

Voice column for March 2020

Raising our national profile – in a good way

By John Groh

A year ago, in this space, we asked you to pick up digital trumpets to share the good news about our region with your social media networks by becoming 815 Ambassadors. Today, we want to say THANK YOU (and invite additional ambassadors to join the team)!

Thanks to more than 350 active Ambassadors, a dozen positive stories featuring the Rockford region as a great place to live, work and visit have been trumpeted across multiple online platforms for a reach of more than 400,000 people. We launched the program in February 2019 in partnership with our friends at Transform Rockford, the City of Rockford and RAEDC.

Here's how it works: At least once monthly, we email friends who sign up as Ambassadors asking them to post stories about our region on their various digital platforms including Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. The circle of influence widens with each share and repost among social media users in the Ambassadors' networks.

Our intent is to leverage your standing as regional thought leaders to reach your far-flung and influential networks of friends and business contacts. Gone are the days when Rockford allowed itself to be defined — too often in negative terms — by others. We needed to be more aggressive in telling our own story. For the past few years, with the help of our PR team, we've been promoting and securing placement of positive news stories nationally about the region.

By sharing these stories, Ambassadors play a vital role in raising our national profile in a way that benefits the local economy. This positive news highlights to outside investors that Rockford has the assets they need to flourish here. When we launched this program, we were pretty sure you would be eager to share information that persuades you daily that you're living in the right place at the right time. You didn't disappoint.

We have evidence that the program is working as we envisioned. Here are subjects of our top posts, along with the publication or online site where the stories initially appeared and the number of impressions for each post.

Top posts we've shared:

- Best of the Midwest: 9 must-see destinations worth a visit in 2019, Chicago Tribune, 8,489 impressions
- Rockford Art Museum feature story Chicago Tribune, 6,897 impressions
- Rockford Airport adding 500 jobs, Chicago Tribune, 6,121 impressions
- Rockford's Pride for NBA Champion Fred VanVleet, Forbes, 3,888 impressions
- 12 Regional Water Parks with Tickets Under \$30, Sherman's Travel, 2,455 impressions
- Rockford, Illinois has a plan to stop homelessness by the end of the year, Fast Company, 1,768 impressions
- On the Wings of Innovation in the Rockford Region, Machine Design, 1,014 impressions
- Penny Marshall Remembered at Play Ball event, www.mlb.com, 923 impressions

For all the stories we've pushed out to our Ambassadors, we've amassed 524 shares, 3,263 clicks, 70,507 impressions and \$14,441 in earned media value. Again, thanks to you!

We're pleased with how the program is working and we invite anyone who hasn't already signed up to do so. It takes just a minute. Go to <https://www.gorockford.com/media/815-ambassadors/>. Your trumpet awaits.

John Groh is president/CEO of Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. 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

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