

Voice Column for December 2018

Many work to make it a Merry & Bright season – Holiday traditions to enjoy again this year

By John Groh

I want to commend the Rockford Chamber of Commerce for highlighting community collaboration this month, as the holiday season spotlights such partnerships better than any other time of the year.

The sixth annual Stroll on State, held in downtown Rockford on Nov. 24, showcased collaboration at its finest. Our presenting sponsor for the event, Illinois Bank & Trust, led the way once again in a lineup of partners from the business sector, government, churches and community organizations to stage a holiday celebration that was the best yet. Hundreds of volunteers stepped up to beautify downtown with holiday decorations, and volunteers from across the community who ran the show on the big day.

Everybody pulls together to create a glorious day for people of all ages who gather to celebrate cherished traditions, while making new memories from the shared experience. The event has come to symbolize all that we can do and be when we come together as a community.

The continuing success of Stroll on State traces to a spirit of collaboration I see at work in almost everything we attempt to do at RACVB.

Time and again, when a new idea is floated for a program or an event that will benefit our community, I see a pattern in subsequent conversations. Someone initially says: “What if we tried ... *such and such*.” Someone else comes back with: “Why not? Let’s do it!” At that point, invariably, other entities chime in, saying: “How can we help make it happen?”

This familiar dynamic is highlighted in so many events that are part of the Merry & Bright Season.

Business owners joined forces with one another in various shopping districts in the region to create a fun holiday shopping scene that helped customers make merry while supporting local stores and restaurants. Early December events in the Rockton business district and at Edgebrook in Rockford are great examples. The merriment continues in those shopping enclaves throughout the holiday season, and business owners understand that what’s good for one is good for all.

The efforts of a local group called Winnebago Buy Local are showcased annually at the Local Holiday Market, held at Rockford University on the first Saturday in December. Check out the member organizations at www.winnebago buylocal.com and drop by some of the stores during the holiday season.

The success of these businesses depends on local support, says WBL President Lauren Davis. “Shopping local is so much more than the good feeling you get from doing so. Statistics show that for every \$100 spent at your LOCAL stores, services and businesses, 68% stays in your local economy.”

Compare that to just 32% percent for purchases made at a national chain.

Some other Merry & Bright events coming up wouldn’t happen without community collaborations. The **All Aglow Exhibit at Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens** continues until Jan. 6, 2019; the **Holiday Festival of Lights at Sinnissippi Park** runs Dec. 7-31. Beyond twinkling lights, upcoming events to keep you merry this season include:

Dec. 7-15. **Starlight Theatre stages “A Charlie Brown Christmas”** on Fridays and Saturdays.

Dec. 15-16. **The Mendelssohn Chorale joins the Rockford Symphony Orchestra for the Holiday Pops concerts.** www.rockfordsymphony.com

Saturdays in December. **The Burpee Museum of Natural History** has launched a new program called **“Victorian Holiday Party at the Barnes Mansion.”** www.burpee.org

Dec. 31. **New Year Around the World at Burpee.** www.burpee.org

Dec. 31. **Countdown to Fun at the Discovery Center Museum.** www.discoverycentermuseum.org

Jan. 16-19, 2019. **Illinois Snow Sculpting Competition.** www.ilsnowsculpting.com

Jan. 31-Feb. 3, 2019. **Rockton Yeti Fest.**

John Groh is president/CEO of 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

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