



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

# QUARTERLY REPORT

**FY20, Q1**

July, August, September 2019



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.

[gorockford.com](http://gorockford.com)

# NEWS & NOTES

## TOURISM SPENDING GROWTH CONTINUES TO OUTPACE COMPETITORS

In 2018, travel provided \$392 million in economic impact to Rockford and Winnebago County communities and supported the livelihood of 3,039 hardworking area residents. At that

level, visitor spending reached an all-time high, up 2.1 percent from \$384 million in 2017. That spending generated visitor industry employment income of \$95 million and generated

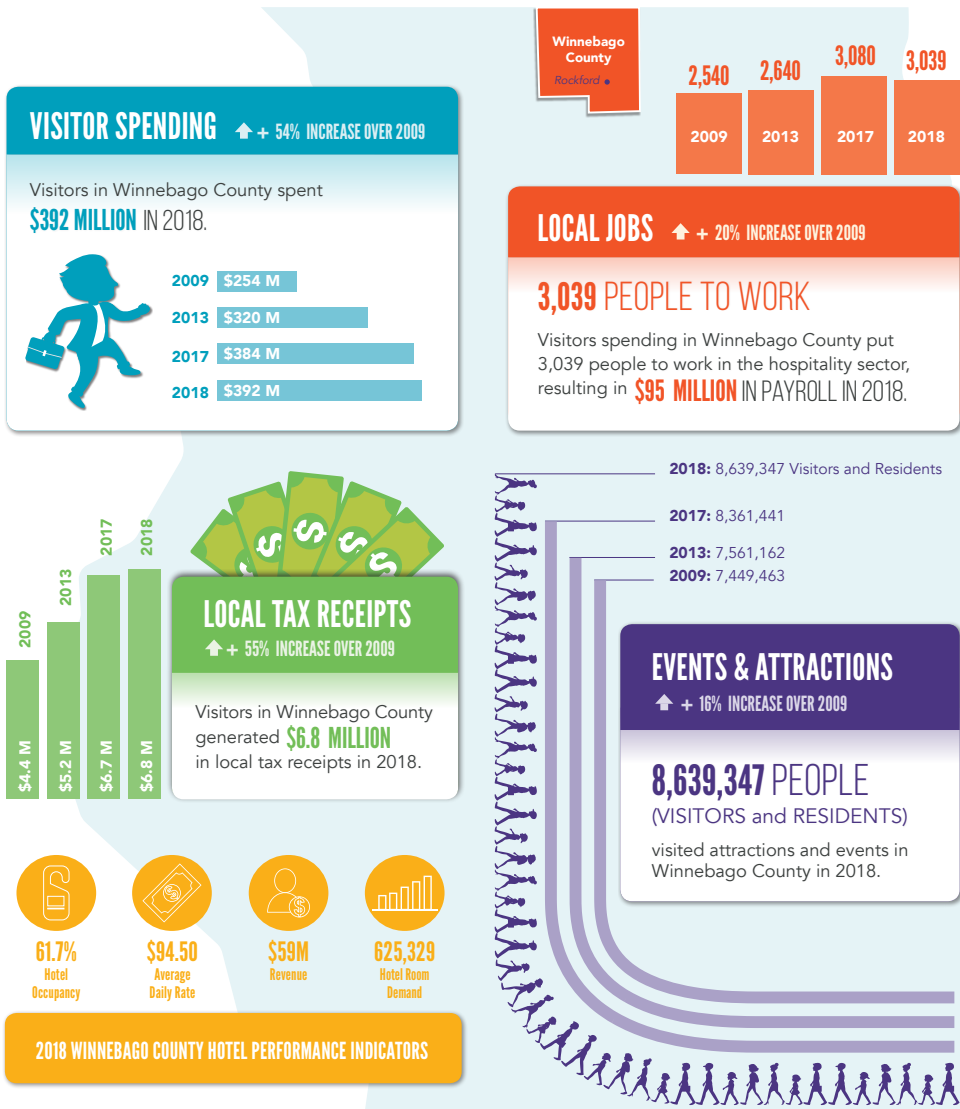
\$30 million in state and local taxes.

The ten-year period between 2009 and 2018 shows visitor-related economic impact in Winnebago County growing **54 percent**; faster than all other major counties except Cook (Chicago, at 58 percent) and much faster than the set average of 41 percent. Major metropolitan counties that were used for comparison are Cook, DuPage, Champaign, McLean, Lake, Will, Peoria, Madison, St. Clair, Sangamon, Kane and Rock Island.

In addition to spending, visitors also generated increased funds for local and state tax coffers to use for core services such as police, fire and public works. In 2018, visitors paid **\$23.2 million** in state and **\$6.8 million** in local tax receipts (up 6.2 percent and 0.7 percent). Visitor expenditure, tax revenue and employment data are provided by the U.S. Travel Association and the Illinois Department of Commerce.

“Tourism is a strong economic driver locally and has caused a ripple effect throughout our community. Based on reports and data analysis we can clearly see many businesses and organizations are thriving from successful tourism-related initiatives and events,” said **Jennifer Furst, RACVB’s board chair**. “I especially appreciate the correlation between visitor spending and how that helps put local people to work.”

The economic impact of tourism has grown rapidly in recent years, and the recent and coming investments in the community – including a new downtown hotel and conference center and a future casino gaming complex in Rockford – will fuel additional impact.



RACVB is responsible for promoting the Rockford region as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the impact of travel, RACVB strengthens the economic position of the region and provides opportunities for people in our communities. [www.gorockford.com](http://www.gorockford.com)



[GOROCKFORD.COM](http://GOROCKFORD.COM)

Source: Illinois Department of Commerce, US Travel Association | Attendance numbers are self reported

# SUMMER AT DAVIS PARK

In June 2018, Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara appointed a task force to increase utilization of the park and advance its redevelopment. In concert with the task force and with future planning ongoing, earlier this summer Rockford Sharefest partnered with the City of Rockford, the park's owner, to refurbish the park.

The larger vision for the park will unfold and become a reality over the next few years. "However, we don't want to wait to bring the park back to life," said John Groh, task force chair and RACVB president/CEO. "The improvements made by Rockford Sharefest and the City of Rockford helped prepare the park for company, so to speak. And now we're ready for our residents and visitors to come back to Davis."

## MUSIC AT DAVIS PARK

Music at Davis Park events represent a



Summer at Davis Park: Workout Wednesdays

variety of music genres and feature live bands, performers, food and beverage trucks and vendors. Concerts took place on the north lawn of Davis Park every Thursday in August from 5 - 9 p.m. The concerts WERE free and open to all.

Workout Wednesdays occurred every Wednesday July 24 through August from 5:30 - 7 p.m. on the north lawn of Davis Park. The workouts WERE FREE and featured high-energy music and exercise



Summer at Davis Park: Music at Davis Park

led by fitness instructors from the YMCA of Rock River Valley and a free Kid Zone for kids ages 5 - 12, with activities led by the Rockford Park District's Youth Sports Department.

"I want to thank the RACVB not only for working tirelessly to attract visitors but also for its work to make Rockford a place for residents to proudly work, live and play." said McNamara.

# BUSINESS IS BLOOMING



Business is Blooming Award Recipients

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) announced the 2019 **Business is Blooming** program winners who further the efforts of Forest City Beautiful and aim to enhance the Rockford region by beautifying their storefronts and entrances to their businesses. The Business is Blooming Awards **exists to build a culture of community involvement and visually appealing environments for our city.** The program supports and acknowledges the positive values and efforts displayed by our business owners to make Rockford a beautiful and enjoyable place to live, work and play. Activities that strengthen civic pride and the customer experience are vital links to long-term success in the Rockford region. Rewarding beautification efforts acknowledges this value.

Now in its third year, the Business is Blooming program expanded the boundaries by more than doubling the geographic area of businesses who could participate to include businesses east of Alpine. A team of ten judges visited the exterior grounds of selected businesses to be considered for this designation. Out of more than 40 businesses, seven were chosen in select categories: Small Business **5 Forks Market** (6565 Lexus Dr, Rockford, IL 61108); Big Business **Mercyhealth Javon Bea Hospital - Riverside** (8201 E Riverside Blvd, Rockford, IL 61114); Restaurant Outdoor Dining **Franchesco's Ristorante** (7128 Spring Creek Rd, Rockford, IL 61107) AND **The Olympic Tavern** (2327 N Main St, Rockford, IL 61103); Best of State Street **The Standard** (214 E State St, Rockford, IL 61104); Returning Champion **UIC Health Sciences Campus - Rockford** (1601 Parkview Ave, Rockford, IL 61107); Hidden Gem **City Body Shop** (301 N Madison St., Rockford, IL 61107). This year, there were two Special Recognition winners as well; **Veteran's Memorial Circle** (Auburn St. and Main St) with "Biggest Blooms," and **Deli Italia** with "Unique Blooms" (507 E State St, Rockford, IL 61104).



Biggest Blooms Awards

# SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

## SPORTS SALES HIGHLIGHTS

RACVB sports sales team produced a highlight-reel first quarter, complete with new bookings, multiple national bids, trade shows, site visits and awards/designations. To kick things off, **Nick Povalitis, director of sports development**, earned the prestigious Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) designation at 2019 Destinations International (DI) Convention in July in St. Louis. The CDME curriculum represents tourism's most rigorous educational program and culminates in being awarded the highest industry designation after coursework, research papers and a three-part final exam.

In August, RACVB put together a bid for the 2020 International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) North American Junior Open, which would bring an estimated 200-plus athletes and 750-plus total visitors to the Rockford region for six days next summer. The bid process was a direct result of **RACVB successfully partnering with BMO Harris Bank Center, USA Table Tennis and ITTF North America** to win the rights to host Rockford's first-ever Olympic Trials October 5, 2019. The team's sales efforts continued at 2019 Connect Sports Marketplace, where it met with more than 40 event operators from August 26-29 in Louisville. The show yielded event contract requests of the UW Health Sports Factory from two national basketball operators, including Primetime Sports and State Basketball Championships. In addition, Povalitis earned another accolade when he was honored as a 2019 Connect Sports Game Changer, a peer-nominated award that recognizes sports tourism's most innovative professionals.

Fresh off the trip to Connect Sports, RACVB welcomed State Basketball Championship to the Forest City for a site visit in early September. After touring

30 basketball courts throughout the region, the Arizona-based event operator inked a two-year extension that secures a projected 150-plus teams and 2,500 total visitors in March 2020 and 2021 for the Illinois Middle School Basketball Championships. On September 9-12, RACVB attended 2019 S.P.O.R.T.S. The Relationship Conference in Panama City Beach, FL, where it met with 25 national event operators to pursue future business. RACVB also delivered two major national championship event bids in September—one as a partnership with the Midwest Wildcats for the 2020 Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Fourth Grade Boys Basketball National Championships and another in partnership with Illinois/USA Wrestling and the Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation for the 2020-21 USA Wrestling 16U National Dual Championships. The RACVB team wrapped up the quarter by booking the **2020 USA BMX Midwest National Championships** and the 2020 Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) A Tier Rockford Open.

## INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

RACVB hosted two international fam tours. Ten media and trade with Visit USA Austria visited the Coronado Theater, Anderson Japanese Gardens and the Laurent House.

**A German journalist visited Rockford** as part of the Frank Lloyd Wright Trail which highlights the Laurent House.

Public Relations efforts: The German office distributed a press release on the Mural project CRE8IV resulting in 69 placements, over **3 million impressions with an ad value of \$132,027**.

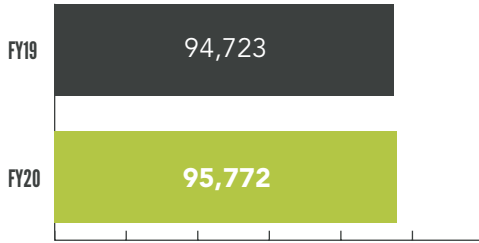


Visit USA Austria tours Anderson Japanese Gardens

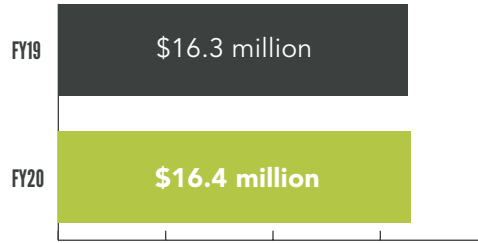


BMX Midwest Nationals

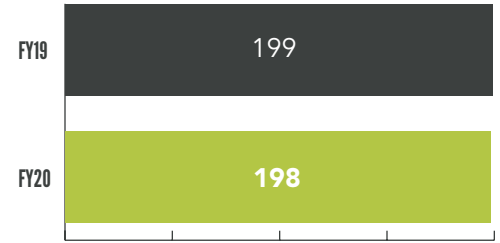
## Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



## Estimated Economic Impact



## Number of Event Bookings



## MEETING SALES

The RACVB will welcome the Illinois Rural Water Association Conference October 22-23, 2019. The group will have 150 attendees and approximately **300 room nights**. The Illinois Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives Annual Fall Conference has confirmed that their conference will be held at the Embassy Suites on November 4-6, 2020. The conference will have approximately 125 attendees and produce approximately 160 room nights.

During the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2020, RACVB has:

- Attended the **Connect Specialty Conference** in Louisville, KY August 26-29.
- **Conducted 41 one-on-one appointments** with meeting planners from all over the country who handle meetings and conferences of various size.
- Attended **Small Market Meetings Conference** in Green Bay, WI September 24-26.
- Conducted 26 one-on-one appointments with meeting planners who **plan small to mid-size meetings**.

In addition to the appointments, we **sponsored and participated in the Know your Sponsor Auction**. We are working with other potential groups to confirm their events in Rockford, such as Illinois Recreational Cheerleading Association State Championships 2021-2023, Upper Midwest CVB Conference 2021, Rotary District Conference 2021 and more.



Small Market Meetings Conference



Rockford Olympic Trials Table Tennis

## BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

### 2020 Illinois State Middle School Basketball Championships

March 13-15, 2020  
1500 Room Nights  
\$270,000 EEI

### 2020 PDGA A Tier Rockford Open

May 29-31, 2020  
250 Room Nights  
\$45,000 EEI

### 2020 USA BMX Midwest Nationals

June 19-21, 2020  
2900 Room Nights  
\$522,000 EEI

### 2021 Illinois State Middle School Basketball Championships

March 19-21, 2021  
1500 Room Nights  
\$270,000 EEI

Estimated Economic Impact Total = **\$1,107,000**

# MARKETING

## MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS & EARNED MEDIA

With summer underway the media results focused on seasonal media outreach highlighting things to do in the Rockford region. Media coverage in July and August included **Magic Waters, a Six Flags Waterpark, in ShermanTravel** story about affordable waterparks in the region and World Bride Magazine included the Rockford region's wedding

venue guide. The various **stories generated 84,709 impressions**. In September, Rockford was highlighted in the Chicago Tribune, Single Tracks and Red Tricycle (all online media outlets) related to fall activities, events and places to enjoy fall colors. The **articles generated 1,062,519 impressions** combined.



**ShermanTravel** TOP DEALS DESTINATIONS INTERESTS CRUISE SMART LUXURY FAM

9. Six Flags Magic Waters: Rockford, IL

One of the most affordable Six Flags-branded parks in the country, **Magic Waters**, offers dozens of ways to relax or catch a thrill. Double Dare Drop plunges guests down a 75-foot near-vertical drop, while Screaming Lizard takes sliders through a free-fall and 45-degree loop. Admission: \$19.99 if you purchase online at least one day before your visit.

10. Water World: Denver, CO

**Water World** opened in 1979, and is home to Colorado's first two waterslides. Today, the park has grown to encompass over 50 attractions, including a hydromagnetic water-

## SOCIAL MEDIA

**TOP FACEBOOK POST**  
 People Reached: **32,548**  
 Reactions, Comments & Shares: **2,576**



**FACEBOOK**  
 27,076 followers  
 (1,023 increase)



**INSTAGRAM**  
 10,787 followers  
 (499 increase)



**TWITTER**  
 6,558 followers  
 (51 increase)



**YOUTUBE**  
 474,133 video views  
 (57,177 increase)

## EARNED MEDIA (Meltwater) (July - September)

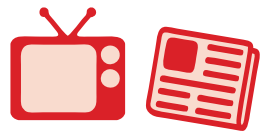
RACVB works to attract visitors by directly pitching stories to media. We focus pitches on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.



**\$2,811,560**  
 Average Ad Value



**29,100,694**  
 Total impressions



**3,677**  
 Total mentions (social, broadcast, online and print)

## PROMOTING ROCKFORD TO ROCKFORD

RACVB continues to provide two pages of content to **The Rock River Times each week** for the “RACVB View” section. Topics of the pages’ content in this quarter included fun things to do for the Fourth of July, pet-friendly locations, things to do during the summer months, Summer at Davis Park live music and workout series, Rock River Anything That Floats Race, Business is Blooming (a program of the Forest City Beautiful initiative), tourism’s economic impact, Olympic Trials table tennis, individuals who rock in the Rockford region. The **weekly pages also highlight four local events** occurring in the upcoming weekend. These four events are also mentioned on RACVB’s weekly radio and television spots including The Bull, B103, WXRX, WROK, The Eagle, and WIFR TV. This quarter, **21 news releases and advisories** were sent to our local media partners and stakeholders to keep them informed of what RACVB is working on and involved in. Subjects of the releases included **sports tournaments booked or happening in the region** (Rock River Robotics, Tough Mudder, Olympic Trials table tennis, NSA softball, McHenry County College Volleyball Invitational) as well as RACVB news, initiatives and events (New board officers and members, Fred VanVleet Fan Fest and Summer Camp, Summer at Davis Park, Tourism Economic Impact for 2018, Fall into Fun seasonal events, Business is Blooming award recognition program and a Dasher Dash announcement). These press releases and advisories are emailed to the local media as well as RACVB stakeholders. RACVB continues to create and post original content for the blog on **gorockford.com**. In this quarter, 14 unique blogs were created by RACVB staff or Rockford region residents. RACVB blogs covered topics including Christmas in July, the top local coffee shops to visit, things to do during the summertime, places to spend time with grandparents in Rockford, Olympic Table Tennis Trials, **inspiring people in the community**, top places to get pizza and things to do during the fall season.

## ADVERTISING

**Midwest Meetings, Illinois Society of Association Executives, and Illinois Meetings & Events**  
Highlighting the “It’s Time We Meet” campaign

**Sports Destination and Sports Events**  
Highlighting Fred VanVleet as RACVB’s Sports Brand Ambassador for the “Bring Your Game 2 Rockford” campaign in each of their publications

**Northwest Quarterly Magazine**  
Highlighting Rockford’s downtown scene in a leisure-focused ad promoting the many “Experiences” and things to do in the Rockford region



## GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

### MOST SEARCHED TERMS

Things to do in Rockford, IL  
Rockford Events  
Anderson Japanese Gardens

### MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

Roscoe Lions Club Fall Festival  
Midway Village Museum – World War II Days  
Winnebago County Fair

### MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Anderson Japanese Gardens  
Burpee Museum of Natural History  
Discovery Center Museum

## Website Traffic Sources

72%  
Organic

4%  
PPC

3%  
Referral

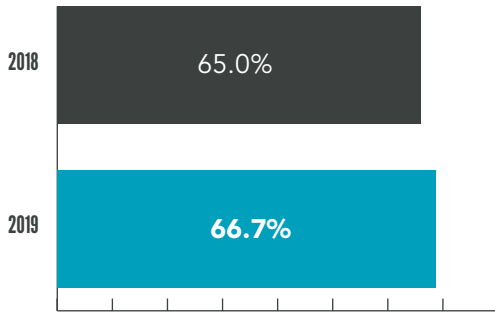
17%  
Direct

5%  
Social

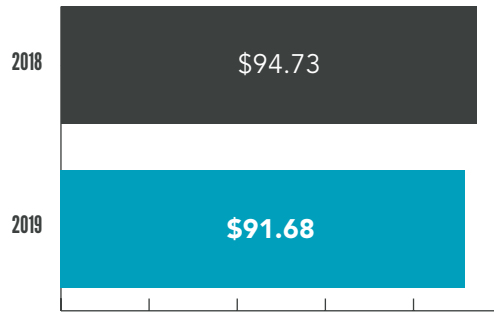
**173,361 total website visitors**

# WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - September)

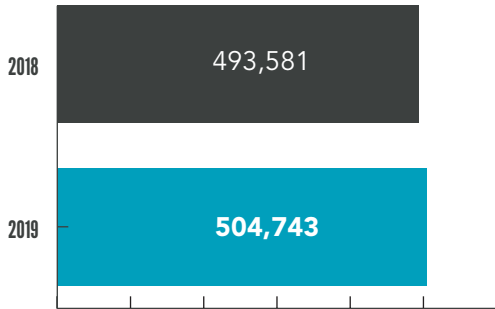
## Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



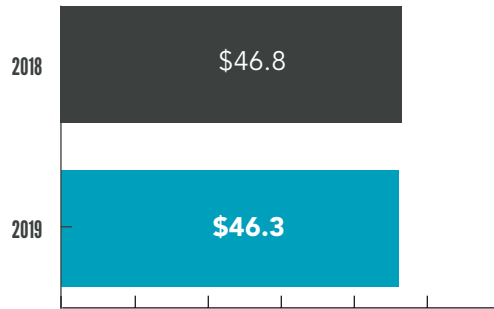
## Year to Date Average Room Rate



## Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



## Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



## New Staff Joins the RACVB Team



**Kara Davis**, Executive Assistant



**Austin Taylor**, Group & Event Services Manager

## RACVB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Jennifer Furst** (Chair), FurstStaffing

**Todd Cagnoni** (Vice Chair), City of Rockford

**Tim Myers** (Treasurer), WIFR-TV

**Einar Forsman** (Secretary), Rockford Chamber of Commerce

**Chad Anderson**, Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

**David Anderson**, Anderson Japanese Gardens

**Marcus Bacon**, Radisson Hotel & Conference Center

**Nathan Bruck**, City of Loves Park

**Nathan Bryant**, Rockford Area Economic Development Council

**Bryan Davis**, SupplyCore

**Patricia Diduch**, Village of Rockton

**Kevin Frost**, City of Rockford

**Tiana McCall**, Winnebago County

**Mike Nelson**, Valley Expo Displays

**Noel Nickel**, SwedishAmerican - Lake Peterson Home

**John Penney**, Painters District Council No. 30, Local 607

**Ted Rehl**, City of South Beloit

**Jay Sandine**, Rockford Park District

**Carol Schuster**, University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford

**Darrell Snorek**, Lamonica Beverages

## RACVB STAFF

**John Groh**, President/CEO

**Lindsay Arellano**, Vice President of Sales & Service

**Martasha Brown**, Director of Advancement

**Jenny Caiozzo**, Destination Development Events Manager

**Andrea Cook**, Associate Director of Marketing & Communications

**Kara Davis**, Executive Assistant

**Phil Elsbree**, Senior Sales Manager

**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

**Austin Taylor**, Group & Event Services Manager

**Tana Vettore**, Director of Destination Development