

March 2019 Column for The Voice

By John Groh

The trumpet line forms here. Digital trumpets, I should say.

With the help of our friends at Transform Rockford, RACVB has launched a new program called 815 Ambassadors, and, with your help, this effort can spread the good word about our region -- one "share" at a time. The Ambassadors program is a grassroots effort that uses local thought leaders like you -- online influencers with large social networks -- to disperse news and information that presents our region in a positive light.

There's plenty of reason to toot our own horn these days. And besides, it's not bragging; it's merely presenting evidence to our many far-flung networks of friends and acquaintances of what we already know to be true -- that the Rockford region is a great place to live, work and grow. For too long, Rockford has allowed itself to be defined by how we're ranked and rated by others. We must take every opportunity to convey the real story. The positive voice needs to be louder than the negative.

It's easy to become an 815 Ambassador, and it's fun, too. Here's how it works:

Go to: 815ambassadors.com. Follow the link to sign up. It takes less than a minute to set up your Ambassador account. With that, you've earned your trumpet.

Then, we'll share positive news and information with you via email. You choose which of your digital platforms on which to post, i.e., Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. All the content we give you is ready to post, and you may add your own thoughts and experiences, as well.

As an example, in early February, we shared a story with ambassadors from the Chicago Tribune titled, "Best of the Midwest: 9 must-see destinations worth a visit in 2019." The story highlighted Rockford, "a city on the rise," as an essential stop on the Frank Lloyd Wright Trail because of the presence of the Laurent House.

"While you're in town," the story continued, "get some coffee at Rockford Roasting, food at Social Urban Bar & Restaurant and beer at Prairie Street Brewing Co., on the banks of the Rock River."

Ambassadors who shared that story earned points toward the winning prizes. Ambassadors can check their points on a dashboard. With every "share" on a digital platform, Ambassadors widen the circle of people who may be positively influenced about what's going on in our city.

Oh, one other thing. As an 815 Ambassador, you'll be among the first to know about some of the latest exciting developments, activities and events that are happening in our region. You'll be the one "in the know," so to speak.

By leveraging your widespread connections, you'll play an important role in raising our national profile in a positive way. From the Rock River, new sports facilities, professional sports, diverse restaurants, festivals, live music, museums, symphony, theater and dance, there's no shortage of offerings in the Rockford region.

Global companies choose to do business in Rockford, reinvest millions into the local economy and partner with local educational institutions to train the hard-working talent these companies need. The region's economic future is bright.

As an 815 Ambassador, you'll be a key resource to support the work we do at RACVB, as well as our charter Ambassadors group, which includes Transform Rockford, City of Rockford and RAEDC.

We hope you will join our team as an 815 Ambassador. As connected, engaged and socially active professionals, your varied digital networks can be of immeasurable value to raise the profile and enhance the reputation of our region.

We're asking for your help because we know you are as passionate as we are about this region. The 815 Ambassador program makes it easy to "share" the love.

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

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