

*Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau*

# Quarterly Report

## FY19, Q2

October - December 2018



**News &  
Notes**

**Marketing**

**Sports**

**Meetings**

**Bookings**



The mission of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.

# Sports & International Sales

## International Efforts

RACVB partnered with the Illinois Office of Tourism and six other Illinois partners at **World Travel Market** in London, one of the largest global travel trade shows. 26 pre-scheduled appointments were held over three days with a focus on Illinois Road Trips.



In November, a group of **journalists from China and Japan** came to Rockford on a FAM visit. The group toured Anderson Japanese Gardens including a private tour of the Guest House with David Anderson.



## Sports Sales Highlights

RACVB's sports sales team kicked off the second quarter by attending **2018 TEAMS Conference** from Oct. 1-4 in Louisville, KY, where it met with more than 30 event operators. Out of market activities continued with two sales trips to the Illinois Athletic Commission (Oct. 17), as well as a micro sales mission to Milwaukee for meetings with Junior Volleyball Association (JVA), Badger Region of USA Volleyball and the Toronto Raptors. In addition to hosting a site visit with the National Softball Association (NSA) on Oct. 17 in support of the team's bid for **2019 NSA World Series**, RACVB also leveraged two regional partnerships—with the Rockford Disc Golf Club and the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) of Illinois—to secure a major A Tier disc golf event in Rockford in Spring 2020. The team's other highlights included booking the **2019 ENPL Playoffs** (6,250 room nights), a major soccer showcase in partnership with Mercyhealth Sportscore Two, as well as securing the return of the **2019 USA BMX Midwest Nationals** alongside Rockford BMX.



Progress continued in November, when RACVB conducted two major site visits by welcoming the **Junior Volleyball Association** on Nov. 6 and the **National Junior Collegiate Athletic Association (NJCAA)** on Nov. 9. The beginning of the month also brought the second junior college national championship of the year when RACVB partnered with Rock Valley College in hosting the **2018 NJCAA Division III Women's Soccer Championship** from Nov. 8-11. RACVB also supported the Ski Broncs's efforts for more national events, providing presentation materials and sponsorship commitment for the Loves Park-based club's attendance at the Nov. 9 USA Water Ski Board Meeting in Florida—where the board voted to approve that the **2020 Division I Show Ski Nationals** will be held at Shorewood Park. Sales efforts continued Nov. 19 when RACVB took another sales trip, this time to La Crosse, WI, where it presented its bid to host the **2020-21 Men's Collegiate Lacrosse Association (MCLA) National Championships**.



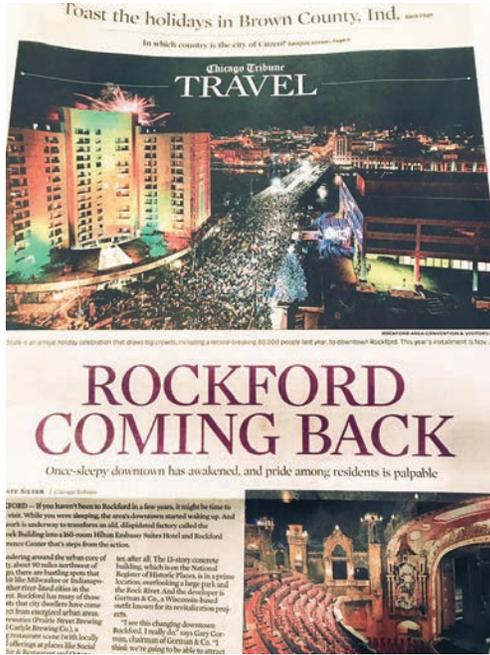
On Dec. 2-5, RACVB returned to the **2018 U.S. Sports Congress** in Daytona Beach, FL, where it networked with 35+ event operators, during which time it finalized a partnership with Great Lakes Ultimate Events (GLUE) to support its bid to host the **2019 USA Ultimate TCT Elite-Select Nationals** at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two. The team hosted another site visit just before the holidays, welcoming the Jr. NBA and Chicagoland Youth Basketball Network (CYBN) to the Forest City on Dec. 20 for a tour of the UW Health Sports Factory.

# Marketing

## Media Partnerships & Earned Media

There were several earned media stories and articles that RACVB secured this quarter. The top highlighted stories and media mentions helped to promote the Rockford region in various publications and online outlets on a local, regional

and national level. There were five **Chicago Tribune** mentions in print and online about the Rockford region. One story made the front page of the Travel section in the Chicago Tribune and focused on Rockford's Comeback in conjunction with promotions around the sixth annual Stroll on State event. **Air Chicago** and **Outdoor Families Magazine** shared three separate stories about Fall events happening throughout the area. **Reader's Digest** also touted Rockford as, "One of the 15 Best Places to Move to in the U.S. (Before They Get Too Crowded)." **Trivago Magazine** recognized the Rockford region as, "One of the 8 Weekend Getaways in Illinois for Foodies, Families and Thrill-Seekers." **Travel Weekly** focused on the Rockford region's connection with Francis Ford Coppola and how the community was a pleasant surprise for Arnie Weissmann (writer) who visited to learn more about what the area has to offer. **Matador Network** highlighted Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens and named



Chicago Tribune article

### These Are the 15 Best Places to Move to in the U.S. (Before They Get Too Crowded)

by Melissa Klurman

#### Rockford, Illinois



Henryk Sadura/Shutterstock

Just 90 minutes west of Chicago, Rockford's small-town charm and unsuspecting, cultural, culinary, and outdoors spaces make it a fun, noteworthy destination for those looking for a truly off-the-beaten-path experience. Among its many charms, you can spend time at one of the nation's oldest internet cafes, wakeboard at a cable-run wake park, and stroll through one of North America's top Japanese gardens. Early settlers dubbed Rockford "Forest City," and nearby are more than 10,000 acres of natural land for outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy activities like hiking, camping, fishing, and kayaking. The town also recently launched a new convention center, and it's home to nearly a dozen museums, including the top-ranked family Discovery Center.

Reader's Digest article

their ice skating rink as "One of the Best American Rinks to Skate at this Christmas – that aren't in New York." These stories are actively being pitched through social media, on the gorockford.com website and partner sites to extend their reach.

## Earned Media

(October - December, 2018)

RACVB uses **Meltwater**, a public relations management software, to track and report the effectiveness of media mentions and their ad value through various outlets; e.g., television, online, print, radio and social media.

RACVB also works with **Development Counsellors International (DCI)** to attract visitors by directly pitching stories to media. They focus pitches on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.



**\$185,557**  
Average ad value



**20,060,897**  
Total impressions



**2,967**  
Total mentions  
(2,473 social, 222 broadcast, 202 online, 70 print)

**\$734,230**  
Ad equivalency

**8,821,364**  
Total impressions resulting from direct media efforts

**12**  
Strategic media mentions

## Social Media



**Facebook**  
25,419 followers  
(254 increase)



**Instagram**  
8,990 followers  
(334 increase)



**YouTube**  
391,433 video views  
(9,428 increase)



**Twitter**  
6,399 followers  
(30 increase)

# Marketing

## Website Statistics

### Website Traffic Sources



### Most Searched Terms

- Stroll on State
- Festival of Lights
- Things To Do in Rockford, IL

### Most Searched Events

- Festival of Lights
- All Aglow at Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens
- Family Christmas Walk (The Landscape Connection)

### Most Searched Attractions/ Restaurants

- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Discovery Center Museum
- Burpee Museum of Natural History

## Promoting Rockford to Rockford

RACVB contributes to the Rockford Chamber of Commerce's **The Voice** publication each month. Topics from October through December highlighted the progress that has been made from RACVB's Forest City Beautiful initiative and Stroll on State. These columns described each of these revitalization efforts that have helped to significantly enhance our region through event activation and the installation of public art, sculptures, murals and other beautification efforts throughout the region.



Trick-or-Treating article in The Rock River Times

In addition, the weekly "RACVB View" section of **The Rock River Times** highlighted various local attractions, businesses, organizations and initiatives working to make the community a better place to live, work and play in. This quarter various topics focused on sites, events and attractions that drew large crowds like the Forest City Beautiful Paint the Town event, Kelsey Montague mural installation in downtown Rockford, places to Trick-or-Treat in the Rockford region, parks and preserves to enjoy Fall foliage, promotions highlighting various aspects of Stroll on State, RACVB premium items and where to shop around the region and great local restaurants to enjoy during the Merry & Bright season.

**Nine news releases and advisories** were sent to our local media partners to keep them informed of what RACVB is working on and involved in. Content from these releases as well as weekly event promotions helped generate content shared through regular weekly radio spots with Mid-West Family Broadcasting (WXRX, The Bull and B103) radio spots with Townsquare Media (WROK, The Eagle) live mentions with local TV (WIFR, WREX, WQRF, WTVO) and through print publications Rockford Register Star and The Rock River Times.

## Advertising

RACVB placed ads in various print publications and digital targeted placements. These ads allow us to creatively reach a very hyper-focused demographic of leisure and sports industry decision makers looking to visit the Rockford region. We continue to promote ourselves as a destination that supports several traditional and non-traditional sports tournaments, meetings and leisure events. Leisure print ads featuring Rock Cut State park were created in-house for **Travel Illinois** magazine and **Midwest Living** magazine. Sports print ads showcasing Rockford native Fred VanVleet were created for **Sports Destination** magazine and the **Rockford Public Schools Tip-off Classic**. A digital banner ad was also created for the **Small Market Meetings and Events** website.



Midwest Living ad

# Meetings & Bookings

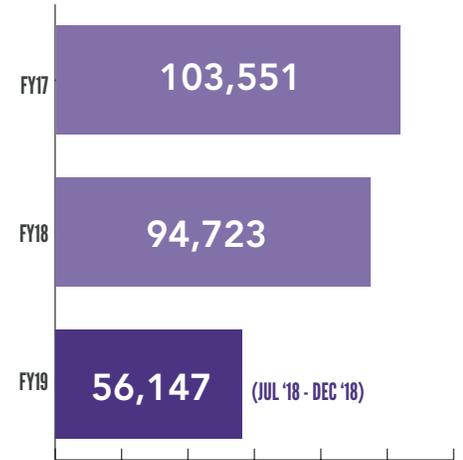
## Meetings Market Updates

RACVB helped welcome the **Baptist General State Convention** at the Riverview Inn and Suites October 29-31, 2018. The group had over 300 people in attendance and produced approximately 150 rooms nights. RACVB welcomed the group back after having left the area for 3 years. We look forward to working with the group to have them return in 2019. RACVB is working with the **Jehovah's Witnesses Convention** to lock in their 2020 and 2021 dates as part of a 5-year agreement with the city of Rockford. This year we will be welcoming the

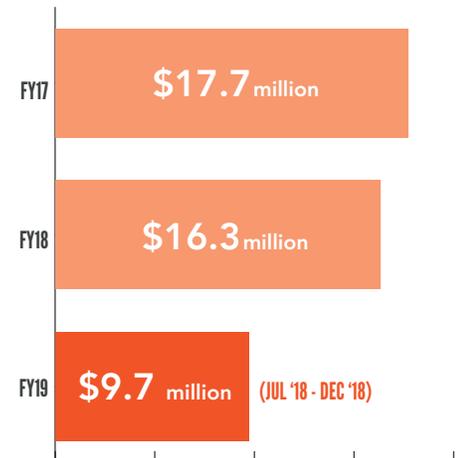
Jehovah's Witnesses Convention for 4 weekends in July and August at the BMO Harris Bank Center. The **ATLAS Area Training for Librarians & Staff** group has confirmed their meeting for March 8, 2019 at Cliffbreakers which will include 100 sleeping room nights at Riverview Inn and Suites. We are working with other groups to confirm their stay in Rockford such as Quad Con, Illinois Rural Water Association, Rotary District Conference, Pathfinders Bible Bowl 2019, Illinois State Dental Society Foundation and more.



## Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



## Estimated Economic Impact



## Booking Highlights for the Region

### Northern IL Antique Dealers Association

March 1, 2019  
60 room nights  
\$7,800 EEI

### ATLAS Area Training for Librarians & Staff

March 8, 2019  
100 room nights  
\$13,000 EEI

### 2019 Elite National Premier League Tournament

June 28 - July 2, 2019  
8,000 room nights  
\$1,125,000 EEI

### 2019 USSSA Single A State Baseball Championship

July 18, 2019  
500 room nights  
\$90,000 EEI

### National Softball Association (NSA)

July 17 - 21, 2019  
7,000 room nights  
\$540,000 EEI

### 2020 Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

July 31 - August 2; August 7 - 9; August 13 - 16, 2020  
15,000 room nights (for three weekends)  
\$589,500 EEI

**Total Q2 Booked Highlights Estimated Economic Impact = \$2,365,300**

## Number of Event Bookings



# News & Notes

## Shop on State

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and the River District Association geared up for the holidays with the community's annual holiday shopping event, **Shop on State** on Saturday, December 22. Shop on State is a hometown holiday event where people are encouraged to shop, sip and snack during the Merry & Bright season in the Rockford region. This shopping experience invited guests to explore the unique local establishments that the downtown Rockford region has to offer. Participant merchants provided sips and snacks to make the shopping more enjoyable and free gift wrapping was available at some locations.

"This event replaces the 'hustle and bustle' of the shopping season with a much more convenient experience along State Street where shoppers can find handmade or hand-selected gifts by local business owners," said Missy Minnaert, River District Association executive director. "The event is truly a win-win for our community and helps to strengthen our commerce in Rockford's burgeoning downtown."



Shoppers also had the chance to win a one-of-a-kind Grand Prize gift basket (valued at \$500) filled with items and gift cards from various River District businesses. Participants were required to fill a stamp card available at participating locations. Stamps were obtained by visiting 5 different participating shopping establishments, and a bonus stamp could be earned by purchasing something at a participating restaurant, bar or coffee shop.

## RACVB Paints the Town Green



**Paint the Town Green** is an RACVB Charitable Foundation fundraising event that supports the ongoing Forest City Beautiful initiative. This year's event was held on Friday, October 12 at the outdoor pavilion at Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden and included a Vintage Circus theme.

This fundraising celebration highlighted the **Forest City Beautiful** initiative that began in summer 2014 to enhance and beautify Rockford's downtown core. RACVB leads the initiative with the help of hundreds of volunteers and partnerships with Rockford Sharefest, the City of Rockford and the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois. Forest City Beautiful turns lifeless and bleak civic spaces into ribbons of choreographed landscapes. In 2018, Forest City Beautiful expanded citywide as RACVB works to beautify gateways into Rockford.

Highlights of Paint the Town Green included **Chicago Aloft Circus Performers** who did tightrope performances, acrobatics, juggling, and stilt walking. Aloft is a Chicago-based

circus company dedicated to telling original stories through world-class circus arts. Street performer and storyteller **Abby the Spoon Lady** from Asheville, North Carolina, was also at the event for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Abby is one of the very few professional spoon players in the United States and has been a professional street performer for over a decade.

Rockford's own **Alchemy** served creative twists on classic fall favorites including house made soft pretzels, specialized hot dogs, caramel apple nachos, soup shooters and a fountain of buffalo sauce with shrimp and chicken to dip. Attendees who purchased a table also received a big batch cocktail served in a large pumpkin. For dessert, guests were treated to gourmet cotton candy from **Spin-Spun**.

Paint the Town Green sponsors included Secure Staffing (presenting sponsor), David & Colleen Anderson Family, Alchemy, MembersAlliance Credit Union, HolmstromKennedy, Illinois Bank & Trust, Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden, and Event Floral.

# News & Notes

## Stroll on State Boosts Economy and Achieves Record Attendance

**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.

"We're grateful the event continues to bolster revitalization efforts and provides a boost to business owners during the holiday season," said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO. "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.

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.

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.





**RACVB  
Board of  
Directors**

- David Anderson (Chair), Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Bill LaFever (Vice Chair), Bill Doran & Co.
- Tim Myers (Treasurer), WIFR-TV
- Jennifer Furst (Secretary), FurstStaffing
- Chad Anderson, Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram
- Marcus Bacon, Radisson Hotel & Conference Center
- Nathan Bruck, City of Loves Park
- Nathan Bryant, Rockford Area Economic Development Council
- Todd Cagnoni, City of Rockford
- Bryan Davis, SupplyCore
- Patricia Diduch, Village of Rockton
- Einar Forsman, Rockford Chamber of Commerce
- Kevin Frost, City of Rockford
- Roberta Holzwarth, HolmstromKennedy PC
- Marco Lenis, Vocational Rehabilitation Management
- Tiana McCall, Winnebago County
- Ted Rehl, City of South Beloit
- Jay Sandine, Rockford Park District



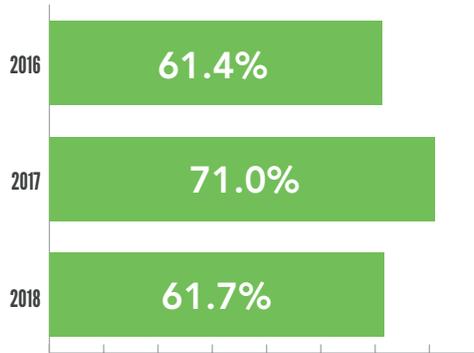
**RACVB  
Staff**

- John Groh, President/CEO
- Lindsay Arellano, Vice President of Sales & Service
- Jenny Caiozzo, Destination Development Events Manager
- Andrea Cook, Associate Director of Marketing & Comm.
- Phil Elsbree, Senior Sales Manager
- Mary French, Group Services Manager
- Monique Gaines, Executive Assistant
- Heidi Gee, Office Coordinator/Receptionist
- Jennie Hahn, Group Services Specialist
- Fred Harris, Visitor Services Assistant
- Janet Jacobs, Marketing Assistant
- Lindsey Kromm, Accounting Assistant
- Elizabeth Miller, Creative Services Manager
- Joanne Nold, Director of Finance & Administration
- Kristen Paul, Destination Development Operations Manager
- Nick Povalitis, Director of Sports Development
- Tana Vettore, Director of Destination Development

# Winnebago County Hotel Statistics

(January – December 2018)

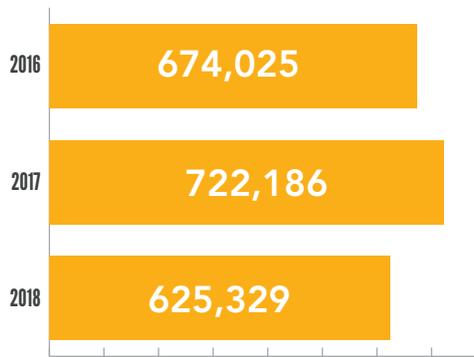
## YTD Hotel Occupancy



## YTD Average Room Rate



## YTD Hotel Room Demand (rooms sold)



## YTD Revenue (in millions)



# Rockford Sister City Reports

**CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA** — Relationships with the University Church of Romania, founded in 1750, are successful after 10 years.



**TOKMOK, KYRGYZSTAN** — The four students that received visas are currently still studying in the United States at Rockford University and North Park.

