

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Quarterly Report

FY18, Q4
April – June 2018

**News &
Notes**

Marketing

Sports

Meetings

Bookings

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.

Sports & International Sales

International Efforts

International efforts included four media fam tours from **Germany, the UK and Mexico**. To date **eight stories** have resulted. In addition, RACVB participated in a **New York Receptive Tour Operator** sales mission, training and meeting 41 operators and staff.



German media fam at Rockford Speedway

The Illinois Office of Tourism organized a sales mission to the UK and Ireland, meeting and training 139 tour operators, agents and media. Media highlights included **96 placements in print and online** in various German outlets featuring Craft beer breweries in Rockford and the Rock River Anything That Floats Race event, resulting in a total audience of 3,146,713 people.



UK sales mission

Sports Sales Highlights

RACVB's sports sales team opened April with another Ultimate booking—this time the **2018 USA Ultimate Lake Superior D-I College Men's CC**. Sales efforts shifted toward external marketing programs quickly, as the team trekked to Arizona alongside the Rockford Park District to formally submit the region's bid to host the **United States Quad Rugby Association National Championships** at the UW Health Sports Factory (UWHSF). RACVB then continued its travels at the 2018 **NASC Symposium** in Minneapolis from April 23-26, during which time the sports sales teams picked up **NASC Sports Tourism Organization of the Year** honors for the second time in three years. The team wrapped up the month by welcoming the **NFA7v7 Midwest Regionals** back to Mercyhealth Sportscore Two, where the third-year event drew an NFA7v7-record 56 teams.

RACVB kicked off May with another new booking by re-signing the **2019 Illinois State Basketball Championships**, an event that drew 100 teams in the inaugural 2018 event at UWHSF. USA Ultimate again returned to the Rockford region May 19-20 when the **2018 Division III College Championships**—which was first hosted in Rockford in 2015—ensured the third national ultimate championship in four years held in the Forest City. RACVB then transitioned to another organizational first when it hosted the **2018 Sports Illinois Huddle**. An annual sports trade show featuring Illinois-based CVBs and event owners of all kinds—from USSSA Illinois, to USA Ultimate, to the World Wake Association, and many more—the Sports Huddle, which represents a primary piece of RACVB's sales process, showcased the area's sports venues during interactive professional panels and keynotes, one-on-one event overview appointments, and evening receptions for attendees.



NASC Sports Tourism Organization of the Year award



2018 Sports Illinois Huddle at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two

RACVB's sales efforts continued in early June during a sales mission to Chicago that included meetings with USA Basketball, Game Day USA, Sports Planning Guide and Advantage Marketing, in addition to a digital and billboard **Ultimate Fighting Championships (UFC)** campaign centering on the June 9 UFC 225 event at the United Center in Chicago. By mid-month, RACVB and RPD's April trip to Arizona already paid off, resulting in the booking of the **2019-21 U.S. Quad Rugby National Championships**. RACVB's event operations support shifted to the **2018 AAU Girls Basketball Sixth Grade National Championships**, which were also held at the UW Health Sports Factory from June 24-29. AAU Girls Nationals Rockford marked the first time ever that AAU Basketball National Championships were ever hosted in Illinois, and also represented the first national tournament ever booked at the UW Health Sports Factory—an event win from an RACVB sales process that began in Fall 2013.

Marketing

Media Partnerships & Earned Media

There were several earned media stories and articles that the RACVB secured this quarter.

The top highlighted stories and media mentions included a **Fox Business** news story shining a national spotlight on the Embassy Suites Hotel and Rockford Conference Center revival and how this will rebuild our community in the years ahead.

Additional coverage included The **New York Times** that featured the Rockford region in June for reaching and sustaining "functional zero" for either veteran or chronic homelessness, **Chicago Tribune's Bicentennial Bucket List** that featured Rockford's Laurent House as one of the 20 Must-See Architectural Attractions in Illinois, The Rockford Peaches 75th Anniversary was highlighted in over **247 outlets with an audience of nearly 81 million** and specifically included in the **Chicago Tribune, NPR's All Things Considered, Smithsonian.com, Associated Press** and travel writer **TravelingMom.com** focused on fun things to do in the Rockford region throughout the summer months.



The New York Times



Chicago Tribune

AP Associated Press

Peaches see fruits of their past labor

Women feted in 'League of Their Own' made mark

By SHANNON RYAN
Chicago Tribune

Shirley Burkovich watched as women milled about a downtown Rockford theater in vintage dresses and hats and replica Rockford Peaches uniforms. "It's overwhelming," she said.

Burkovich played for the Peaches, a team in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which is celebrating its first season.

Former Cubs owner Philip K. Wrigley created

NUCCIO DINUZZO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Former All-American Girls Professional Baseball League player Maybelle Blair, 91, applies lipstick during a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the league's first season.

the league to keep baseball in the public eye when many major-league players served in World War II.

The Peaches played their first game on May 30, 1943, making it a landmark moment for women's athletics.

At the gala Wednesday night, former players signed autographs. Actor Megan Cavanagh, who played Marla Hooch in the 1992 movie "A League of Their Own," based on the Peaches, posed for photographs. Little girls bought Peaches T-shirts in the lobby.

The festivities, which run through Sunday, launched a \$7 million fundraising campaign to help build the International Women's Baseball Center and Museum in Rockford.

Burkovich, 85, played for

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Earned Media (April - June, 2018)

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.



\$604,223

Average ad value



65,321,418

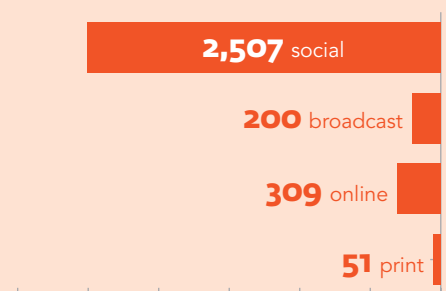
Total impressions



3,067

Total mentions

Media Mentions



Social Media



Facebook

24,960 followers
(113 increase)



Instagram

8,403 followers
(144 increase)



YouTube

377,013 video views
(5,292 increase)



Twitter

6,440 followers
(73 increase)

Meetings & Bookings

Meetings Market Updates

In June the RACVB hired **Phil Elsbree**, Senior Sales Manager, to join the already existing two-person sales team. Phil, an experienced hotel sales manager and prior employee of the RACVB will handle the meetings market as well as some identified sports. The RACVB will re-enter the meetings market by attending **Connect Meetings** in August and **Small Market Meetings Trade Show** in September of this year. The meetings market sent out 10 leads to area partners in efforts to find a location to host the different events which range from reunions to professional

associations to religious groups. We are looking forward to promoting and selling the renovated banquet/meeting space at Cliffbreakers Conference Center as well as the new Embassy Suites meeting space that will open in April of 2020. This quarter the RACVB worked to identify and officially book the **Jehovah's Witnesses Convention** weekends in July and August of 2019 and we are currently working with the City of Rockford on a downtown parking plan. The RACVB is excited to welcome the General Baptist State Convention Fall Board Meeting in October of 2018.



2017 Jehovah's Witnesses Convention

Booking Highlights for the Region

Baptist General State Convention - Fall Board Meeting

October 29 - 30, 2018
150 room nights
\$19,650 EEI

2018 Rosie the Riveter Gymnastic Challenge

December 13 - 14, 2018
475 room nights
\$85,500 EEI

2019 Illinois State Basketball Championships

March 15 - 17, 2019
1,100 room nights
\$198,000 EEI

United States Quad Rugby National Championships

March 2019, 2020 and 2021
325 room nights per year (975 for all 3 years)
\$112,500 EEI yearly (\$337,500 total)

2019 AAU Central District Gymnastics Championships

April 4 - 5, 2019
525 room nights
\$94,500 EEI

2019 Jehovah's Witnesses Conventions

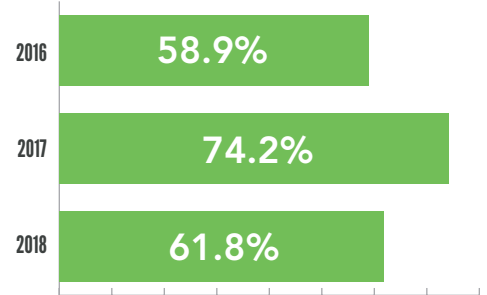
July and August 2019 (4 weekends)
1,500 room nights per weekend (6,000 total)
\$786,000 EEI (all 4 weekends)

Total Q4 Booked Highlights EEI = \$1,296,150

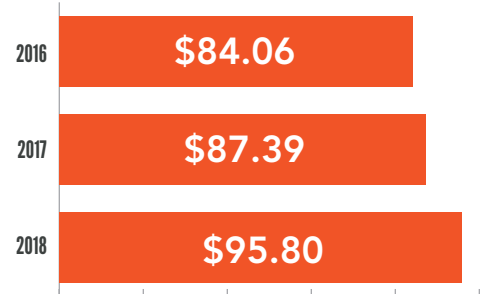
Winnebago County Hotel Statistics

(January - June 2018)

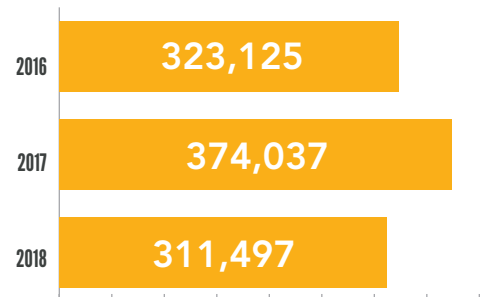
YTD Hotel Occupancy



YTD Average Room Rate



YTD Hotel Room Demand (rooms sold)



YTD Revenue (in millions)



News & Notes

2018 FVV Fan Fest

RACVB partnered with tourism brand ambassador and NBA star point guard **Fred VanVleet** to produce the **2018 FVV Fan Fest** on Friday, June 22, at the UW Health Sports Factory. The evening's festivities included shooting stations, three point and dunk contests, bouncy houses, live T-shirt screenings, and more – all to celebrate VanVleet's success on and off the court and the positive impact of RACVB's sports tourism efforts.



"We're excited and honored to work alongside Fred for the 2018 FVV Fan Fest. The weekend celebration is for the community and a reflection of the positive impact of sports, which has become the core of Fred being our sports tourism ambassador," said Nick Povalitis, RACVB director of sports development. "His success on and off the court is an inspiration for us all."

The **2018 FVV Summer Camp**, produced by VanVleet, took place on Saturday, June 23 - Sunday, June 24 and was designed for boys and girls ages K - 12. Attendees had the chance to learn skills and compete in contests under the professional direction of Rockford native Fred VanVleet.

City Rings in 75th Anniversary of the Rockford Peaches

Many partners, including RACVB, kicked off a multi-day series of events from May 30 - June 3 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the **Rockford Peaches**, the team made famous in the movie, "A League of Their Own," and bring attention to the historic significance of women's baseball.

The family-friendly anniversary events were organized by the **International Women's Baseball Center (IWBC)** in partnership with the Friends of Beyer Stadium. The celebration marked the beginning of a capital campaign to build a \$7 million IWBC educational center and museum next to Beyer Stadium, located at 245 15th Avenue, Rockford, where the Rockford Peaches played from 1943-1954.

The Rockford Peaches team was one of the first four teams in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which formed in 1943 when many baseball players were away during World War II.

The week's events included the "Diamonds, Denim and Stars" event held at the Coronado Theatre, Rockford Peaches Day at Rockford City Market during the hours of City Market, a showing of "A League of Their Own" at Friday Night Flix, and a Home Run Derby at Beyer Stadium. There was also an exhibition game held at Beyer Stadium on Saturday, June 2 where stars from "A League of Their Own" teamed up with 75th Anniversary Celebration sponsors and community leaders on a Celebrity Team against the Rockford Starfires Women's Baseball Team. All events were free except the May 30 event at the Coronado and fees for participating in the Sunday, June 3 home run derby.

RACVB also held a free **Meet a Peach Autograph Signing** event at the RACVB office on Thursday, May 31. Original members of the Rockford Peaches, Dr. Kat Williams of the International Women's Baseball Center, and Megan Cavanagh, the actress who played Marla Hooch in "A League of Their Own" were all at the event to sign autographs. Over 200 people attended the Meet a Peach Autograph Signing.



News & Notes

Inspiring Community to Think BIG, Then ACT!



RACVB inspired guests to Think BIG, Then ACT and celebrated major tourism accomplishments for the community on **Wednesday, May 23, 2018**, during the organization's annual luncheon. The luncheon took place in the recently renovated **Cliffbreakers Conference Center**.

When it comes to marketing cities as tourist destinations, the name of the game is storytelling, said **Melissa Luebbe**, publisher of Midwest Living, in her keynote address.

"You could call it marketing, but when it's done really well, marketing is telling a story," Luebbe said at the event, which attracted an audience of nearly 325 to the newly renovated ballroom at Cliffbreakers.

Also, RACVB has successfully partnered with **Development Counsellors International (DCI)**, a national public relations firm, to push out positive stories to national media outlets. Those efforts have resulted in more than 20 positive stories in the last year in such national outlets as USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, Fox Business, CNN Money and Industry Week. Those stories have reached 1.3 billion people with positive narratives surrounding Rockford's quality of life assets, economic success, community members and initiatives.

In his report on the state of tourism in the region, RACVB President/CEO John Groh said the success story is

compelling. With the exception of Cook County, Winnebago County is the fastest growing tourist destination in the state. Visitors spent more than **\$350 million** (the largest amount on record) last year in Winnebago County. That money supported almost **3,000 jobs** and a payroll of almost **\$86 million**.

Making news at the RACVB event, Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara appointed RACVB as the lead agency for the **Davis Park project**, and he named Groh to chair a 20-member task force to implement the plan. Concepts recommended by the original committee include such features as a splash pad that converts to an ice rink in winter, a sunning beach, public docks, a sculpture garden, attractive gateways and greenspaces, and much more.

RACVB's Annual Luncheon was supported by generous local organizations and businesses in the community. Gold Sponsors were Illinois Bank & Trust, Gorman & Company, Inc., and City of Rockford. Silver Sponsors were SwedishAmerican, a division of UW Health, Fehr Graham and Event Floral.



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- David Anderson (Chair), Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Bill LaFever (Vice Chair), Bill Doran & Co.
- Tim Meyers (Treasurer), WIFR-TV
- Jennifer Furst (Secretary), FurstStaffing
- Chad Anderson, Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram
- Marcus Bacon, Radisson Hotel & Conference Center
- Nathan Bruck, City of Loves Park
- Nathan Bryant, Rockford Area Economic Development Council
- Todd Cagnoni, City of Rockford
- Bryan Davis, SupplyCore
- Patricia Diduch, Village of Rockton
- Einar Forsman, Rockford Chamber of Commerce
- Kevin Frost, City of Rockford
- Roberta Holzwarth, HolmstromKennedy PC
- Marco Lenis, Vocational Rehabilitation Management
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- Mary French, Group Services Manager
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