

Vacation dreamers: If you plan it, you will go

By John Groh

Here at RACVB, we're serious about recreation and leisure – on and off the job. Our stock-in-trade, so to speak, is helping people enjoy the region's natural resources, historic attractions, entertainment, special events and sports venues.

We're just as mindful about how to make the most of our own leisure time. We hope to help you and your work colleagues do the same with a "Project Time Off: Plan for Vacation Day" campaign we've just launched in the community. It'll be fun, but it's serious business, too. Vacations are not only good for the individual's mind, body and spirit, they also benefit the company's bottom line.

Thanks to the prompting of National Plan for Vacation Day, which was Tuesday, Jan. 30, I've booked my vacation days for 2018 and have encouraged my co-workers here at RACVB to do the same. Now, when winter doldrums threaten, we can picture ourselves biking, boating, golfing or hiking at locales near and far, knowing that those daydreams will be fact, not fantasy. Anticipation is part of the fun.

Vacation shouldn't be an afterthought, yet, too often, it is. That vaunted American work ethic is alive and well. Did you know that 662 MILLION vacation days go unused annually in this country? In fact, more than half of Americans leave vacation days on the table at the end of the year. Those unused vacation days cost the U.S. economy \$236 billion in 2016 due to lost spending, enough to support 1.8 million American jobs.

It doesn't have to happen. Research shows that vacation planners are vacation takers. People who take their earned time off are happier, more productive employees who report better health, better work satisfaction and better social and family relationships.

Companies benefit, too. The vast majority of senior managers – 91 percent – believe people come back from vacation renewed and ready to work more effectively. Yet, lack of support and encouragement from management is the main reason workers say they don't take their paid time off. It's time to talk!

To get the conversation started, the RACVB has asked five interesting area residents to create one-day itineraries for different seasons featuring things they like to do in our community. They are Zak Rotello, Ben Chauvin, Zina Horton, Angel Martinez and James Purifoy. All have been featured in "Our City, Our Story" videos, an award-winning project of Rockford filmmaker Pablo Korona. These five people know and love the Rockford area. They have put together exciting all-day adventures that are worth replicating.

You can find their creative itineraries and watch their videos at gorockford.com.

In addition, we invite area residents to submit their own sample itineraries at info@gorockford.com. What's your best-day-ever scenario? With an entire day stretching before you, what would you do to make the most of it? Write it down and send it to us.

Your best-day itinerary could be featured in a GoRockford social media post, and you could win a Plan for Vacation Day prize package.

For the socially minded among us, we'll be using these hashtags/tags for the campaign: #PlanForVacation, @ProjectTimeOff and #GoRockford. It's a great way to share your own best-day plans with followers and get some new ideas, too.

Believe me, I'll be looking at the Plan for Vacation Day itineraries and trying them out during some of the vacation days that already are on my 2018 calendar.

For more information about the national Project Time Off: Plan for Vacation Day movement – and to access a handy planning tool – go to www.projecttimeoff.com. Planning out the entire year may require a meeting of your work group so that scheduling is fair to all and meets everyone's needs. You can do that.

It's time to get serious about fun.

The mission of the RACVB is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development. www.qorockford.com