

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Fifth Annual Stroll on State Draws Record Crowd with 82,500 in Attendance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 13, 2017

ROCKFORD, IL – A record number of local residents and visitors gathered in downtown Rockford to celebrate Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, on November 25. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau produces the annual event with the support, services and donations of many community partners, volunteers and sponsors.

Event organizers are pleased to announce that the merry and bright activities Stroll on State is known for, together with several new enhancements attracted an estimated **82,500 visitors** to downtown Rockford for the one-day event, a 10 percent increase over 2017.

Key elements that contributed to the success of the event were the new Dasher Dash 5K run/walk, extended hours, a reimagined parade that kicked off the event, the addition of new stages for live entertainment, additional fire and ice displays and the warmest Stroll temperatures on record. Organizers evaluate aerial photography, feedback from crowd spotters, shuttle bus ridership, occupied parking stalls, sales/participation numbers for local businesses and participation counts at event attractions throughout the duration of the event to help determine the estimate.

“Stroll on State truly resonates in the hearts of many and has become a tradition that puts a big, bright spotlight on downtown Rockford. With five years in our rear view we see more clearly than ever before that events like this make a big difference and form perceptions of our community that are both positive and lasting,” said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO. “Stroll on State may be a one-day event, but it is a catalyst for a revitalized downtown, has improved our economy with an influx of people supporting local businesses and provides a memorable experience thousands can look back on with joy for years to come.”

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 the Stroll on State parade, visits with Santa, horse and wagon rides, several live performances and entertainment, 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):

- 7,278 guests utilized park and ride shuttles to/from the event (a 4 percent increase over last year).
- 4,200 children visited Santa Claus (a 20 percent increase over last year).
- 3,242 s'mores were eaten (a 38 percent increase over last year).
- 1,889 people volunteered for Stroll on State (a 51 percent increase from last year).

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- 954 people ran or walked in the first annual Dasher Dash 5K.
- 794 letters written to Santa noting their wishes for Christmas (a 58 percent increase over last year).
- 137 rehearsal hours took place for The Studio's performance of James & The Giant Peach
- 38 characters, 13 floats, 11 drummers drumming and 2 large-scale inflatable balloons adorned the Stroll on State Parade

What Rockford region businesses say about Stroll:

- "Year in and year out the Saturday after Thanksgiving has been the largest grossing sales day of our fiscal year by far. The 2017 Stroll on State met and exceeded our expectations yet again," said Ben Chauvin, **Rockford Roasting Company** co-owner. "This year we saw our sales increase over 60 percent above last year and for five consecutive hours we did more sales than our single busiest hour last year. Furthermore, that "rush" included one hour with over 80 transactions! That accounts to four sales transactions every three minutes – a success by far!"

It should also be noted that 423 espresso drinks were sold (up 69 percent from last year,) more than 150 drip coffees were served (up 51 percent over last year) and over 60 bags of coffee were sold (up 48 percent from last year.)

- "**Lucha Cantina** had a great experience at Stroll on State as one of the food vendors. We saw our sales double over the previous year and we can't wait to come back next year," said Josh Binning, Lucha Cantina owner. "As Stroll on State is such a huge event, we had to bring extra staff to help run our booth. We partnered with the dance team from Jefferson High School and by helping us during Stroll they were able to raise over \$700 dollars towards their dance uniforms."
- "Stroll on State is awesome for **Minglewood**, not only for the record-breaking sales, but also for the opportunity for so many new people to discover my boutique for the first time. It's their return visits throughout the year that keep me in business," said Karen Elyea, Minglewood shop owner.

In a post-event survey, Stroll on State and downtown Rockford have collectively received favorable feedback. An overwhelming **95 percent** of people said they had a **positive (excellent/46%, very good/34% or good/15%) experience** at the event.

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

- "I saw people singing along to the songs at the tree lighting ceremony. Citizens were in the spirit and proud to be a part of the event in downtown."
- "This year was the first time I went, and I thought it was great and I enjoyed it very much. I will go every year. Thank you, Rockford!"

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- “We enjoyed everything, we never have missed one year!”
- “My family looks forward to this event each year and it seems to get better and better as the years go!”
- “The day after, when I’m scrolling through Facebook and almost every post is something positive about Rockford. That’s when you know you’ve started to transform your city.”

A few other key takeaways from the survey include:

- **75 percent** of shoppers **spent more than \$25** (more than a 10 percent increase over last year.)
- **95 percent** said they are more likely to come back downtown after experiencing Stroll on State (a 5 percent increase over last year.)
- **56 percent** of people said that Stroll on State positively changed their perception of downtown Rockford, also noting that they felt there were **more places to shop**, downtown was **cleaner and safer** than they perceived.
- **46 percent** of people said that Stroll on State has now **become a holiday tradition** for them.
- Respondents that were asked if they would recommend Stroll on State to a friend or colleague generated a **68 Net Promoter Score (NPS)**. The NPS is used to **gauge overall satisfaction** with the event. Stroll on State’s NPS is 70 percent higher than the Global NPS benchmark.

“Partnering with the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, and countless others, gives Illinois Bank & Trust a chance to give back to the Rockford community in such a meaningful way. Stroll on State exceeds expectations each year by bringing the magic of the holidays to life in our downtown,” said Jeff Hultman, Illinois Bank & Trust president/CEO. “It is truly an incredible event supported by the community and that’s why we remain fully invested. It’s hard to ever remember a time when we didn’t have Stroll on State to look forward to, and speaking of looking forward, we can’t wait to see what’s in store for next year.”

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.

“On behalf of the men and women of the Northwestern Illinois Building Trades, NECA and IBEW Local 364, I would like to say how wonderful it has been to sponsor the Stroll on State parade this year. We are elated that our investment to this reimagined parade truly made a difference by bringing in new features like large-scale balloons, floats and more,” said Alan Golden, National Electrical Contractors Association and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 364 business manager/financial secretary. “It has been a great honor to have an opportunity to serve our community in such a fun and festive way.”

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Presenting Sponsor:

- Illinois Bank & Trust

Premier Sponsors:

- ComEd, sponsor of Rockford's River Lights
- National Electrical Contractors Association and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 364, sponsor of the Merry & Bright Holiday Parade

Supporting Sponsors:

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- Project First Rate
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- Landstar System, Inc.
- River District Association
- International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 150

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- City First Church
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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. Stroll on State merchandise, sold during the event, is now available for purchase online by visiting the Rockford Store www.gorockford.com/about/rockford-store/ or at the RACVB office (102 N. Main St.). Items are available while supplies last.

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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

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