

Reimagined Stroll on State Experiences Return Responsibly, Merry & Bright Programs Expand

Beloved Traditions, Refreshed Line-Up Pair In-Person Strolling with Virtual Experiences to Support Local Businesses and Hospitality and Tourism Industry

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 14, 2020

Rockford, IL – Alongside many sponsors, community partners and volunteers, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) is excited to again inspire hope, awe and wonder this holiday season through the production of a reimagined and socially distanced eighth annual **Stroll on State**, **presented by Illinois Bank & Trust**. With responsibility and safety at top of mind, this year's reimagined Stroll experiences are set to begin **Saturday, November 28** in downtown Rockford before extending region-wide with an at-your-leisure, safe line-up of in-person and virtual programs.

"Stroll is one of our community's most beloved traditions. Since the onset of the pandemic, it has been our fervent hope that we would be able to hold Stroll on State as we've known it in prior years. However, of course, that is not possible or responsible this year. So, while we are not able to gather all together at the same time, we can still come together as a community to celebrate the holidays, support local businesses and look with wonder to the future and the possibilities it holds," said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO.

As November 28, 2020, is also Small Business Saturday, RACVB is expanding Stroll activities and programs through December 24 to help raise awareness around the importance of supporting local, and as an avenue for enhanced marketing support of our region's local shops, restaurants, bars and small businesses of the hospitality and tourism industry.

"I look forward to attending Stroll on State each year with my family and, while this year feels a bit different, it will mean even more as we participate in-person and virtually. It's something we look forward to each holiday, spending time with our kids laughing and having such a great time together," said Gina Caruana, senior vice president of Illinois Bank & Trust. "This is exactly why the team at Illinois Bank & Trust is honored to be presenting sponsor, the event is right in line with our core values to care for one another, keep traditions and commitments a top priority, especially during times when they are needed the most."

This year's Stroll experience highlights include:

- expanded decorations downtown Rockford;
- a new location for the official City of Rockford Christmas Tree at Davis Park with extensive new decorations throughout the park;
- a day-of Merry & Bright Holiday television production on Channel 13 WREX that will feature a live online tree lighting program and conclude with fireworks at multiple locations city-wide;
- a virtual version of the Fleet Feet Dasher Dash 5k;
- an extended SantaLand at Rockford City Hall; and
- six locations around town to drop off letters to Santa.

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“This year has brought a range of challenges and uncertainty for many of us and has flipped the script on what we considered normal. The holidays are a time to rediscover special moments with our loved ones. It’s time to unify and come together—in some cases while still apart—to kick off the holiday season in a variety of unique and meaningful ways,” said Kristen Paul, RACVB director of destination development and director of Stroll on State. “Since 2013, Stroll on State has been a tradition that gives people a chance to rediscover the growth and development of our region’s core. It has brought so much hope to people who needed to believe change could happen and builds upon time-honored traditions while supporting our local businesses. This has always been more than a one-day event—it’s a movement and something our community needs now more than ever.”

This year’s refreshed Stroll on State traditions and experiences includes a variety of ways to engage from home, experience the Merry and Bright season responsibly, and explore locally in support of our small business community. **Some 2020 highlights include:**

- **Watch the Stroll on State Holiday Special, Davis Park Tree Lighting and Fireworks Celebration** as a primary way to enjoy the Stroll experience over a televised special on Channel 13 WREX from 6-7 p.m. Saturday, November 28, the night of Stroll on State. A co-production of RACVB, Heartland Community Church and Channel 13 WREX, this television event will feature holiday-themed feature stories and a variety of special guest appearances, culminating with a countdown to the tree lighting and an accompanying fireworks celebration around the region.

We invite local families to spend their Stroll day decorating their homes and trees for the holidays, and then gather together at 6 p.m. to watch the televised special program where together, as a community, we can all count down and light our own trees and the City’s tree at the same time. And, then, we’ll be launching fireworks from five locations throughout the area so residents can enjoy the festivities from the comforts of their homes and neighborhoods!

- **Support local!** Enhancing civic pride and helping to spark economic development embodies the essence of Stroll on State’s creation in 2013, and there may be no better time or bigger moment than now for our community to help small businesses. Join us throughout the season by shopping at local boutiques and galleries, dining out responsibly or ordering to-go at your favorite local restaurants or bar, and sharing the important message of taking care of our own.
- Fleet Feet Rockford and the RACVB are excited to bring back the Stroll on State **Dasher Dash Virtual 5K!** Due to COVID-19 restrictions, **this year’s race is an at-home edition that gives each participant the flexibility to complete the run anytime between November 28-December 24,** compete for hometown pride and make your run/walk a bit more festive and fun by using the RACE JOY app FREE for the Dasher Dash. Those planning to be out of town can also participate, and packets can be mailed out for an additional fee. Sign up today at <https://www.gorockford.com/stroll-on-state/dash/>!

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- **Visit SantaLand from 12-4 p.m. each Saturday November 28 and the next three Saturdays—December 5, December 12 and December 19** at Rockford City Hall (425 East State Street, Rockford, IL 61104), where you'll experience a mini-Strollville complete with a train, trees, ornaments, toy soldiers and of course Santa. Share your holiday gift wish list and take a picture with Santa! Just be sure to wear your mask, keep your distance, enter through the south entrance and exit via the north doors. Then, stay downtown to shop and eat, supporting local businesses and enjoying the decorations.
- For those who cannot make it to see Santa in-person, **Letters to Santa** returns thanks to FurstStaffing & FurstProfessionals and has been expanded to include six drop-off locations around the region. To ensure you get a response from Santa, **drop your letters off at any of the below locations between Saturday, November 28, and Monday, December 7:**
 - **FurstStaffing**, 2580 Charles Street, Rockford
 - **Rockford City Hall**, 425 E. State Street (south side of building), Rockford
 - **Davis Park**, Chestnut & Wyman Streets by the City Tree, Rockford
 - **Janenes Event Design Studio Social Café**, 607 West State Street, Studio B, Rockford
 - **Illinois Bank & Trust**, 4571 Guilford Road, Rockford, **OR** 308 West State Street, Rockford
- **Decorations will be bigger and brighter this year**, featuring Davis Park as another focal point of downtown décor and the new home of the official City Tree. **The Tree's new location will be on the north lawn of Davis Park, where memories will be made and captured as part of a holiday backdrop** that also adorns RACVB's new ROCKFORD letters. Be sure to also head north to check out the River District Tree, walk along State Street to the Eddie Green Tree, take in all of the downtown lights and décor, and **shop and eat local as you stroll and support the community at your own leisure**. And while Stroll on State helps us to officially kick off **Small Business Saturday** annually, please join us in revisiting your favorite shops, eateries and small businesses throughout the Merry & Bright season!
- Engage with us on GoRockford social channels and the Stroll on State Facebook page, where we will feature opportunities for the community to come together virtually to celebrate the season—and win some fun prizes along the way! Decorate your homes and neighborhoods as part of the new **Merriest and Brightest Lights** contest and get ready for the return of the **2 x 2 Shopping Challenge**. RACVB's **Stroll Supports Social Series** will feature **social media pop-up contests in the coming days and weeks** as creative ways to engage via your favorite social channels, support local and win prizes from November 28-December 24. Follow the GoRockford and Stroll on State Facebook pages today and watch for more updates!

"I'm excited by this year's vision for Stroll on State and the creativity we're seeing from the RACVB and the community volunteers in supporting the event and these holiday experiences," says **City of Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara**. "It's more important than ever that we remain together, even when we're physically apart. Stroll and its traditions bring our community together and provide support to local businesses when they need it most."

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For a complete listing of Stroll on State programs and updates, please visit www.strollonstate.com.

A Special Thanks to Our Volunteers, Who Continue to Go Above and Beyond for the Community

Stroll on State is made possible in part with the help of several organizations, businesses and volunteers. **Rockford Sharefest** is spearheading the volunteer efforts again this year. Volunteer Workshops are held **Saturday mornings from 8 a.m.–12 p.m.** and **Tuesday evenings from 6–9 p.m.** in downtown Rockford at 310 Winnebago Street (on the corner of Winnebago and Chestnut Streets). Children ages 12-15 may volunteer with an adult and a signed waiver; 16- and 17-year-olds must provide a signed waiver.

Volunteers are welcome to come to the workshops without prior registration. After the Workshops end on Tuesday, November 17, volunteers will still be needed for the downtown decorating days on **Friday-Saturday, November 20-21**. Those looking to lend a helping hand the day of the festival can get more information about available opportunities at www.strollonstate.com.

Volunteers will be practicing appropriate COVID-19 related precautions at all workshops as follows:

- Masks will be required to enter the workshop
- Non-contact temperature checks will be required at sign-in
- Hand sanitizer will be readily available for volunteers

A Special Thank You to Our Sponsors and Partners—Your Support Makes Stroll Possible!

Thus far this year, 18 local companies and organizations are providing financial support through sponsorship of a reimagined Stroll on State and Dasher Dash Virtual 5K. Their investment allows RACVB to present the event as a free gift to the community. Many other organizations and media provide in-kind support that is invaluable to the production of Stroll on State. Thank you to all of our 2020 sponsors and supporters, who have come together to generously support Stroll on State:

Stroll on State Presenting Sponsor:

- Illinois Bank & Trust

Davis Park Sponsor:

- The Power Connection IBEW 364 & NECA

Fireworks Sponsors:

- OSF HealthCare
- Pierce Distribution Services

SantaLand at Rockford City Hall Sponsor:

- Butitta Brothers Automotive

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City Tree Sponsor:

- Northwestern Illinois Building Trades Union

Decorations Sponsors:

- Xfinity
- Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23
- Cleo
- ComEd
- David & Colleen Anderson Family
- Pearson Plumbing & Heating

Support Sponsor:

- Winnebago County

Dasher Dash Virtual 5K Sponsor:

- SwedishAmerican

Stroll on State Website:

- Project First Rate

Letters to Santa Sponsor:

- FurstStaff & FurstProfessionals

Main & Mulberry Tree Sponsor:

- Illinois State Lottery

Eddie Green Tree Sponsor:

- Roofers & Waterproofers Local 11

Partner Organizations:

- City of Rockford
- Heartland Community Church
- Rockford Sharefest
- Fleet Feet Rockford

Television Production Partner:

- WREX 13

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

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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