

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2018

Stroll on State Boosts Local Economy, Thrills Crowds and Achieves Record Attendance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 11, 2018

ROCKFORD, IL – Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, welcomed residents and visitors to downtown Rockford and achieved record attendance in its sixth year on Saturday, November 24. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau produces the annual event – which happens on Small Business Saturday – 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 **87,500 visitors** to downtown Rockford. Attendance for this one-day event is up 6 percent over 2017.

Key elements that contributed to the success of the event were the Dasher Dash 5K run/walk, an expanded holiday parade and the enhanced Frosty's Merry Markets that included new retail and food vendors. 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.

“As we wrap up another successful Stroll on State, I find myself reflecting on what this event means for the community. Seeing perceptions shift, hope soar and people having the time of their lives in downtown Rockford demonstrates the power of coming together – literally and figuratively – as a community,” said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO.

“We’re grateful the event continues to bolster revitalization efforts and provides a boost to business owners during the holiday season. Stroll is a community-supported event and happens thanks to the generosity of so many local partners, sponsors, volunteers, and business owners. To RACVB, it means a lot knowing that Stroll on State - created from the simple idea of bringing the community together - has brought so much goodness and joy to Rockford.”

The event spans more than 15 blocks in downtown Rockford, showcasing locally owned retail shops and eateries. It also features an abundance of family-friendly activities highlighted by the Stroll on State parade, visits with Santa, horse and wagon rides, several live performances and entertainment, drinking hot chocolate and watching the magical lighting of the City of Rockford Christmas Tree.

“Our Illinois Bank & Trust team is extremely proud to be the official presenting sponsor of Stroll on State. This holiday event sets a great example of community togetherness and kindness,” said Jeff Hultman, Illinois Bank & Trust president/CEO. “We loved participating this year and are proud to be all in for the next four years as well.”

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What Rockford region businesses say about Stroll:

- “I had a 20 percent increase in gross sales over last year’s Stroll. This is so important for me because aside from that one day of sales, I have been down a bit. It took me six weeks prior to Stroll to ring up the amount that I rang during that one night,” said Karen Elyea, owner of **Minglewood**. “This event really helps our bottom line and sets the pace for continued sales growth this holiday season.”
- “It was a real pleasure and privilege for **Franchesco’s** to participate in our first Stroll on State! Our team was humbled to be part of an event that draws the entire state-line community together,” said Mark Holm, Franchesco’s marketing director. “We felt grateful for the opportunity to serve and look forward to next year as well.”
- “Our sales at **Bath and Body Fusion** were up 10 percent from last year during Stroll on State. We sold a lot of our best sellers, our Dream Cream and bath bombs for Christmas gifts,” said Jennifer Ralston, owner of Bath and Body Fusion. “We have had many people come back to our store after stopping by at Stroll on State. Some shoppers have said they never knew we were there before.”
- “Stroll on State positively impacts our bottom line with an increase in sales due to the rerouting of the parade that now goes directly in front of **Bella Luna Bakery**. We once again look forward to increasing our sales and the number of visitors to our bakery year over year,” said Polly Matranga, co-owner of Bella Luna Bakery.

In a post-event survey, Stroll on State and downtown Rockford have collectively received favorable feedback. It was reported that **95 percent** of people said they had a **positive (excellent/50%, very good/30% or good/15%) experience** at the event.

When asked what they liked most about Stroll some respondents said:

- “Please keep doing this family event. We have made it a tradition now with our family. My family from the Chicago suburbs comes up and this year especially commented several times how Rockford has made its own small-town feel. I love that we have the opportunities to support local businesses and share our town with everyone.”
- “The overall experience was awesome and everyone in my family and extended family enjoyed it! We look forward to next year!”
- “Sharing positive downtown Rockford experiences with friends I grew up with (I’m a young adult from the area) and friends who have moved to the area.”
- “Seeing all of the people in our beautiful city come together as one, to prove that we are on a comeback. It was an awesome time to spend with family! The local stores, local food, etc. were fantastic. I’m proud to call this great city home!”

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A few other key takeaways from the survey include:

- Sales were up with **77 percent** of shoppers indicating they **spent more than \$25** (a 3% increase from last year.)
- **97 percent** said they are more likely to come back downtown after experiencing Stroll on State (a 2 percent increase over last year.)
- **53 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.
- **81 percent** of people said that this was not their first time attending Stroll on State.
- **69 percent** of people said that they have made Stroll on State a tradition for three or more years.
- Respondents who 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.

Stroll on State by the Numbers (complete list attached):

- 13,500 multi-colored lights on Rockford's Christmas tree (plus 100 twinkling strobe lights).
- 7,900 guests utilized park and ride shuttles to/from the event (a 9 percent increase over last year).
- 5,325 children visited Santa Claus (a 27 percent increase over last year).
- 3,680 s'mores were eaten (a 14 percent increase over last year).
- 3,367 hours of work put in by volunteers.
- 1,615 people watched "Mary Poppins" at the Nordlof Center.
- 1,292 people ran or walked in the Dasher Dash 5K (a 35 percent increase over last year).
- 1,000 letters written to Santa noting their wishes for Christmas (a 26 percent increase over last year).
- 88 balloon handlers, 40 foot long float featuring Santa, 15 parade floats and 8 large-scale balloons in the Stroll on State parade.

Supporters & Partners: Led by the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, in addition to many partners, the following entities have come together to generously sponsor Stroll on State:

Presenting Sponsor:

- Illinois Bank & Trust

Parade Presenting Sponsor:

- The Power Connection IBEW 364 & NECA

Supporting Sponsors:

- OSF HealthCare
- Allstate Insurance Company
- PCI Pharma Services

- Northwestern Illinois Building Trades Union
- Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23
- International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150
- Ironworkers Local Union 498
- Roofers & Waterproofers Local 11
- Mercyhealth
- LaMonica Beverages
- David & Colleen Anderson Family
- Comcast
- Rockford Mass Transit District
- Event Floral

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- Gallagher Williams-Manny Insurance Group
- ComEd
- Nicor Gas
- FurstStaffing & FurstProfessionals
- Project First Rate
- Pearson
- Landstar System, Inc.
- River District Association

Media Sponsors:

- Northwest Quarterly
- Rockford Register Star
- The Rock River Times
- Lamar
- Mid-West Family Broadcasting
- Townsquare Media
- WIFR 23
- WREX 13
- WTOV 17 / FOX 39

- Journal & Topics Newspapers
- El Sol

Partner Organizations:

- City of Rockford
- Heartland Community Church
- City First Church
- Rockford Sharefest
- Rockford Park District

Dasher Dash 5K Sponsors

- SwedishAmerican, presenting sponsor
- Wolfe Landscaping
- A. Tanner Design
- Peak Sports Club
- Turano Baking Company
- Mechanical
- Gorman & Company
- Pearson

View the list of sponsors and partners on the website www.strollonstate.com.

The Merry & Bright season continues in Rockford through the end of January with many more community events and programs. Check out www.gorockford.com/merryandbright for recommendations and information. Stroll on State merchandise, sold during the event, is now available for purchase online by visiting the Rockford Store www.gorockford.com/about/rockford-store/ or at the RACVB office (102 N. Main St.). Items are available while supplies last.

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RACVB exists to drive quality of life and economic growth for the citizens of Rockford and Winnebago County through tourism marketing and destination development. www.gorockford.com

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