

April 2018 Column for The Voice

## Videos reveal Rockford's soul, one story at a time

By John Groh

Who doesn't love a good story? Rockford is full of them, and thanks to local videographer Pablo Korona, these uniquely Rockford stories of character, challenge and triumph are being told and enjoyed by audiences here and across the internet.

In a weekly video series titled, "Our City, Our Story," Pablo focuses on interesting people who make Rockford a great place to live, work and play. You can view them on our website, [gorockford.com](http://gorockford.com), and on the project's home site, [ourcityourstory.com](http://ourcityourstory.com).

I have to warn you, though: The videos are binge-worthy, in fact. Nobody can watch just one.

The intention of this project is to honor the diversity and authenticity of our community. In addition, these professionally produced pieces often "go viral" on social media channels, which makes them a valuable marketing tool for the city. One video has produced almost 350,000 views.

The RACVB actively promotes these videos on national channels, and the results have been terrific. Subjects of OCOS videos have been featured by national media outlets, including USA Today, CNN Money, Entrepreneur Magazine, Business Insider and others. It's all positive press for Rockford.

In order to ensure the storytelling continues, RACVB and Woodward partnered last year to sponsor the current season of videos. We sat down recently with Pablo to talk about the success of OCOS.

### **Q: When did you launch OCOS?**

Pablo: "It was 2011. There was a lot of negativity going around about the community – we were on a lot of 'bad' lists. We felt that our story wasn't being told, and we wanted to change the conversation. We asked ourselves: What is a city? It is a collection of people. So, we launched Our City, Our Story."

### **Q: Besides the marketing goal, what's your goal for each piece?**

Pablo: "I want to make sure that there's a human revelation of character that has a little magic in it. I look for the unexpected perspective, stories that connect not only with the community, but with the world beyond Rockford. When we tell stories, we don't tell them through the Rockford perspective specifically; we tell them through the perspective of the greater human condition. The connecting theme, of course, is that they all happen to be in Rockford."

### **Q: What is the process for making one of the videos?**

Pablo: "We have an editorial team and nothing goes out without getting past the team. They help steer the project." (The team includes representatives from RACVB, Woodward, Community Foundation of Northern Illinois and Transform Rockford.)

"I spend 10-12 hours with the subject and about 25 hours on editing. Each video has original music created by a studio team."

### **Q: Why does it matter to tell these stories?**

Pablo: "Every single story is a reason to break through any negative perceptions about this community. Sure, we have challenges, but Vito Grisanzio is there cranking out pizzas at Capri despite all the negative things. The 'Band Grandpas' are going back into the schools to help kids despite all the negative things." (See "More than a Million" and "Band Grandpas" episodes in OCOS Season Two.)

### **Let's continue the storytelling**

The reach of this project is truly astounding. A charming story of love that has endured 79 years titled "Merle & Stella," which we pushed out on social media for Valentine's Day this year, is nearing 100,000 views on Facebook alone. "Band Grandpas" has been viewed more than 62,000 times and "More than a Million" is at 82,000 and counting.

I agree with Pablo when he says, "It's hard not to like somebody when you've heard their story."

We invite our partners in the community to join the RACVB and Woodward in sponsoring OCOS to continue promoting the best aspects of our city, one story at a time. If you're unable to sponsor, please consider sharing the video series on your corporate social media sites. We believe they are valuable as a reputation builder for our community and as a recruiting tool. Please contact me for more information.

*John Groh is president/CEO of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. The mission of the RACVB is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development. [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com)*

*The views expressed are Groh's and do not necessarily represent those of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce.*