

Stroll to Celebrate 5 years of Awe and Wonder

By John Groh

Awe & Wonder. Sights & Sounds. Memories & Experiences.

This is Stroll on State.

For the past 4 years, Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, has been a signature event not only for the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and its partners who help to make it happen, but also a signature event for our community.

Each year at Stroll we all can come together as a city – one collective family – and celebrate all we have accomplished and all we will accomplish. As I reflect on the past four years, and look forward to celebrating Stroll's 5th anniversary, I can't help but to be excited with anticipation.

Thinking about what it takes to make this event so great – hundreds of individuals putting in thousands of volunteer hours, cooperation from dozens of businesses and organizations and tens of thousands of happy stroll-goers – I am immensely encouraged about where we are and where we are going as a community.

A few years ago, I wrote: "Stoll on State is about making memories, starting new traditions and coming together as a city, as a family ... Lately, as a community, we have been envisioning Rockford as a transformed, top 25 city. Seeing downtown transformed into a winter wonderland, with thousands of people celebrating together, we can begin to see a city transformed."

I wrote that in 2014, after our Stroll on State crowds had increased to 60,000 visitors. This year, we anticipate having more than 75,000 guests. That outpouring of support is even more amazing as I look back to the year before Stroll on State. Flashback to November 2012 and one lone, small Christmas tree was put up near what is now the Rockford City Market Pavilion. A small band of Rockfordians, maybe a few dozen, helped to celebrate the season and an evening of shopping in the downtown.

While the turnout for a simple night of shopping was modest, it did provide a spark for something more. Collectively we shared a vision of what could be if we were able to harness the right talent and the right support behind the right plan.

And so, in the fall of 2013, a few folks crafted a plan together with our partners at Heartland Community Church and Rockford Sharefest we jumped in feet first. Then, as now, we were committed to a cause of helping to transform our community through celebration and with that simple and noble cause, we launched Stroll on State. Some 30,000 people came together that night.

Over the course of the last four years, Stroll has grown and evolved and will continue to do so this year as we add the Dasher Dash 5K race and expand Stroll on State's Holiday Parade, among other exciting additions and changes.

We hope Stroll continues to be a catalyst for community advancement; inspiring others to find ways to move the community forward while enjoying time spent with family and friends.

This year, Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, will take place on Saturday, November 25 from 2-9 p.m. in downtown Rockford. Stroll's Dasher Dash 5K steps off at 8 a.m. Learn more at www.strollonstate.com.