

RACVB February 2019 Voice Column

Many good things being said about Rockford

By John Groh

Last month in this space, I highlighted recent stories by outside media that focused on the unmistakable resurgence of Rockford's downtown.

Those positive stories are just the latest examples of a noticeable shift in how our city and region overall are being represented on the national stage. The topics of media coverage have varied from tourism to the economy to Rockford's progressive response to social issues that challenge every American city.

Since June of 2017, Rockford has been featured nearly 500 times in print and electronic media across the nation. And most of those media placements have portrayed Rockford in a positive light.

This consistent positive buzz can change the narrative among people who have no first-hand knowledge of our city but who have the power to make good things happen here. We want them to say, "I heard that Rockford ..."

- Is the cradle of women's baseball;
- Uses new strategies to tackle urban problems;
- Values historic buildings and redevelops them;
- Has a thriving downtown;
- Appreciates its natural resources;
- Supports artistic and cultural ventures;
- Offers great job opportunities in a robust economy;
- Is a terrific place to find work, be prosperous, own a home, raise a family, have fun and lead a full and enriching life.

That's what we are, after all. RACVB, along with partner organizations, works hard every day to tell our story and promote our assets. More and more, we are sharing those stories with external media outlets and journalists who can amplify our message to their readers and viewers.

Here is a brief – but far from comprehensive – snapshot of some of our media placements over the past 18 months.

September 2017: USA Today, "11 Must-See Fall Exhibits at U.S. Museums." The lineup included the Bruce Munro light exhibit at Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens.

September 2017 and June 2018: The Wall Street Journal, "An Illinois City Aims to Move Better Policing into the Neighborhood;" and The New Republic (cover story), "Peace Officers: How one American city chose to tackle crime, combat racism, and reckon with the legacy of police brutality." Both publications ran major stories about Rockford's pilot program through which police officers live in troubled neighborhoods with the goal of establishing relationships of trust with residents to reduce crime and improve safety.

November and December 2017: TravelingMom.com, Money Inc., and Chicago Parent focused on Rockford as a cool winter destination for fabulous light displays, great ice skating and Christmas activities, including Stroll on State.

February 2018: Industry Week, “Rockford Illinois Workforce Program Propels Aerospace Cluster.” The story raved about public-private workforce development programs that produce skilled workers for the region’s 250 aerospace-related companies.

March 2018: Prevue Magazine, “Rockford Revives Industrial History with First Convention Center & Hotel.” Fox Business, online and broadcast, as well as MSN News, also featured stories about the Embassy Suites project in downtown Rockford.

June 2018: More than 100 media outlets from coast to coast, including dozens of National Public Radio affiliates, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, Los Angeles Times, Seattle Times, Washington Times and the Tampa Bay Tribune, featured stories about the Rockford Peaches and the 75th anniversary of the launch of women’s professional baseball in America.

September 2018: Family Traveller Magazine and the online site, Whereverfamily.com, featured stories about Halloween attractions in Rockford, namely the paranormal tour at Tinker Swiss Cottage and the “spook-tacular” event at Anderson Japanese Gardens.

October 2018: Outdoor Families Magazine, “27 Best Fall Foliage Destinations to Visit in the USA.” The region was promoted for its apple orchards, community festivals and spectacular fall colors.

October 2018: Reader’s Digest, “These are the 15 Best Places to Move to in the U.S. (Before They Get Too Crowded). The section about Rockford read, in part: “Rockford’s small-town charm and ... cultural, culinary and outdoors spaces make it a fun, noteworthy destination.”

These may be surprising storylines for people who historically have assigned Rockford to the category of “distressed Rust Belt city,” but they’re old news to us. Let’s keep on telling our story, the real story of who we are. In the process, we’re writing the next chapter of our city’s history.

John Groh is president/CEO of Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. RACVB is the heart, soul and energy of the Rockford region as a destination. It is the defender of Rockford’s image and brand and guardian of its unique sense of place. www.gorockford.com

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