

VOICE -- RACVB

A tradition the community shares together

By John Groh, President/CEO

Sometimes it is hard to believe that Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, is just four years old. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's signature event has quickly become a community favorite and we are grateful for all the support and accolades it has received.

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. 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.

Each year the event has grown in both size and scope, with this year's event attendance estimated at **75,000 visitors**. Have you ever wondered how we come up with this number? You're not alone ... we are asked this question quite often. We take aerial photography, gather feedback from crowd spotters, count shuttle bus ridership and analyze sales/participation numbers for local businesses and attractions and then we crunch all those numbers (and others) to come up with our estimate.

Here are just a few of those numbers from Stroll on State 2016:

- 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 and 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.
- 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).
- 1,400 guests attended The Studio's performance of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at The Nordlof Center.
- And, just for fun, 30,000 lights adorn Rockford's Christmas tree.

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 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. And, judging by the feedback we have received so far, all of this went off splendidly.

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.

In the end, we at the RACVB are always impressed and encouraged by the community’s love for Stroll on State. Thank you again to everyone for embracing the awe and wonder of the event that is truly by the community and for the community. See you all on Saturday, November 25, 2017.