

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Quarterly Report

FY18, Q2

October – December 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
- 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

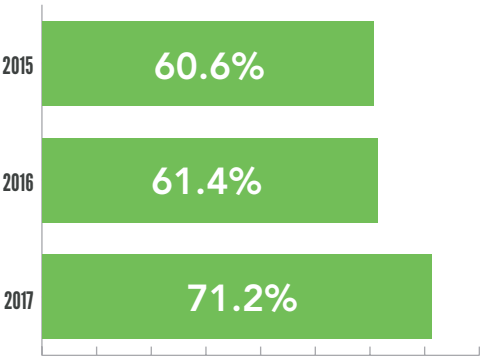


- John Groh**, President/CEO
- Lindsay Arellano**, Director of Sales & Service
- Jenny Caiozzo**, Destination Development Manager
- Andrea Cook**, Marketing & Communications Manager
- Mary French**, Group Services Manager
- Heidi Gee**, Office Coordinator/Receptionist
- Jennie Hahn**, Group Services Specialist
- Fred Harris**, Brochure Distribution Assistant
- 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**, Director of Sports Development
- Tana Vettore**, Director of Destination Development

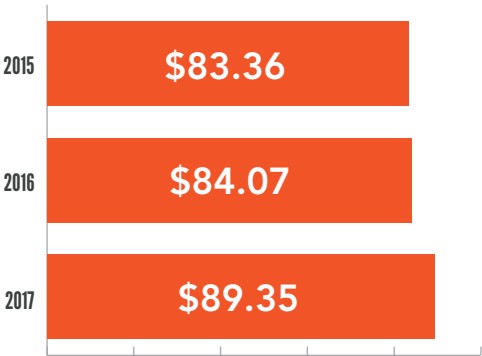
Winnebago County Hotel Statistics

(January – December 2017)

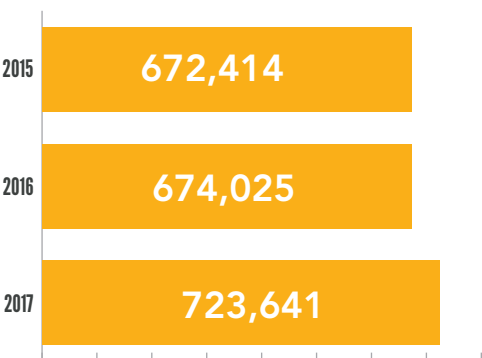
YTD Hotel Occupancy



YTD Average Room Rate



YTD Hotel Room Demand (rooms sold)



YTD Revenue (in millions)



Sister City Reports

BORGHOLM, SWEDEN — A playground in the memory of John Nelson is currently in progress in Borgholm. The plans have grown beyond originally thought and are getting significant media attention in Sweden. The location of the playground has moved to the city square and will have a nautical theme.

LIDKÖPING, SWEDEN — Rockford is regularly in the Swedish media highlighting many positive events and activities. The University of Illinois College of Medicine in Rockford has also secured 10 nursing students from Sweden for next semester.



FERENTINO, ITALY — Sister Cities representative Dina Getty took a 12 day trip to Ferentino in September to meet with their Chamber of Commerce and stay with the students who visited Rockford. A fundraiser held on November 5 sold out with 200 tickets sold and 9 restaurants represented.

CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA — Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara has sent an invitation for students in Romania to visit Rockford. The students are waiting on travel visas but anticipate they will come as early as January. An event will be held for them at Emmanuel Episcopal Church when they arrive.



News & Notes

Fifth Annual Stroll on State Draws Record Crowd Downtown

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.



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.

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.)

“Stroll on State may be a one-day event, but it is a catalyst for a revitalized downtown.”



“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.”

- 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, and 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.

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.

News & Notes

Shop on State

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau partnered with the River District Association for **Shop on State**, the community's premiere holiday shopping event on **Saturday, December 9**. Shop on State is a hometown holiday event where people are encouraged to shop, sip and snack during the



Merry & Bright season in the Rockford region. This shopping experience invited guests to explore the unique local

establishments that the downtown Rockford region has to offer. Participating merchants provided sips and snacks to make the shopping more enjoyable and free gift wrapping was provided at select shops.

Guests attending the event also had the chance to win a one-of-a-kind gift basket (valued at \$500) filled with various items from several local shops. During the Merry & Bright season, participating businesses also donated 2% of purchases to the Rockford Register



Star's Empty

Stocking Club, which provides toys to children in need.



New Items Added to RACVB Store and Online Inventory



The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau recently rebranded **merchandise and gift items** sold at the bureau with a fresh new look and started offering these items on an online store. The purpose of the new items is to respond to the consumers' growing interest of choosing to support the Rockford community by owning their own Rockford-themed merchandise. This rebranded merchandise is a way to turn these influential and dedicated consumers into Rockford promoters.

In addition to offering a variety of branded Rockford products for purchase at the bureau, these products are also **available for purchase online**. Products are categorized by "Clothing," "Souvenirs," and "Food & Beverage." There is also a "Seasonal" category where items will be offered for a limited time only.

"We have offered Rockford-themed items like sock monkeys, postcards, shirts and other gift items for some time now, but recently made the decision to expand our product assortment,

which created a greater need to offer these products to the public in a more convenient way. We realized this trend when we started posting our products on the Go Rockford Facebook, Twitter and Instagram account pages," said Andrea Cook, RACVB marketing & communications manager. "Several people responded by asking how they could purchase the items we were sharing. Having an online store creates a convenient shopping experience for our Rockford residents and visitors and, in turn, more exposure for the souvenirs and gifts we have to offer."

The RACVB marketing department branded these products in-house, but the servicing team also partnered with local businesses and retailers throughout the Rockford region to create various other co-branded products to sell to consumers. Items can be purchased directly from the Go Rockford website (www.gorockford.com/store), by phone or by visiting the RACVB. Currently, RACVB is offering shipping within the United States only.

Marketing

Promoting Rockford to Rockford

RACVB contributed to two articles featured in **Northwest Quarterly** in their print publication and website highlighting fun things to do in the region. In November, the article was dedicated to Stroll on State, the RACVB's annual Christmas kick-off event. Also, in December Northwest Quarterly featured the RACVB's recommendations for fun local activities and events to take part in during the winter months.

RACVB suggested five Go Rockford adventures residents and visitors should take this season in the winter issue of **815 Magazine** put out by the Rockford Register Star. Folks were encouraged to check out Rockford's River Lights, the Coronado Performing Arts Center, Snow Park at Alpine Hills a local brewery hop tour and the Riverfront Museum Park. The story was shared through their website as well as sent directly at Rockford region residents who receive the newspaper to their homes. The story was also shared through social media. RACVB will continue to highlight local news, suggestions and topics related to tourism each quarter in the 815 Magazine.



815 Magazine

Ten news releases were sent to our local media partners to keep them informed of what RACVB is working on and involved in. Content from these releases as well as weekly event promotions helped generate content shared through regular weekly radio spots with Mid-west Family Broadcasting (WXRX, The Bull and B103) radio spots with Townsquare Media (WROK, The Eagle) live mentions with local TV (WIFR, WREX, WQRF, WTVO) and through print publications Rockford Register Star and The Rock River Times.

Advertising

Stroll on State was the main focus of advertising leading up to the event on November 25. Print ads were placed in El Sol, Journal & Topics, Northwest Quarterly, Rockford Register Star, Rock River Times and Valuchic. Online ads were also placed on the Rock River Times website. Each of these ads featured a large photo from Stroll on State as well as all of the Stroll on State sponsor logos. These ads combined created a total of **1,797,443 circulation/impressions/readership**. Three billboards promoting Stroll on State were also in various locations around the city. There was a print billboard at Jefferson & State Streets in downtown, and two digital billboards at Perryville Road across from Cherryvale Mall, and at the corner of Alpine Road and Broadway. These three billboards generated **603,583 impressions**.



Stroll on State digital billboard

Website Statistics

Website Traffic Sources



Most Searched Terms

Stroll on State
Rockford, IL
Things To Do

Most Searched Events*

4th Annual Christmas Walk
Holiday Festival of Lights
33rd Annual Rockton Christmas Walk

Most Searched Attractions/Restaurants

Discovery Center Museum
Anderson Japanese Gardens
Coronado Performing Arts Center

*Stroll on State was the highest searched event, but has its own microsite so it was not included in these searched events



Marketing

Media Partnerships & Earned Media

RACVB's marketing & communications manager recently started a new morning radio segment on **B103** with local radio hosts Judi Diamond and Rebecah Lamb about Rockford area places and things to do throughout the region. These local public service

announcements are also promoted through social media.

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

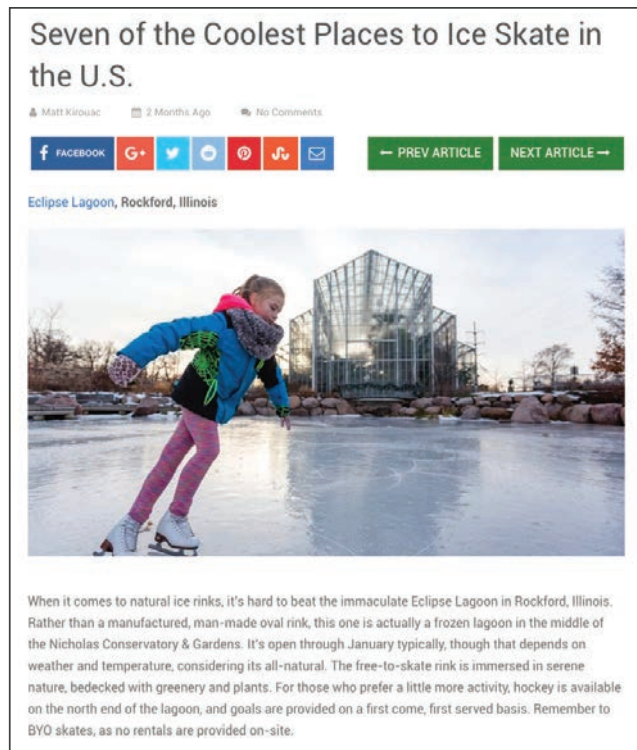
In December **Money Inc** featured Rockford's Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens' ice skating pond in their winter roundup touting, "Seven of the Coolest Places to Ice Skate in the U.S."

The **Chicago Tribune** partnered with the RACVB to feature two different events in their News to Use Travel Section that was circulated in both their print publication and website. In November they featured Stroll on State and in December they highlighted the Illinois Snow Sculpting Competition that took place at Sinnissippi Park

Other earned media mentions included stories and social media posts about Rockford region holiday events, Stroll on State and



Chicago Tribune online article



Money Inc online article

Earned Media (October - December, 2017)

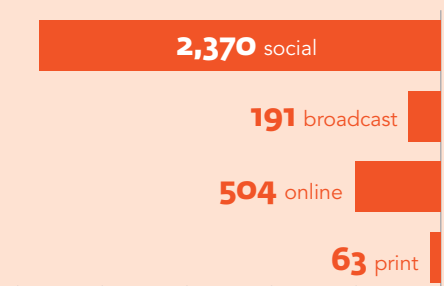
RACVB uses **Meltwater**, a public relations management software, to track and report the effectiveness of media mentions and their ad value through various outlets; e.g., television, online, print, radio and social media.


\$929,650
Average ad value


100,501,740
Total impressions


3,128
Total mentions

Media Mentions



Social Media



Facebook
24,448 followers
(456 increase)



Instagram
8,181 followers
(162 increase)



YouTube
367,877 video views
(7,451 increase)



Twitter
6,307 followers
(57 increase)

Sports & International Sales

Sports Sales Highlights

October Highlights

RACVB began the second quarter with a busy October, presenting bids for a **2018 AAU Sports Festival** and the **Baseball for All Nationals 2018**. By mid-month, GoRockford sports sales visited University of Wisconsin and Kollege Town Sports in Madison, WI, for development prospecting, as well as the Northern Illinois University athletics department for event partnership opportunities. As a follow-up to the community's bid, RACVB and the Rockford Park District welcomed Baseball for All officials back to the Forest City for a site visit at the end of October when the girls baseball organization announced it would return for a second year to Rockford with the Baseball for All Nationals 2018. Additionally, GoRockford booked **Junior Sports Association (JSA)** for the 2018 May Day Showcase at the UW Health Sports Factory—a booking that resulted directly from attending the 2017 Connect Sports Marketplace last

August in New Orleans, and the team expanded its partnership with JP Sportz baseball by adding two more Experience the Turf tournaments to the 2018 calendar.

November Highlights

In early November, RACVB sports sales presented the region's case to host a JVC Tournaments volleyball event at the UW Health Sports

Factory, targeting early 2019 for entry into the market. On Nov. 8-9, GoRockford traveled alongside Rock Valley College Athletics to scout the **2017 NJCAA Division III Women's Soccer Championship**. The sales trip was part of RACVB and RVC's event hosting responsibilities, as the duo teamed up two years prior to win the rights to host the **2018 NJCAA**



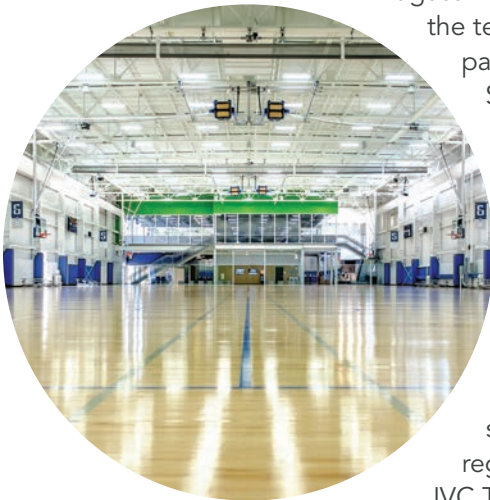
DIll Women's Soccer Championship

at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two.

Moreover, the Rockford Boys and Girls Club solidified the return to Mercyhealth Sportscore Two of the **2018 AABC World Series**, which is expected to bring in 64 youth baseball teams from afar to the Forest City for nearly two weeks in July. **Tough Mudder** and RACVB also extended their multi-year agreement through 2020 to wrap up the month.

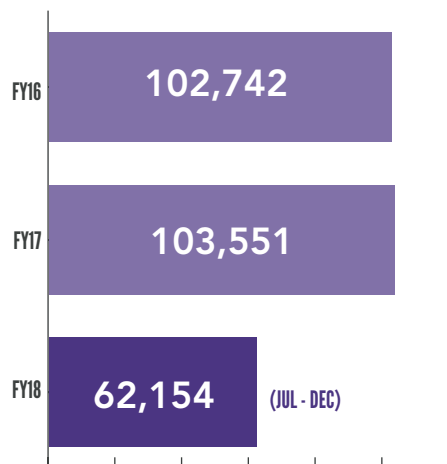
December Highlights

GoRockford sports wrapped up the 2017 calendar year by targeting for the first time the rights to host the **Sports Illinois Huddle**, a trade show that brings together destination marketing organizations and event owners and rights holders for professional networking and one-on-one appointment opportunities geared toward bringing overnight sports event business to communities throughout the state. Of RACVB's many event bookings in December, the sports sales team added another new event to the UW Health Sports Factory calendar with the **2018 Primetime Sports Basketball Qualifier** set for May.

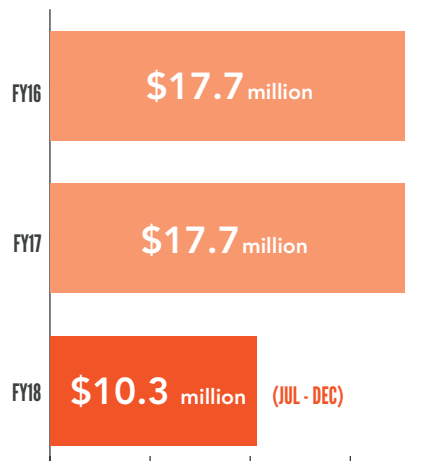


Meetings, Servicing & Bookings

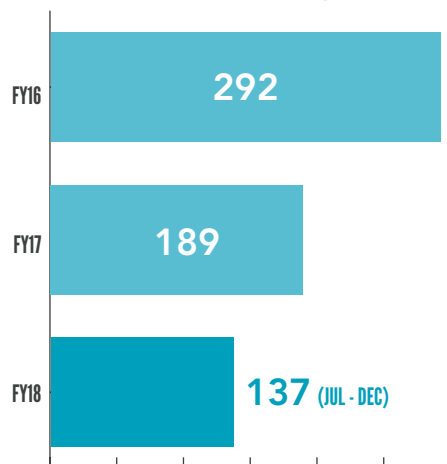
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



Estimated Economic Impact



Number of Event Bookings



Meetings Market Updates

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's sales team worked with the **Jehovah's Witnesses Convention** and booked their annual convention in Rockford again for 2018. The convention appreciates the support of the city of Rockford and will last three weekends in the summer of 2018 including July 26, August 2 and August 9. The convention will be held in downtown Rockford at the BMO Harris Bank Center.

During their stay, the attendees of the

Jehovah's Witnesses Convention will use 1,500 hotel room nights each weekend they are in Rockford. This translates to 4,500 room nights during their three weekend stay.

In 2017, the convention attendees patronized nearby restaurants and shops, extending their economic benefit to the region. In 2018, the convention is estimated to create \$589,500 in estimated economic impact for the Rockford region.



Jehovah's Witnesses Convention

Booking Highlights for the Region

Northern Illinois Antique Dealers

February 16 - 18, 2018 | 60 room nights
\$7,860 EEI

AAU Rockin' Rockford Grand Prix

March 9 - 11, 2018 | 900 room nights
\$162,000 EEI

2018 JSA May Day Basketball Showcase

May 4 - 6, 2018 | 700 room nights
\$126,000 EEI

Prime Time Sports

May 18 - 20, 2018 | 200 room nights
\$36,000 EEI

JP Sports - Experience the Turf Series

June 1 - 3, June 8 - 10, June 22 - 24 2018
1,425 room nights
\$256,500 EEI (over 3 weekends)

Baseball For All

July 18 - 20, 2018 | 600 room nights
\$108,000 EEI

Tough Mudder 2018

August 24 - 25, 2018 | 1,400 room nights
\$252,000 EEI

Total Q2 Booked Highlights EEI = \$948,360