

# NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



## **RACVB Founding President/CEO, Wendy Perks Fisher, Inducted in to Industry Hall of Fame**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 16, 2020**

**ROCKFORD, IL** — The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is honored to announce that Wendy Perks Fisher, RACVB's retired president/CEO, has been inducted into the Hall of Fame for Destinations International, the world's largest organization serving and representing destination marketing organizations (like RACVB) focused on helping member agencies boost economic impact, create jobs and improve quality of life through tourism.

Fisher, a Rockford native, became the bureau's first executive director in 1986, shortly after the agency was created to help grow the region's troubled economy and positively impact the lives of residents. Over the 20 years of her tenure, Fisher's visionary leadership was the driving force in developing the region's tourism industry, which now annually provides \$400 million in economic impact to Rockford and Winnebago County, said John Groh, RACVB's current president/CEO.

"It's a high honor for Wendy to be among a select few inducted into the Hall of Fame. It demonstrates that for 20 years our visitors bureau and the region's tourism industry were led and shaped by someone of the highest caliber in the field."

Groh, who has led RACVB since 2009, said Fisher's ever-expanding vision and high standards became part of the organization's DNA, and her influence continues to be felt. "Rockford would not be the destination it is today without her pioneering work and her vision through the years," Groh said. "We keep building on the work that traces back to Wendy."

Fisher, who retired from the bureau in 2006, said her focus in the early years was identifying the tourism potential in the existing character of the community. She asked herself: What matches our community profile? Through a series of interviews with community leaders and residents, it became apparent that growth potential existed in several areas: amateur sports (some of the current infrastructure already existed), the depth of interest in Rockford's cultural and ethnic groups, and the region's natural assets.

While other cities built attractions to draw tourism, Fisher said she looked to the "heart and soul" of the community to develop ways to market the area. A former educator and administrator in the arts locally and in Washington, D.C., she put equal focus on improving quality of life for residents. Besides, there was little local money to devote to marketing the city for tourism, as the region was struggling out of the Recession when RACVB was launched. Reflecting on her induction in to the Hall of Fame, Wendy noted she considered it an honor to be included in the Hall and encouraged current destination leaders to use the unique opportunities presented by Covid-19 to maximize their work on behalf of their communities and residents.

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“From the beginning, it wasn’t tourism we were after, it was economic development,” she said. “Tourism was a tactic for progress. I chalk our success up to partnerships, a lot of luck and a lot of hard work.”

The partnership between the bureau and the Rockford Park District led to the development of the hugely successful Sportscore One and Two, which now attracts more than 150 sports tournaments every year. Beyond driving development of this region’s nationally recognized and award-winning sports market, Fisher’s team sought to market and develop activities around the region’s rivers, golf courses, gardens, museums, historic sites and the park system, in addition to the then-new entertainment venue downtown – formerly the MetroCentre, now BMO Harris Bank Center. New attractions and entertainment options that were created during her tenure include:

- Aldeen Golf Club & Practice Center
- Alpine Hills Golf Course
- Anderson Japanese Gardens (a private garden converted to a public garden)
- Carlson Ice Arena/Sapora Playworld
- Davis Park at Founders Landing
- Historic Auto Attractions
- Keeling-Puri Peace Plaza
- Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden
- Learning Links at Ingersoll Golf Course (Tiger Woods program for young golfers)
- Mack Town Living History visitor center
- Rockford IceHogs
- Rockford RiverHawks (now Rockford Rivets)
- Rocky Glen OHV Park
- Sportscore Two
- Volcano Falls Park (miniature golf)

She was sought after in the industry for her expertise and served as founder, president or chair for many boards, committees and councils, including Visit Illinois; Illinois Council Convention & Visitors Bureaus, Northern Illinois Tourism Council, Rockford Area Arts Council and several other group related to tourism or the hospitality industry in the region.

Since retirement, she has continued to be active in various organizations and projects in the community, including serving on the Eclipse corporate and foundation boards (a family-owned corporation) and chairing the Eclipse 100 year global anniversary project. She also has consulted on organizational development with various nonprofit groups and corporations. In addition, she has served on the Geneva Lake (WI) Conservancy Board. She has received many awards and honors for her service to the tourism industry.

In recognition of the COVID-19 pandemic, Destinations International held a virtual 2020 Annual Convention on July 14-15. Induction into the Hall of Fame, the organization’s highest honor, recognizes individuals who have changed the future of the destination industry for the better.

**About RACVB:** 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)

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