



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT

FY20, Q4

April - June, 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.

gorockford.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



In wrapping up fiscal year 2020, our region has remained resilient and creative as the travel industry continues to combat the impact of COVID-19. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) in cooperation with partners has been working diligently to lead the way in advocacy and support of those impacted by the

loss of tourism. We understand that those impacted include businesses and organizations that add to the vibrancy of our community for both residents and visitors. It is for this reason that we have and will continue to strive for the successful return of tourism.

As a result of the state moving into phase four of the Restore Illinois plan, we are seeing businesses continue to reopen and tournaments return to the fields of play across our region. Although this is encouraging the reopening of businesses does not single handedly showcase a return to a thriving economy. It will take collaborative, regional strategic planning that incorporates building consumer confidence, dynamic marketing, and increased resources for our agency and tourism partners.

The climate of our region and nation surrounding tourism's impact does not stand alone in our agency's focal point over this past quarter. We would be remiss to not see the civil unrest surrounding racial inequalities brought further into the forefront through the recent events. Our agency has practiced intentionality behind our approaches and engagement and understand our role of supporting our minority communities to help ensure our region is welcoming for residents and visitors.

As we move into a new fiscal year, we take with us many lessons learned and look forward to leading our county towards recovery through tourism marketing, support of the diversity of our community and visitors, and partnerships with small business, hotels, venues, and attractions. Agility and creativity will continue to be our calling card in ensuring our region remains competitive as a destination. Our community's local economy and future depends on it.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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PREPARING TO REBOUND

PRACTICING RESILIENCE

Now more than ever, resilience and preparation are key to the success of our region. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) has worked diligently toward tourism recovery and community pride. Tourism can and will be used as a means to rebuild our community and positively impact our economy.

In order to rebuild our region through tourism, RACVB has focused on a few core areas that align with our organization’s priority results of creating economic wealth, enhancing tourism product, and engaging constituents on behalf of tourism. Our focal points include:

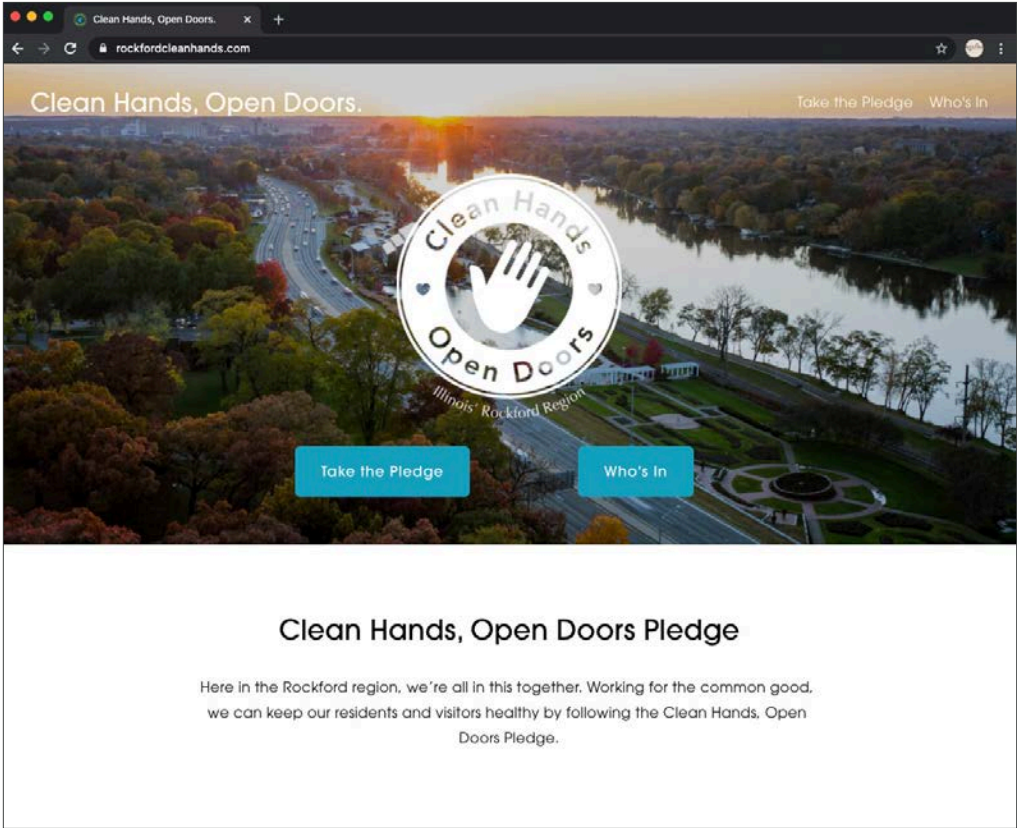
REMAIN COMPETITIVE AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on our sports tourism, meetings, and events programs, our team has worked hard to grow relationships with event operators and partners. Through these relationships, the Sales and Service team have minimized impact where possible through rebooking for a future date and determining solutions that will allow us to reengage for events in the future. In addition, our team continues to focus on new creative partnerships and ways to generate new business in the future.

INSTILLING CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Our work has continued in providing resources to our partners through the RACVB’s Resource Page, e-newsletter distribution, hotel industry resource meetings, and LunchChat webinars. In addition to this work, RACVB, in cooperation with the City of Rockford

Mayor’s Rockford Rebounding Working Group, has formally launched the Clean Hands, Open Doors Pledge, which encourages businesses and organizations to showcase their commitment to following best practices for keeping residents and visitors healthy as the community returns to its favorite restaurants, shops, attractions



RockfordCleanHands.com website

CANCELED/POSTPONED EVENTS DUE TO COVID-19

Event Changes Between April 1 - June 30

The RACVB team continues to work to minimize the loss of events due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

	NUMBER OF EVENTS	ATTENDANCE	ROOM NIGHTS	ECONOMIC IMPACT
Postponed events	6	28,580	14,380	\$6,455,526
Cancelled events	59	141,855	37,145	\$16,467,053
TOTAL	65	170,435	51,525	\$22,922,579

and event spaces. Thus far, more than 200 businesses have taken the Clean Hands, Open Doors Pledge. This program continues to grow across Boone, Stephenson and Winnebago counties. Through this community pledge, we hope to improve consumer confidence to help boost visitors and revenue opportunities for attractions, offices, hotels, retail establishments, restaurants and local businesses. For more information on the pledge, please visit rockfordcleanhands.com.



Clean Hands, Open Doors billboard - Midway Village Museum



Clean Hands, Open Doors billboard - Rockford Art Museum

STANDING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Social unrest and discussions of equity have been at the forefront during the last quarter. Our agency has made a commitment to our minority communities to help ensure that the Rockford region is welcoming to all. RACVB issued a statement in support of the Black community and peaceful protests, and also established a process to ensure we welcome diversity. Our process is as follows:

Listen.

Become better listeners of our community members and the industries we serve to understand how we can support and create a more welcoming region.

Plan.

Develop a plan and/or incorporate feedback into current plans as actionable steps with associated timelines.

Engage.

Engagement is not a one-time investment. We plan to continue engagement with groups to ensure the channels of communication remain

open and our advocacy meets the needs beyond the recent events that have occurred. This will help us to ensure we remain agile to the needs of our minority community.

Commit.

Our plan will be submitted to our board for approval and accountability as a reportable component, within our monitoring reports.



RACVB statement shared on social media

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.

- **Connect Meetings** - "CVBs Provide Virtual FAMs for Planners"
- **Forbes** - "Go On a Literacy Escape With These Suggestions from Independent Bookstores"
- **Smart Meetings** - "Taking a FAM in My Pajamas"
- **MPI.org** - "When FAMs Go Virtual"
- **Livability.com** - "Beyond Palm Springs: 7 Other Mid-Century Hotspots That Might Surprise You"
- **Northstar Meetings Group** - "Virtual Destination Tours Help Event Planners Get Business Back on the Books"

Taking a FAM in My Pajamas

By Gary Diedrichs April 17, 2020

Smart Meetings article

Northstar Meetings Group Virtual Destination Tours Help Event Planners Get Business Back on the Books

Rockford, Ill.

In Illinois, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau held a live virtual familiarization tour last week. During the four-long session, CVB members introduced themselves and shared information on the midwestern destination. Event venues and hotels, such as the [Coronado Performing Arts Center](#) and the [Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront](#), were given the chance to present on their offerings for groups. The tour is now available on-demand [here](#).

Northstar Meetings Group article

EARNED MEDIA (April - June, 2020)

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



\$294,886

Ad equivalency



31,879,657

Total impressions



2,287

Number of mentions

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK
27,575 page likes
(97 increase)

TOP FACEBOOK POST

April 23 | 52,285 people reached

GoRockford
Published by John Groh (?) · April 23 ·

One year ago today, Go Rockford announced CRE8IV: transformational ART, a new mural festival for Rockford. As part of our celebration and spotlight on creativity, we are pleased to commemorate this anniversary by looking back through the release of a film documenting the landmark event's transformational impact.

The film was commissioned by RACVB and created in partnership with @GrahamSpencer! Artist = iisA fRosT Atalie Gagnet Jenny Mathews Corey Barksdale Atlanta Art Gallery Yulia Avgustinovich Art Brett Whitacre - Artist page Jenny Roesel Ustick Molly Z. Art+Design and Chris Silva

CRE8IV Transformatonal Art Documentary:Filmcz
09:40

GOROCKFORD.COM
CRE8IV Transformatonal Art Documentary Film [Learn More](#)

51,285 People Reached **3,648** Engagements [Boost Again](#)

243 15 Comments 132 Shares



INSTAGRAM
12,385 followers
(573 increase)



LINKEDIN
922 followers
(102 increase)



TWITTER
6,581 followers
(1 increase)

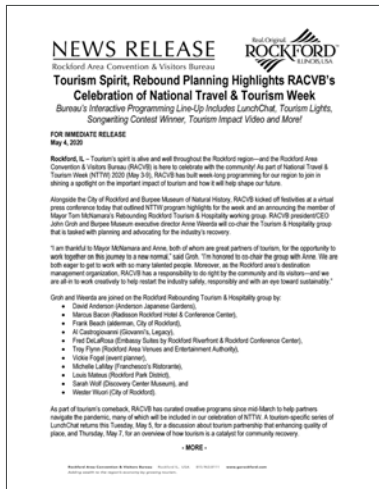


YOUTUBE
512,605 video views
(11,796 increase)

PROMOTING ROCKFORD TO ROCKFORD

During this quarter, communication with Rockford area residents increased exponentially in light of the stay-at-home order to help ensure pertinent information reached our residents and business owners. Every Wednesday, RACVB sent out an e-newsletter to stakeholders, including resources and local happenings amidst temporary business closures, changes, and eventual reopenings. Updates were also shared in the two weekly pages the Bureau writes for **The Rock River Times**, as well as **weekly media spots** on radio and television made virtually and over the phone. Weekly media spots include B103, WXRX, WROK, The Eagle and WIFR TV.

Seven news releases and advisories were sent out during the fourth quarter to local media partners and stakeholders, and two news conferences were organized to highlight RACVB's work within the hospitality and tourism sector. These news conferences were held online via Zoom and Facebook to allow for virtual attendance to complement socially-distanced, in-person attendees.



Press release

yielded 25 contest entrants, including Rockford-native Clark Kelly's winning song **"Up, Up, Up."**

Several new initiatives were implemented to connect with residents in the Rockford region, including the **Stay Home Songs** songwriting contest, cooking demonstrations, and weekly webinars. During the month of April, RACVB launched asked Winnebago County-based musicians to create an original song to show the resilient spirit of our community amidst the pandemic. Stay Home Songs

ADVERTISING

Travel Illinois Magazine

Rock Cut State Park cross country skiing for the Fall/Winter issue



To keep residents engaged, RACVB also created the **'What's Cooking at Home?'** cooking demonstration video series, during which several local chefs and restaurateurs shared videos creating a favorite dish for viewers learn from and subsequently cook at home. Finally, RACVB developed and launched the highly successful **LunchChat webinar series** to provide relevant and specific information for area residents and visitors on a variety of topics related to the pandemic, current events and how to navigate a developing new normal. In total, there were 19 LunchChat webinars from April-June.



LunchChat webinar

GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Rock Cut State Park
- Fiesta Cancun
- Pearl Lake

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- Food Truck Drive-Thru
- Rockford City Market
- 4th of July Fireworks at Rivets Stadium

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Rock Cut State Park
- Pearl Lake
- Sugar River Campground

Website Traffic Sources



135,449 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS SALES HIGHLIGHTS

In light of the pandemic, RACVB's sports sales efforts shifted toward rescheduling events in the short- and long-term, as well as a variety of virtual programs. As an extension to its #StayHomeRFKD campaign, the Bureau hosted **Home with the FAM** in April as a tourism industry leading live virtual familiarization tour for national meeting and sports event operators, trade publication partners and media. More than 80 regional, national and

international event guests attended the tourism industry's first virtual FAM during COVID-19, where featured venues included BMO Harris Bank Center, Coronado Performing Arts Center, Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront, Mercyhealth Sportscore One, Mercyhealth Sportscore Two and the UW Health Sports Factory.

After the success of Home with the FAM, RACVB subsequently co-hosted

a second **virtual site visit** alongside the Rockford Park District in May, when six national basketball event operators virtually toured the UW Health Sports Factory and the Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront. RACVB's online sports tourism programs continued when it produced a LunchChat webinar entitled "**Sports Tourism Readies for a Responsible Return,**" where guest panelists from the Huddle Up Group, Illinois High School Association and Rockford Park District reviewed best practices for welcoming events back to our community.

As Phase 3 of Restore Illinois shifted to Phase 4 in June, RACVB's plans for welcoming events back to town as early as July ramped up. Rescheduling and new business development efforts highlighted the last month of fiscal year 2020, when a variety of sports tourism event operators including USA Wrestling, Game Day USA, JP Sports, North American Fastpitch Association and USA BMX requested dates at many area facilities, setting the stage for an event re-start at the beginning of FY21.

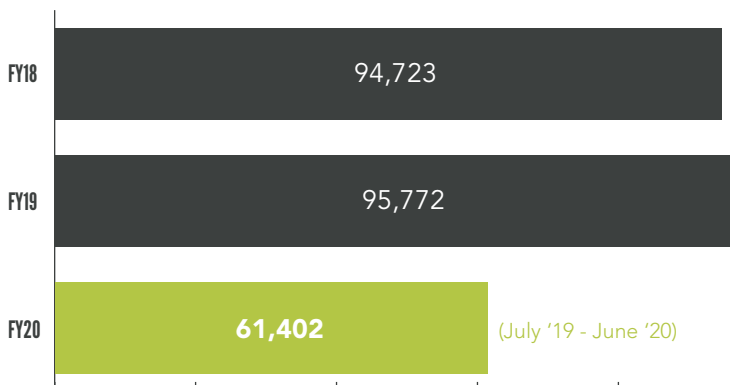


Home with the FAM - Mercyhealth Sportscore Two

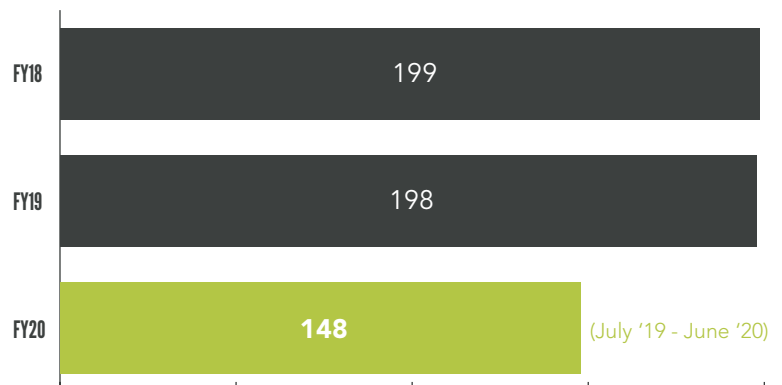


Home with the FAM - Embassy Suites

Future Hotel Room Nights Booked



Number of Event Bookings



MEETINGS MARKET UPDATES

During the fourth quarter, the sales team worked with meeting planners and hoteliers to postpone or cancel events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total to date, RACVB canceled 21 meetings and conferences, tourism event business that would have brought in a projected 43,355 visitors, more than 8,000 room nights, and ultimately \$2 million in tourism economic impact to the region.

Additionally, the Rockford region looked forward to welcoming two new hotel properties to its portfolio, highlighted by the



Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

Rotary District Conference 2021

April 17 - 18, 2021

100 room nights

\$53,460 EEI

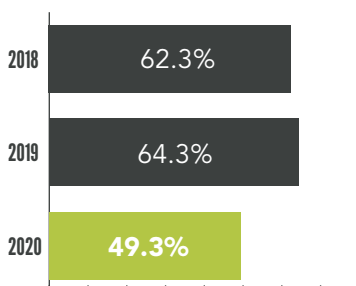
Estimated Economic Impact Total = **\$53,460**

Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront and the connected Rockford Conference Center that are slated to open this summer. This riverside hotel located in downtown Rockford features 160 suites, an outdoor rooftop bar, Tower Tap and Grill, indoor pool, fitness center, gaming rooming, and other great amenities. Between the hotel and conference center, there more than 22,000 square feet of total meeting space that includes up to 12 different meeting rooms and a main ballroom that can serve 550 guests in rounds. RACVB continues to assist the new property with clients, including the Rotary District Convention set for April 2021. Moreover, the **Home2 Suites by Hilton** opens in Loves Park later this summer. This 91-room extended-stay property is adjacent to the Interstate 90/ East Riverside Blvd. exit, which makes it an ideal location for business travel.

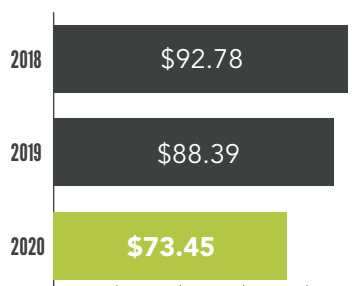
RACVB also hosted **weekly hotel conference calls** to update Winnebago County-based properties about regional occupancy numbers, cancelled and postponed announcements, and new program developments. Insights were shared by a wide array of industry speakers, including Michael Jacobson, President/CEO of the Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association, the Winnebago County Health Department, the Rockford Police Department and the Rockford Park District.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - June 2020)

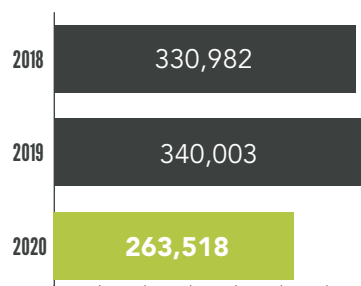
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

REDEFINING DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

The Destination Development team has been working hard to ensure the downtown looks beautiful! Through the **Forest City Beautiful** program, in partnership with the City of Rockford, planters have been installed in perfect timing for the reopening of many Downtown Rockford businesses and the city market.



Stroll on State 2019



Suzi's Garden Series sculpture in downtown Rockford



Forest City Beautiful plantings

Stroll on State planning continues as well. The team is preparing multiple scenarios that can be executed based on the current Restore Illinois phase. There will likely be virtual options, additional weekend entertainment and many more surprises.

CRE8IV beautification continues with the **extended contract for 13 sculptures** throughout Rockford. Through this beautification effort our community is able to enjoy the world of art as they walk throughout Rockford. With such beautiful weather and an increase of outdoor activities, we are happy to lead in providing another way to showcase pride and a support of the arts.

As we look back at the activity over the quarter, we would be remiss if we did not thank all of the sponsors who have helped to keep these impactful experiences and beautification efforts going. The support and flexibility of our sponsors as we adapt to the new norms has been phenomenal. We are looking forward to continued planning and preparation for the Stroll on State event this November.

SPONSORS

Thank you to the following businesses and groups who have already confirmed to sponsor Stroll on State in 2020:

Stroll on State Presenting Sponsor

Illinois Bank & Trust

Parade Sponsor

The Power Connection IBEW 364 & NECA

Attractions Sponsors

OSF HealthCare

Pierce Distribution

Butitta Brothers

Xfinity

Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23

Mercyhealth

Pearson

FurstStaffing & FurstProfessionals

David & Colleen Anderson Family

Project First Rate

Roofers & Waterproofers Local 11

Cleo

In-Kind Sponsors

Montel Technologies

Two Men and a Truck

Event Floral

Lino's

Rockford Mass Transit District

RACVB BOARD & STAFF

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FurstStaffing

Marcus Bacon
Radisson Hotel & Conference Center

Daniel Fellars
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John Penney
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Nathan Bruck
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Village of Rockton

Noel Nickel
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Lamonica Beverages

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& Sports Development



Austin Taylor
Group & Event Services
Manager

