



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT

FY20, Q3

January - March, 2020



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.

grockford.com

RACVB MISSION STATEMENT

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau drives quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.

PRIORITY RESULTS

CREATE ECONOMIC WEALTH

The Rockford region experiences growth in tourism's leading indicators.

ENHANCE TOURISM PRODUCT

The Rockford region offers unique and marketable experiences and venues that meet or exceed visitor expectations and enhance quality of life for citizens.

ENGAGE CONSTITUENTS ON BEHALF OF TOURISM

RACVB tourism marketing and destination development efforts have broad support among key stakeholders.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



During these tough and challenging times, the team at the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau has taken a distinct approach to focus on the needs of our community.

With so many tourism-dependent businesses hurting and residents unemployed, the importance of our hospitality and tourism industry has become crystal clear. Our region benefits when visitors travel to our region and support our economy.

As our region's destination management organization, we are fighting to preserve those on the front line of the visitor experience. We understand that the impact of COVID-19 will create a new norm for the tourism industry and destination development efforts in our region.

We have focused on an intentional approach of remaining positive and serving as a source of trusted and helpful information. In doing so, we aim to create a narrative fitting of our resilient community of over 285,800 residents. In the months ahead, we – with our partners – will face an uphill battle as we seek to generate business for the more than 720 attractions, retail shops, restaurants and hotels in Winnebago County. Still, this is a challenge we are up for.

As we move ahead, we'll continue to approach our work with the understanding that what is good for our community is good for our visitors, too. In that order.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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COVID-19 UPDATE

COVID-19 ACTION & IMPACT

As COVID-19 swept through the nation, its impact was felt swiftly and greatly by the tourism industry. On March 21, a stay-at-home order was put into effect for the State of Illinois. The severity has been felt by many, if not all of our tourism industry partners, including but not limited to: hoteliers, small businesses, the airline industry, business travelers, leisure travelers, healthcare providers, large corporate sponsors, donors, and our community members and frontline hospitality industry workers.

In true RACVB fashion we quickly adjusted our focus to meet the needs of our industry and our community. Our approach remained simple, but effective. Be Resourceful. Be Agile. Be a Partner. As the **destination management organization for Winnebago County**, our agency mobilized in additional ways to serve our community:

LOCAL BUSINESSES

Personal contact by phone and email to over 500 local businesses to share and provide needed resources including business loans, unemployment information, and best practices to adapt to business during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

HOTELS

Weekly hotel meetings have been

held to stay in touch with the needs of our hotel industry, remain abreast of the challenges, and communicate of group business adjustments in preparation for recovery.

TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT EVENTS

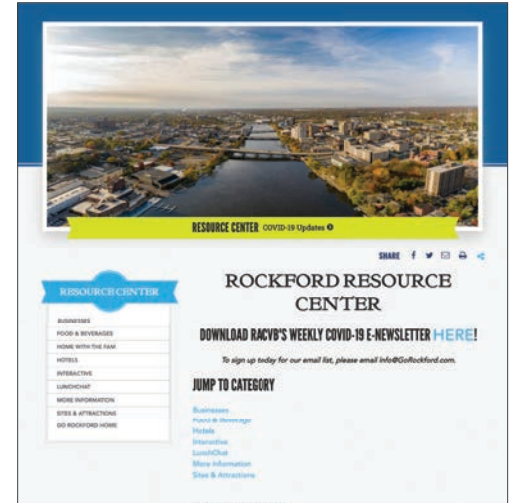
Our sales team is working diligently with facility managers to rebook events and reduce the economic loss of tournaments. We have also worked to get creative, holding the **first ever virtual FAM tour** with an attendance of 100 current and potential customers.

PARTNERING AND PROVIDING INTERACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

We are a hub for **interactive opportunities** for our community together with museum partners, local chefs, personal trainers, and other community partners. We have also launched fun activities such as a song-writing contest focused on community pride.

ADVOCACY & FUNDING

Advocating with local and federal political officials for the needs of our partners impacted by the loss of tourism and other destination management organizations state-wide and internationally. We are connecting with



RACVB Resource Center webpage

current sponsors to help to secure needs for key community events, including Stroll on State.

RESOURCE PAGE

The RACVB has developed a **resource page** housing informative LunchChat webinars every Tuesday and Thursday, as well as updates on key areas important to our community including: food & beverage restaurants adapting to changes with pick-up or to-go service, hotel resources, interactive opportunities developed by the RACVB and community partners, sites and attractions page focused on partners as they get creative to serve their community, and health related information.

CANCELED/POSTPONED EVENTS DUE TO COVID-19

Event Changes Between March 16 - May 1

	NUMBER OF EVENTS	ATTENDANCE	ROOM NIGHTS	ECONOMIC IMPACT
Postponed events	6	28,580	14,380	\$6,455,526
Cancelled events	32	72,030	17,255	\$7,812,655
TOTAL	38	100,610	31,635	\$14,268,181

MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

RACVB attracts visitors to the Rockford region by working with regional and national media outlets. Pitches focus on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.

- **Machine Design** - "On the Wings of Innovation: Aerospace engineering lifts both man and machine to greater heights"
- **Family Vacation Critic** - "13 Cheap Family Weekend Getaways 2020"
- **Rockford Register Star** - "Novel Challenges, Open Hearts"
- **Chronicle Media** - "Eight new meetings and events announced for the Rockford region"
- **Fast Company** - "This city has a plan to stop homelessness by the end of the year"



Family Vacation Critic article



Fast Company article

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

27,478 followers
(363 increase)



INSTAGRAM

11,812 followers
(334 increase)



TWITTER

6,580 followers
(10 increase)



LINKEDIN

820 followers
(150 increase)



YOUTUBE

500,809 video views
(32,872 increase)

EARNED MEDIA (January - March, 2020)

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



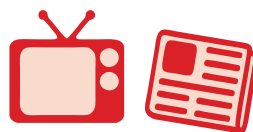
\$230,725

Ad equivalency



16,419,399

Total impressions



2,501

Number of mentions

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 Stroll on State, winter events, Rockford IceHogs, Rockford Symphony Orchestra live concerts, Illinois Snow Sculpting Competition, Rockford staycation ideas, Valentine's Day events and activities, regional shopping events, and highlights on various restaurants, sites, attractions and events. The top events highlighted in The Rock River Times are also mentioned on RACVB's weekly radio and television spots including The Bull, B103, WXRX, WROK, The Eagle, and WIFR TV as well as Soar Radio.

This quarter, seven news releases and advisories were sent to our local media partners and stakeholders and one news conference was planned to share details on what RACVB is working on and involved in.

RACVB contributes an article each month to the Chamber of Commerce for their **Voice publication** each month. Topics for the articles included ways the CVB activates downtown, an update of tourism spending statistics, and a breakdown of our 815 Ambassador program. Through this program we share positive news stories about the Rockford region with our partners and then they can reshare them through their social media channels.

NEWS RELEASE

Big Wins Equal Big Business for Rockford Region
Eight 2020-21 events to yield \$12.6 million of tourism economic impact

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 6, 2020

ROCKFORD, IL — Backed by big venues, variety and expertise, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is thrilled to announce eight tourism Big Wins that are slated to deliver \$12.643.430 of tourism economic impact to the region. These events, collectively representing a diverse mix in the meetings and sports segments — from major bowling and softball tournaments to bassed board and tattoo conventions—will take place throughout the Rockford area in 2020 and 2021.

Highlighting the multi-purpose nature of our region's tourism venues, these eight signature events will showcase the variety of our region's venues including: Mercyhealth Sportscore One, Mercyhealth Sportscore Two and its on-site Indoor Sports Center, Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront & Rockford Conference Center, Cliffbreakers Events & Riverview Inn & Suites, Don Carter Lanes, The Cherry Bowl and Park Lanes.

*The RACVB team continues to seek out opportunities to recruit a variety of events that draw visitors to the Rockford region—these eight big wins, a representative sample of our clients, will be a strong economic

RACVB news release

How Lucha Cantina Is Dealing With This New Reality
Monday, March 23, 2020 1:00 PM by Guest Blogger



RACVB blog

RACVB continues to create and post original content for the **blog page** at gorockford.com. In this quarter, nine unique blogs were created by RACVB staff and guest bloggers throughout the

GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Things to do in Rockford IL
- Rockford Home Show
- Rockford IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- 2020 Rockton Yeti Fest
- 40th Annual Rockford Home Show
- First Fridays

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Indoor City Market
- Skybox
- Coronado Performing Arts Center

Website Traffic Sources



78,094 total website visitors

ADVERTISING

IHSA Girls State Bowling program

Woodfire Brick Oven Pizza and highlighting the region's culinary scene

Illinois Office of Tourism website (digital)

Winter activities at Rock Cut State Park

Midwest Living - Best of the Midwest

Rock Cut State Park stand up paddle boarding and other adventurous activities

Connect Sports

Mercyhealth Sportscore Two soccer fields



Midwest Living

Biking and outdoor activities at Rock Cut State Park

Rockford region. RACVB blog topics included Stroll on State, How to Plan for a Rockford Staycation, and a guest blog from Jamie Diaz Ruiz (Rockford native and esports commenorator). Blogs near the end of the quarter also highlighted area businesses and how they are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS SALES HIGHLIGHTS

RACVB sports sales opened the new calendar year and third quarter of its fiscal year by bidding to host the **North American Fastpitch Association World Series**—and within a few weeks it was awarded the event set for August 12-16, 2020 at Mercyhealth Sportscore One. The NAFA World Series will consist of four divisions (A, A Major, AA and recreational league) and is expected to bring in 80 teams for over a five-day span. Rockford, which won the bid over Topeka, KS, is projected to garner \$694,514.47 in tourism economic impact from the event.

Before COVID-19 began to impact the event and hospitality industry locally in early March, RACVB also bid on and secured the **2020 USA Ultimate National Training Camp**. The event, which has since been canceled due to the pandemic, was set to bring the nation's best ultimate players to Mercyhealth Sportscore Two for a week in preparation for world tournament play later in the summer. It also marked the fifth time since 2015 that RACVB had led a winning national bid process for a USA Ultimate event.



USA Ultimate at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two

As event venues and the community began to shelter at home, RACVB shifted its focus in the short-term toward salvaging postponed and lost business by attempting to reschedule events for later in 2020. These efforts continued through the end of March, and remained at the onset of Q4.

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

Rockford Area CVB participated in the **Great Lakes USA China Sales Mission** in early January. The group visited Beijing, Chengdu and Shanghai with sales calls to major tour operators and workshops with travel agents and tour operators. Over the weeklong mission over 125 Chinese travel specialists learned about the Great Lakes region and Rockford.

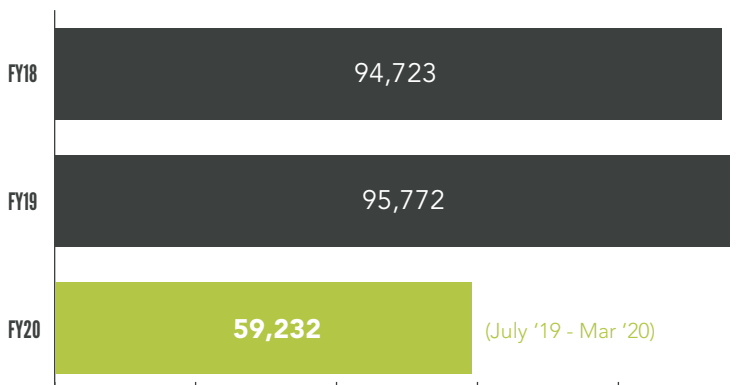


Great Lakes USA China Sales Mission

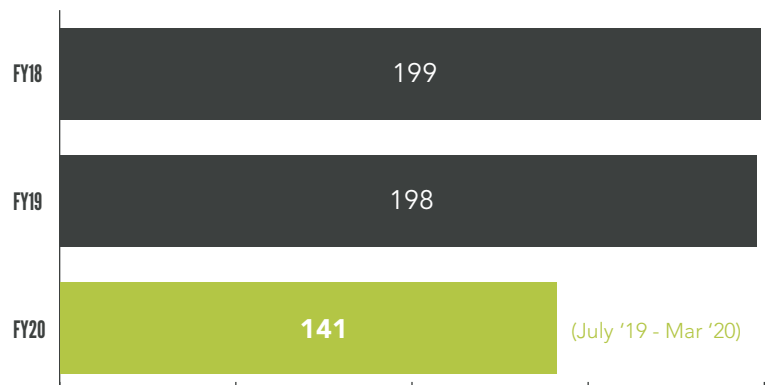
RACVB also participated in **Connect Travel Marketplace** in Orlando in late February. Rockford partnered with the Illinois Office of Tourism in a sponsorship opportunity and Rockford product was presented during 42 pre-scheduled appointments to international tour operators.

PR highlights included 79 placements in the UK and Germany with an audience of 3.7 million and an ad value of \$350,000.

Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



Number of Event Bookings



MEETINGS MARKET UPDATES

RACVB welcomed the **Gospel Radio Awards** which brought 1,500 attendees to Heartland Community Church and a total of 300 room nights. RACVB also welcomed **Paleofest** to Burpee Museum of Natural History which resulted in 170 room nights.



Gospel Radio Awards (photo credit: Albert "Cheeks" Riley Jr.)



Paleofest

RACVB conducted a sales mission to Springfield, IL on February 24 - 25 in order to meet with several state associations and meeting planners that represent state associations and present how Rockford is a great fit for their association meetings. He met with Kristen Ball who is an independent meeting planner that represents several different state associations, Pivot Management company that represents

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

North American Fastpitch Association/NAFA A Major World Series

August 12 - 16, 2020
2,340 room nights
\$694,515 EEI

USA Waterski 2020 NSSA Central Regional Show Ski

July 11 - 12, 2020
500 room nights
\$296,936 EEI

Illinois News Broadcasters Association Fall 2021 Convention

September 23 - 25, 2021
100 room nights
\$37,156 EEI

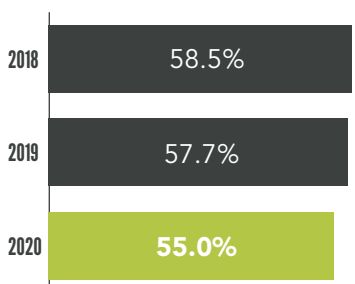
Estimated Economic Impact Total = **\$1,028,607**

the Illinois Society of Association Executives among other associations and the Illinois Primary Health Care Association.

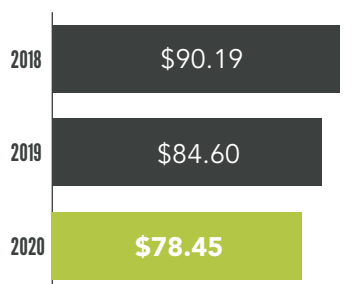
The **Illinois News Broadcasters Association** will take place at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront from September 24 - 26, 2021 and will result in 100 room nights, while **The Gaming Outsider 2020 Rock River Valley Video Game Convention** from September 19 - 20, 2020 taking place at Cliffbreaker Events Center anticipates 750 participants and will result in 150 room nights. The sales team is working on other groups to confirm their events in Rockford including the Vietnam Veterans of America Conference 2022, Illinois Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses Conference 2021, Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management Conference 2022 and more.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - March 2020)

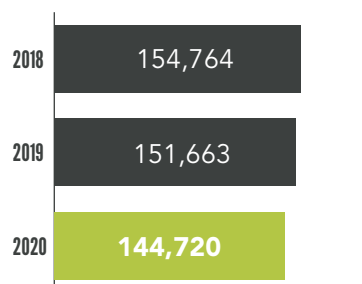
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

STROLL PLANNING CONTINUES IN THE 3RD QUARTER

Stroll on State for many years has been one of the community's top events, with attendance peaking to over 87,500 individuals in downtown Rockford. A lot of work takes place behind the scenes to ensure an event worthy to kick-off the holiday season for our region.

During the 3rd quarter the Destination Development team continued the 11-month planning calendar for the 8th Annual Stroll on State. This included an evaluation of last year's event and reconnecting with partners, sponsors, and volunteers, all of which are essential to the success of this community-focused event planned for November 2020. In addition to these connections the team has been working diligently on the creation of the stroll logistics map and recruitment of volunteer performers.

The excitement continued in the 3rd Quarter as the team began planning for the Stroll on State Parade. The Stroll on State parade application became live in the 3rd quarter to help in producing the over 55 floats and parade groups per Stroll Parade.



Stroll on State 2020 hat options

Our **Facebook interaction remains strong** with over 107 comments helping us to select our exclusive 2020 Stroll on State Commemorative Hat. Our team already has its eyes on the 2020 Stroll on State Tree and will continue planning for one of the community's premier events produced "by the community and for the community."

In reflection of this past year's Stroll on State, we are in awe of our volunteers and their dedication to Stroll on State. **For every individual, group, organization and family...thank you!** Special thank you to the Harlem National Honors Society for running the grounds cleanup throughout the event!



Stroll on State 2020 balloons



RACVB Board & Staff

RACVB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jennifer Furst (Chair)
FurstStaffing

Marcus Bacon
Radisson Hotel & Conference Center

Daniel Fellars
Winnebago County

John Penney
Painters District Council No. 30,
Local 607

Todd Cagnoni (Vice Chair)
City of Rockford

Nathan Bruck
City of Loves Park

Kevin Frost
City of Rockford

Ted Rehl
City of South Beloit

Tim Myers (Treasurer)
WIFR-TV

Nathan Bryant
Rockford Area Economic
Development Council

Tiana McCall
Rock Valley College

Jay Sandine
Rockford Park District

Einar Forsman (Secretary)
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Bryan Davis
SupplyCore

Mike Nelson
Valley Expo Displays

Carol Schuster
University of Illinois College of
Medicine Rockford

Chad Anderson
Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

Patricia Diduch
Village of Rockton

Noel Nickel
SwedishAmerican

Darrell Snorek
Lamonica Beverages

David Anderson
Anderson Japanese Gardens

RACVB STAFF



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President, CEO



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Vice President of Sales &
Service



Martesha Brown
Director of Advancement



Andrea Cook
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Kara Davis
Executive Assistant



Phil Elsbree
Senior Sales Manager



Heidi Gee
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Receptionist



Jennie Hahn
Customer Services Specialist



Fred Harris
Visitor Services Assistant



Lindsey Kromm
Accounting Assistant



Elizabeth Miller
Creative Services Manager



Joanne Nold
Director of Finance &
Administration



Kristen Paul
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Development



Nick Povalitis
Vice President of Marketing
& Sports Development



Austin Taylor
Group & Event Services
Manager

