to do what you love and see the crowds of people really embrace it too."

In a post-event survey, Stroll on State and downtown Rockford have collectively received favorable feedback. An astounding **98 percent** of people said they had a **positive experience** at the event.

When asked what they **liked most about Stroll** some respondents said:

- "I love that it gets so many people downtown. Downtown Rockford is great and getting even better."
- "It was well organized and there were plenty of fun things to do for all ages."
- "Spending time with my family and feeling strongly connected to my community."
- "A great event for families and to showcase the downtown."

A few other key takeaways from the survey include:

- 68 percent of shoppers **spent more than \$25** (an 8 percent increase over last year.)
- 77 percent of people said that Stroll on State **positively changed their perception** of downtown Rockford, specifically noting that downtown Rockford feels **cleaner and safer than expected**.
- 90 percent said they are more likely to come back downtown after experiencing Stroll on State.
- **74 percent** of people that said they experienced Stroll for more than 2 hours.

All festivalgoers are encouraged to participate in the Stroll on State survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Stroll2016> by December 9th.

-MORE-

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



STROLL/Page 3 of 4

"Stroll on State was a magical experience for Rockford in so many ways. The sights and sounds of Christmas brought laughter, warmth and hope to our city. But what makes Stroll truly magical is the overwhelming generosity of volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to create this memorable experience, said Josh Peigh, lead pastor of Heartland Community Church. "Months of creative dreaming, preparation and execution mobilize thousands of volunteers who bring our city to life for the Christmas season. The big hearts, warm smiles and selfless spirit of Stroll volunteers remind us that anything is possible when we link arms and work toward a common vision, together. It is the passion and commitment of our volunteers that make Stroll on State such an incredible success - now four years in a row!"

Sponsors & Partners: The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is grateful for the support and contributions of so many partners, as well as hundreds of volunteers, that help to bring Stroll to the community.

"Stroll on State has quickly become one of the most festive holiday traditions in Rockford that brings together our entire community," says SwedishAmerican President & CEO Dr. Bill Gorski. "At SwedishAmerican, we care for our community and this is just one more way we can showcase how proud we are to support our city and our downtown."

Presenting Sponsor:

- Illinois Bank & Trust

Attraction Sponsors:

- OSF HealthCare – Sponsor of Randy Finch & The Ice Brigades and Fire & Ice
- SwedishAmerican, a division of UW Health – Sponsor of the Official Rockford Christmas Tree Lighting and Merry & Bright Stage
- Butitta Brothers Automotive – Sponsor of the Hot Chocolate Express & S'Mores
- Allstate Insurance – Sponsor of the Horse and Wagon Rides
- Mercyhealth – Sponsor of the Holiday Markets
- LaMonica Beverages – Official Beverage Sponsor
- Williams-Manny Insurance Group – Sponsor of Sky Lights Fireworks Show
- Comcast – Sponsor of Movieland
- ComEd – Sponsor of the Special Moments Photo Booth
- River District Association – Sponsor of the Christmas tree at Memorial Hall
- Landstar Systems, Inc. – Sponsor of the Christmas tree at Eddie Green Park

-MORE-

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



STROLL/Page 4 of 4

Partners:

- City of Rockford
- Rockford Park District
- Rockford Sharefest
- Heartland Community Church
- Rockford First
- Rock River Development Partnership
- Rockford Mass Transit District

Media Sponsors:

- Mid-West Family Broadcasting
- Northwest Quarterly
- Rockford Register Star
- The Rock River Times
- Rock Valley Publishing
- Townsquare Media
- WIFR
- WREX
- WTVO/WQRF
- El Sol de Rockford

View the full list of sponsors and partners on the website www.strollonstate.com.

The Merry & Bright season continues in Rockford through the end of January with many more community events and programs. Check out www.gorockford.com/merryandbright for recommendations and information.

RACVB exists to drive quality of life and economic growth for the citizens of Rockford and Winnebago County through tourism marketing and destination development. www.gorockford.com

###

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Andrea Mandala: RACVB Marketing & Communications Manager:
815.489.1664, amandala@gorockford.com