

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Quarterly Report

FY18, Q1
July – September 2017



**News &
Notes**

Marketing

Sports

Bookings

Meetings

The mission of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.



- David Anderson (Chairman), Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Bill LaFever (Vice Chairman), Bill Doran & Co.
- Tim Meyers (Treasurer/Secretary), WIFR-TV
- Chad Anderson, Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram
- Marcus Bacon, Radisson Hotel & Conference Center
- Nathan Bryant, Rockford Area Economic Development Council
- Robert Burden, City of Loves Park
- Todd Cagnoni, City of Rockford
- Patrick Curran, Curran's Orchard
- Bryan Davis, SupplyCore
- Patricia Diduch, Village of Rockton
- Einar Forsman, Rockford Chamber of Commerce
- Kevin Frost, City of Rockford
- Jennifer Furst, FurstStaffing
- Amanda Hamaker, Winnebago County
- Ben Holmstrom, William Charles Construction
- Roberta Holzwarth, HolmstromKennedy PC
- Marco Lenis, Vocational Rehabilitation Management
- Ted Rehl, City of South Beloit
- Jay Sandine, Rockford Park District

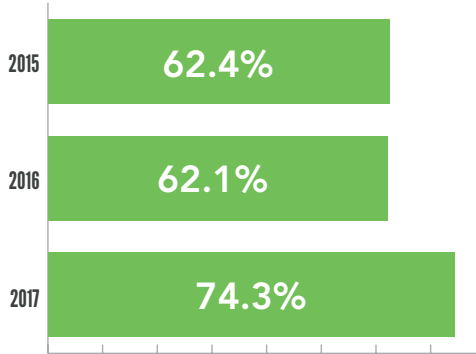


- John Groh, President/CEO
- Josh Albrecht, Director of Marketing & Public Affairs
- Lindsay Arellano, Director of Sales & Service
- Jenny Caiozzo, Destination Development Manager
- Andrea Cook, Marketing & Communications Manager
- Heidi Gee, Office Coordinator/Receptionist
- Jennie Hahn, Group Services Specialist
- Fred Harris, Brochure Distribution Assistant
- Mary Holmes, Group Services Manager
- Janet Jacobs, Marketing Assistant
- Lindsey Kromm, Accounting Assistant
- Bea Miller, Destination Development Assistant
- Elizabeth Miller, Creative Services Manager
- Joanne Nold, Director of Finance & Administration
- Kristen Paul, Executive Assistant
- Nick Povalitis, Sports Destination & Sales Manager
- Tana Vettore, Director of Destination Development

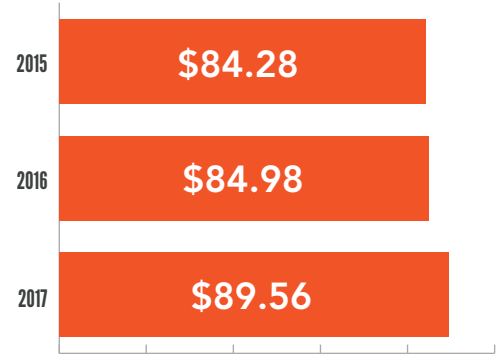
Winnebago County Hotel Statistics

(January – September 2017)

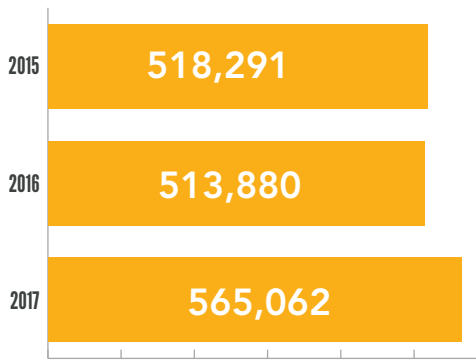
YTD Hotel Occupancy



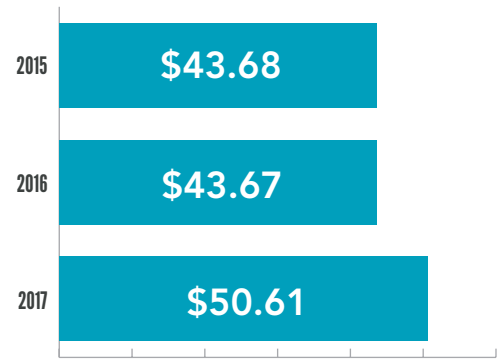
YTD Average Room Rate



YTD Hotel Room Demand (rooms sold)



YTD Revenue (in millions)



Sister City Reports

BORGHOLM, SWEDEN — Swanson Tours brought a group of Swedish travelers to Rockford on September 23, and Scandarama brought a group on September 28. Both tour groups followed a variety of paths that immigrants took when they first settled in the United States.

Midwest Living is doing an article featuring several locations including the Swedish Historical Society on the importance of maintaining historic homes and their history.

LIDKÖPING, SWEDEN — There is a new mayor in Lidköping for the first time in 23 years. The new mayor has already had a Skype conversation with Rockford's Mayor McNamara.



FERENTINO, ITALY — Eleven students from Boylan High School and three teachers returned at the end of July from a two week visit to Ferentino and the surrounding area. The Boylan students were welcomed into the homes of the Italian students who visited Rockford last August.

CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA — A Romanian publication featured the Romanian dancers' visit to Rockford and included photos of Rockford's Mayor McNamara. The dancers visited Rockford in June of this year.



News & Notes

Visitor Spending Reaches All-time High in Rockford and Winnebago County

During 2016, visitor spending in Rockford and Winnebago County reached an all-time high of **\$353 million**, directly creating/sustaining **2,888 jobs** with **\$85.51 million in payroll**.

An analysis of visitor spending since the Great Recession shows that tourism in Winnebago County is growing faster than in other major counties in Illinois. **Spending in Winnebago County grew 39% since 2009. This growth was second in the State of Illinois only to growth in Chicago/Cook County.**

In 2016, local tax receipts generated by visitors – funds that help local governments pay for services residents rely on – were \$6.23 million and state tax receipts were \$19.02 million. Compared to 2015, visitor spending was up 1 percent, employment grew by 2.4 percent and wages grew by 5.6 percent. Importantly, local tax receipts grew by 5.5 percent and state tax receipts grew by 3.2 percent according to numbers released by the Illinois Department of Commerce's Office of Tourism and US Travel Association.



In addition to overall visitor spending statistics, hotel sector-specific data demonstrate growth with all major hotel sector KPIs (key performance indicators) on the rise.

- ADR (average daily rate) reached \$81.27 in 2016, up from \$64.70 in 2009.
- RevPAR (revenue per available room) reached \$49.70 in 2016, up from \$32.64 in 2009.
- The occupancy rate reached 61.2% in 2016, up from 47.0% in 2009.
- Annual hotel rooms booked in Rockford (demand) grew to 651,000 in 2016 from 507,000 in 2009, a compound annual growth rate of 3.6%.

Statewide, domestic and international travel expenditures reached \$37.9 billion in 2016 – a \$571 million increase from 2015. This follows the state's record-breaking domestic Illinois tourism figures released in May, which highlighted an increase of one million travelers to the state in 2016.



Fast facts about Illinois Tourism in 2016:

- Every \$1 invested in Illinois tourism generates \$9 in economic impact
- Illinois welcomed 110 million domestic visitors (an additional one million visitors over 2015). Of Illinois' 110 million domestic visitors, 17% were for business and 83% for leisure. In the past 10 years, domestic travel to Illinois has increased by 19 million visitors
- Domestic travelers spent nearly \$35.1 billion in Illinois during 2016, a 1.8% increase over 2015. In 2016, domestic travelers to Illinois generated \$2.6 billion in state and local tax revenue, an increase of \$122 million over 2015
- Length of stay per visitor increased by 3%, surpassing the US average of 2.4%

Tough Mudder's Return

TOUGH MUDDER WEEKEND ran August 26-27 with participants attempting to conquer the grueling course of 20 obstacles in 10 miles. Events over the weekend included Tough Mudder's overnight event series, **America's Toughest Mudder**, which is an eight-hour competitive event series that kicked off at midnight on Sunday. **This weekend event brought more than 15,000 participants and spectators to the Rockford region** and accounted for more than \$4.8 million in economic impact. As part of the Toughest Mudder competition, CBS Sports was on-site filming the competition with the race scheduled to air on October 28, 2017.



PARTICIPANT STATS

- Over 95% of participants were visitors (non-residents) to Rockford, Illinois.
- 39% of participants traveled to the event from out of state, while roughly 2% traveled internationally to attend the event.
- Over 42% of participants had never traveled to Rockford prior to the Tough Mudder Chicago 2017 event.
- Over 92% of participants said they are likely to return to Rockford for a Tough Mudder event in 2018.
- Tough Mudder Chicago was the primary reason 95% of event guests traveled to Rockford over the event weekend.

News & Notes

Business is Blooming Recognizes Excellence

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) announced a new pilot program to further build on the Forest City Beautiful efforts aimed to beautify the Rockford region. **Business is Blooming** exists to build a culture of community involvement and visually appealing environments for our city. The program supports and acknowledges the positive values and efforts displayed by our business owners to make Rockford a beautiful and enjoyable place to live, work and play. Rewarding activity that strengthens civic pride is one of the vital links to long-term success in the Rockford region.

A team of judges visited the exterior grounds of selected businesses in the River District Association, Midtown District and Coronado Haskell Neighborhood Association to be considered for this designation. Out of 23 businesses, six were chosen in select categories: Small Business (1-10 employees) **The Loc Shop** and **Community Foundation of Northern Illinois**; Large Business (26+ employees)

HolmstromKennedyPC; Restaurant Outdoor Dining **Abreo** and **Prairie Street Brewing Company** (tied) and Special Recognition **Woodfire Brick Oven Pizza**.

This multi-year program aims to develop and maintain a partnership among RACVB, businesses, neighborhood advocacy groups, schools, non-profit organizations, volunteer groups, etc. to share in the vision and maintenance of this program. As a result, they will serve as exemplary models to inspire more people to do the same. The program will recognize and incentivize businesses, organizations and property owners to improve the landscaping and facades of their building and properties; promote the goal of year-round activity/maintenance such as proper snow removal at businesses for customer access as well as lush summer landscapes and weed-free, litter-free environments; and select and reward outstanding or innovative beautification achievements.



Long-term, the goal is for the program to expand city-wide. In the pilot year it is focused on the central city. The 2018 program is in a contest format, with judging in July. Business owners are encouraged to visit forestcitybeautiful.com/bloom to get more information about the program and to register to participate.

New Events at Stroll on State

Stroll on State presented by Illinois Bank & Trust will mark its 5th anniversary on Saturday, November 25, 2017. To mark the anniversary, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is launching two new traditions for friends and family to enjoy.

RACVB has partnered with Fleet Feet Rockford to start off the day of Stroll on State with a run called **Stroll on State's Dasher Dash 5K**. The Dasher Dash will begin at 8 a.m. on the morning of Stroll on State. Starting at the UW Health Sports Factory, the race moves through historic parts of downtown and southwest Rockford, including four bridge crossings, Haight Village and the Founders Landing District including the lovely grounds of Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum & Gardens. Once runners cross the finish line on Grove Street hot chocolate and Christmas cookies will be waiting.

Stroll on State will also feature a reimagined and expanded **Merry & Bright Holiday Parade** including impressive floats, festive music and costumed characters. The parade steps off at 3 p.m. This spectacular parade will be in addition to several other attractions, activities, holiday shopping experiences, the City of Rockford's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony and more.



Marketing

Promoting Rockford to Rockford

Rockford Day

The RACVB teamed up with local organization, Rockford Community Partners, to promote **Rockford Day** held annually on August 15. Rockford Day aims to showcase the people, places and things that make Rockford great with fun and interactive experiences throughout the city. This one-day event invites local businesses, agencies, non-profits, private and public sectors to join in the celebration by offering themed specials, discounts and events across the city and surrounding communities.

The RACVB partnered with the Rockford Community Partners to develop a Rockford Day page on the gorockford.com website and also helped to promote the event through social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



Paint the Town Rockford Calendar

The RACVB and our community partners unveiled the brand new **2018 Paint the Town calendar** during Rockford Day (8-15-17) at 8:15 a.m. This calendar includes watercolor portraits of local Rockford places, events and landmarks created by international artist, **Malika Moine** who traveled to the Rockford region all the way from Marseille, France this summer.

This community calendar was then produced by a local committee who included local monthly event listings and things to do. Ms. Moine was invited back to sign purchased copies during the launch celebration. The calendar retails for \$14.95 with 100% of the proceeds benefiting Forest City Beautiful, the RACVB's nonprofit entity created in 2014 to promote beautification and greening efforts throughout the city.

Advertising

Ads were placed with the following organizations and publications this quarter: **National Association of Sports Commissions** (digital retargeting ads), **Connect Sports** (full page print ad), **Sports Travel** (full page print ad) and **Premiere Travel** (half page ad and advertorial).

All print ads (magazine, online and newspaper) generated a total of 183,412 circulation, impressions and readership. **33 news releases** were sent out to our local media partners that helped generate content shared through regular weekly radio spots with Mid-west Family Broadcasting (WXRX, The Bull), radio spots with Townsquare Media (WROK, The Eagle) live mentions with local TV (WIFR, WREX, WQRF, WTOV) and through print publications Rockford Register Star and The Rock River Times.



Sports Travel full page ad



Premiere Travel Media half page ad

Website Statistics

Website Traffic Sources



Most Searched Terms

- Things to do
- Rock Cut State Park
- Rockford events

Most Searched Events

- Winnebago County Fair

Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens / Bruce Munro: LIGHT

Roscoe Lions Club Annual Fall Festival

Most Searched Attractions/Restaurants

- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Discovery Center Museum
- Burpee Museum of Natural History

Marketing

Media Partnerships & Earned Media

RACVB's marketing & communications manager recently started a new morning radio segment on **96.7 The Eagle** to talk with local radio host Double T about Rockford area places he's never been before. These local public service announcements are also promoted through social media and shared as podcasts on our local media's websites.

There were several earned media stories that the RACVB secured this quarter:

The Daily Herald Chicago featured Rockford's **Crossroads Blues Festival** that took place at Lyran Park on Saturday, August 26, in their weekly calendar of things to do.

The Rockford Register Star worked with the RACVB marketing team for their **"A Legacy of Their Own"** story that remembered 25 years of the "A League of Their Own" movie, to emphasize the impact this movie has had on tourism in the Rockford region and to honor the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in conjunction with the American Amateur Baseball Congress (AABC) "Baseball For All" tournament that took place at several local area sports facilities including

Beyer stadium, home to the original Rockford Peaches. (use photo)

Other media mentions include an article in **Midwest Sports Planner** that speaks to the value of sports tourism in our region, a **WNIJ radio** interview highlighted the value of sports tournaments and their impact on local hotel bookings, **USA Today** featured international artist Bruce Munro's LIGHT exhibit in their top list of fall exhibits to visit in the Midwest and the **Wall Street Journal** highlighted a new policing program implemented in Rockford area neighborhoods.



Rockford's Crossroads Blues Festival happens Saturday, Aug. 26. - Courtesy of Crossroads Blues Festival

Down to the crossroads

Get to Rockford's Lyran Park on the Kishwaukee River to enjoy the eighth annual Crossroads Blues Festival where you can hear The Kinsey Report, The Jimmys, Ivy Ford Band and many more. This year's fest also features 30 different beers plus various wines for sipping during the concerts. 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 26, at Lyran Park, 4781 S. Bend Road, Rockford. Advance tickets cost \$5; \$10 at the gate; camping is \$20. (779) 537-4006 or crossroadsbluesfestival.com/.

The Daily Herald online article



"A Legacy of Their Own" Rockford Register Star online article

Social Media



Facebook
23,992 followers
(224 increase)



Instagram
8,019 followers
(96 increase)



YouTube
360,426 video views
(5,145 increase)



Twitter
6,250 followers
(66 increase)

Earned Media

(July - Sept., 2017)

RACVB uses **Meltwater**, a public relations management software, to track and report the effectiveness of media mentions and their ad value through various outlets; e.g., television, online, print, radio and social media.



87,969,961

Total impressions

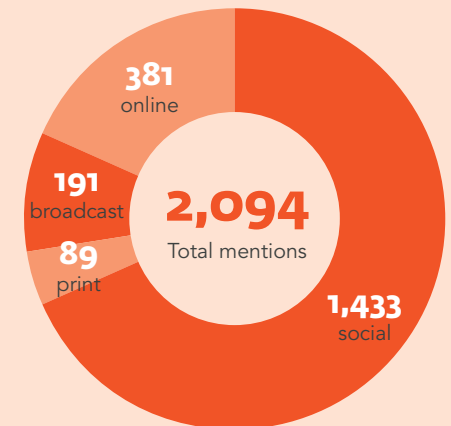


\$813,722

Average ad value

Share of Voice

Total mentions by outlet type



Top Sources

The top online sources were Business Insider, Chicago Tribune, RRStar.com and the Northwest Quarterly. The top broadcast sources were WTVO (ABC), WREX (NBC), WQRF (Fox), WTAE-PIT (ABC) and KDKA-PIT (CBS).

Sports & International Sales

Sports Sales Highlights

July Highlights

RACVB opened FY18 in the midst of a record summer of outdoor events. On July 8-9, the region welcomed for the first time Corrigan Sports Enterprises to run the **2017 JUNK Brands IWLCA Midwest Cup**—an elite high school girls lacrosse showcase that drew the most teams ever (94) for a lacrosse tournament in the Forest City. The sales team's activities continued that next weekend with a sales trip to Chicago for a visit with **Game Day USA**. The team wrapped up July with the fifth annual **Rock River Off-Season Competition (R2OC)**



at Rock Valley College's PE Center. The volunteer grass-roots robotics event drew a record 36 teams from the Midwest, and R2OC, a certified 501(c)(3), also integrated a strong local give-back campaign through a book drive, scholarship application program, and grant funding available for area youth.

August Highlights

GoRockford continued its progressive approach August 3 with a sales trip to Evanston to meet with the Northwestern University athletics department regarding a variety of event partnership opportunities. A week later, the RACVB welcomed the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) back to Rockford for another site visit as part of the **2018-22 IHSA Boys and Girls Lacrosse State Finals** bid process. Two new bookings highlighted the month's sales accomplishments, including the **2018 JUNK Brands IWLCA Midwest Cup** (3,075 room nights) and the **2018 Illinois State Basketball**

Championship (1,025 room nights). GoRockford helped solidify a stellar month by attending the **2017 Connect Sports Marketplace** from August 21-24 in New Orleans, LA, where the sales team met with more than 40 event owners.



International Efforts

RACVB continues to market the Rockford region internationally in Germany and the UK. The Bruce Munro: LIGHT exhibit was featured in a **TravelMole** article online in the UK and received 2,072 hits in one month. In Germany, several media outlets covered the Bruce Munro: LIGHT exhibit as well as the story about Rockford's Coronado Theatre celebrating its 90th Anniversary. Two of those media outlets were **Ruhr Nachrichten**, a newspaper published in Germany, and the travel blog **Globusliebe.com**. Overall, there was a total of 42 placements and a total readership of 876,342.

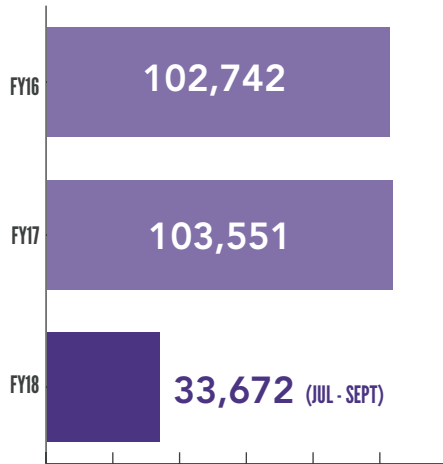


September Highlights

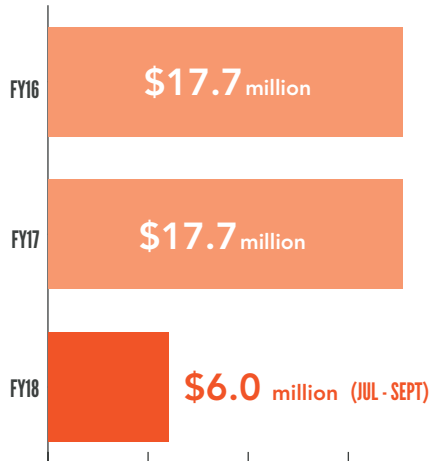
As a direct result from a meeting at that tradeshow in New Orleans, RACVB brought noted basketball tournament operator **Junior Sports Association (JSA)** to Rockford on September 8 for a site visit at the UW Health Sports Factory. After the visit, GoRockford submitted its official proposal for consideration to host a JSA NCAA certified event in future years. The team continued to capitalize on its proximity to Chicago with another sales trip to visit marketing partners Sports Planning Guide. GoRockford then attended its second trade show—**2017 S.P.O.R.T.S. The Relationship Conference**—from September 11-13 in Cedar Rapids, IA, before wrapping up the month by landing another major basketball event. After having met the North Tartan Girls Basketball (MN) club director at the 2013 AAU Convention, the RACVB sales process came full circle when it booked the **2018 NIKE TOC Midwest Hoopfest** (3,100 room nights) to close out the quarter.

Meetings, Servicing & Bookings

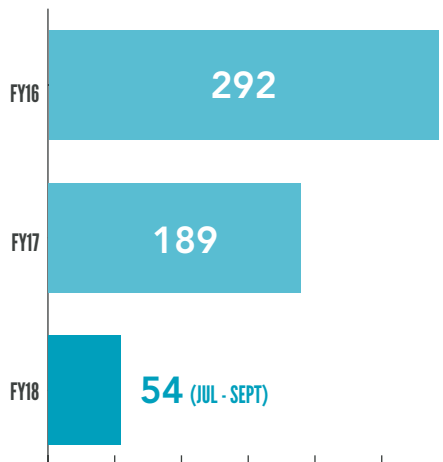
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



Estimated Economic Impact



Number of Event Bookings



Meetings Market Updates

The **Jehovah's Witnesses Convention** was hosted three weekends (July 27-30, August 3-6, and August 10-13, 2017) at the BMO Harris Bank Center and the economic impact on the Rockford Region and feedback from local businesses were positive. In addition to the tax generation to the city, over the course of the three convention weekends a total of 4,265 room nights were reported from 16 different hotels. This created \$558,715 in estimated economic impact for the region. Conference guests patronized nearby restaurants and shops further extending the economic benefit to our region. Beyond the economic impact, there were other benefits to be considered. The Jehovah's Witnesses group takes ownership of every event detail up to and including the cleaning of city-owned and ABM-managed parking lots and decks, the interior and exterior cleaning of the BMO Harris Bank Center, and cleaning of the high traffic areas to and from public parking areas and arena. Their hard work reflects positively on Rockford.

The **National Trappers Association** hosted their 58th

National Convention at the Winnebago County Fairgrounds July 27-29, 2017. The RACVB worked with the trappers for approximately one year prior to their convention planning hotel room nights, receptions, marketing materials and other details of their convention. The Convention brought in over 1,000 hotel room nights at 6 different hotels. The convention brought in an estimated \$224,665 in estimated economic impact.



Jehovah's Witnesses Convention



National Trappers Association National Convention

Booking Highlights for the Region

Italian Folk Art Federation of America
November 10 - 12, 2017 | 120 room nights
\$15,720 EEI

Lincoln Academy of Illinois
May 4 - 6, 2018 | 220 room nights
\$26,200 EEI

State Basketball Championships
March 3 - 4, 2018 | 1,025 room nights
\$184,500 EEI

Corrigan Sports 2018 Junk Brands IWLCA Midwest Cup (Lacrosse)
July 13 - 16, 2018 | 3,000 room nights
\$553,500 EEI

Total Q1 Booked Highlights EEI = \$779,920