

April 2019 Column for The Voice

State, region breaks records in tourism numbers

By John Groh

The staff at RACVB was thrilled to be honored recently at the Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism for a couple of local initiatives that are proving to be beneficial for our region.

Sure, these awards give us a few more plaques for the walls, but they are important mostly because they encourage us in our work and reinforce the knowledge that what we do makes a difference to the economic wellbeing of our region.

Tourism is big business, locally and for the state. Did you know that the Office of Tourism is under the auspices of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity? That's right where it belongs because of the tremendous impact tourism has on state and local economies. The most recent statistics indicate that the number of visitors to Illinois destinations has risen seven years in a row to a record-breaking 114 million in 2017. The U.S. Travel Association's most recent report indicated that tourism put 335,500 Illinois residents to work during that year.

Visitors spending for goods and services in the state totaled \$39.5 billion for 2017, which generated \$2.95 billion in state and local tax revenue. That affects my household and yours to the tune of about \$1,300 in tax savings each year. I'm on board with that! Tourism is one of the state's most important industries.

The local picture is just as encouraging. Tourism continues to grow faster in Winnebago County than in any other metropolitan area in Illinois. Visitors spent a record \$383.7 million in the county in 2017, more than an 8 percent increase from the previous year. Tourism supported 3,084 jobs with an \$93.9 million payroll and generated \$6.78 million in local tax revenue.

The awards RACVB received showcase why tourism is so important locally. RACVB was recognized for "Best Branding Initiative" for the Bring Your Game 2 Rockford (BYG2RKFD) sports marketing campaign. The campaign features the region's multi-use sports facilities and local notables including Fred VanVleet, Kenny Gould, Corey Anderson and Nicole Briscoe.

RACVB also was recognized for "Best Cooperative Partnership" for the Rockford Peaches 75th Anniversary events that took place last summer. RACVB was proud to help plan, promote and execute various events in a wonderful partnership with the International Women's Baseball Center and Friends of Beyer Stadium. The local celebration drew widespread national attention and further cemented Rockford's reputation as the cradle of baseball.

RACVB continues to work with local partners to create and promote new events and attractions that both improve quality of life for area residents and attract visitors. Our success and the astounding local tourism statistics trace directly to the creative and hard-working staffs at every local recreational and cultural venue, at hotels and restaurants and retail outlets throughout the region. They create the experiences that leave residents and visitors alike saying, "Wow, I can't wait to do that again."

Thanks to all of you!

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.