



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

# QUARTERLY REPORT

**FY21, Q1**  
July - September, 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](http://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



The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB), since its creation, has been focused on driving quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development. We have remained of the mindset that a regional approach to tourism's growth, by supporting the entire Winnebago

County, holds for better economic strategy and greater results. To be successful it takes partnership, collaboration and leadership for an agency with the expertise to lead our destination's tourism growth. I proudly and boldly say this agency is the RACVB.

During the first quarter, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Office of Tourism released the 2019 data showcasing the proven success of our strategy for Winnebago County. On the following page you will see, prior to the impact of COVID-19 and record losses in the industry, Winnebago County achieved its tenth consecutive year of record tourism growth in 2019.

Especially during times such as these, I am reminded of the power of travel and tourism and how it greatly impacts our local economy. Tourism is connected to jobs and the support of small businesses in this region. Tourism supports regional core services. Tourism is quality of life. Tourism is quality of place. Tourism is economic development.

This acts as inspiration for the RACVB to keep up the good fight to lead the return of tourism. We are optimistic that tourism will rebound, and our strategy of a regional focus will be the catalyst to our return to tourism's growth.

Be well,

John Groh  
RACVB president/CEO

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT

Positive Economic Growth \_\_\_\_\_ 3

### MARKETING

Media Mentions & Placements \_\_\_\_\_ 4

Earned Media \_\_\_\_\_ 4

Social Media \_\_\_\_\_ 4

Promoting Rockford to Rockford \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Website Statistics \_\_\_\_\_ 5

Advertising \_\_\_\_\_ 5

### SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

Sports Sales Highlights \_\_\_\_\_ 6

International Efforts \_\_\_\_\_ 6

Meetings Market Updates \_\_\_\_\_ 7

Booking Highlights \_\_\_\_\_ 7

Winnebago County Hotel Statistics \_\_\_\_\_ 7

### DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Stroll on State \_\_\_\_\_ 8

### RACVB BOARD & STAFF

RACVB Board of Directors \_\_\_\_\_ 9

RACVB Staff \_\_\_\_\_ 9

# TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT

## 2019 MARKS 10TH-STRAIGHT YEAR OF POSITIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

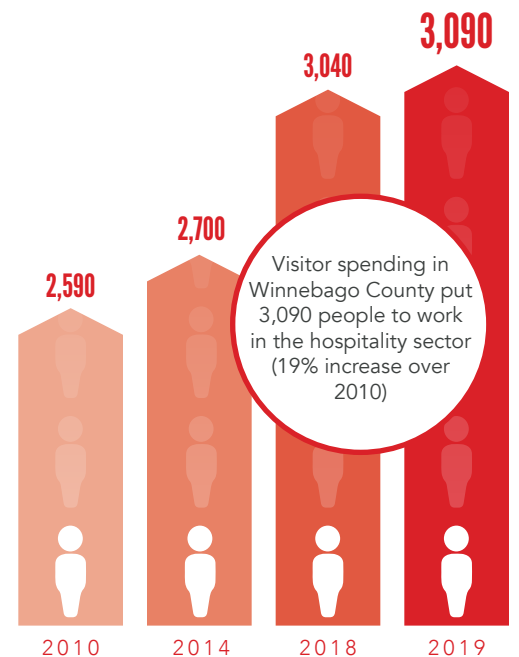
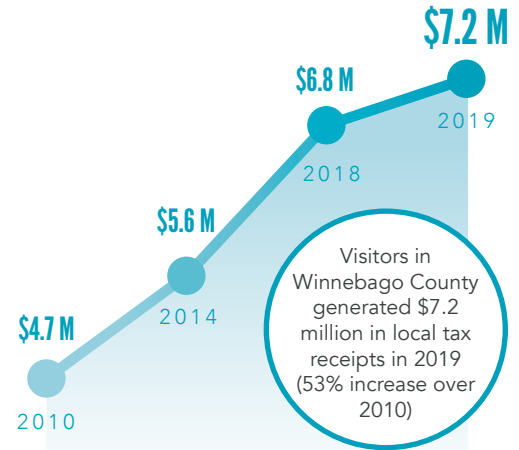
In many ways, tourism feeds into the daily fabric of our lives. It keeps our restaurants open, fills our museums, allows for support of arts and beautification, adds to the identity of our region as a top destination for amateur sports, and so much more.

In 2019, Illinois welcomed a record 120 million visitors, a record economic boost for the state. Visitors to the state of Illinois spent nearly \$43.1 billion, a \$1.3 billion increase over the prior year, according to the U.S. Travel Association. This supported 344,100 jobs in our state.

In Winnebago County, in 2019, **visitors spent \$409 million** while visiting our communities, an increase

of approximately \$17 million from the previous year. In addition, visitation to our region can be credited for generating **\$32 million in state and local taxes**. These taxes are not direct revenue to the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, but rather utilized for core government services that help to improve our quality of place and life by funding priorities such as police, fire and public works.

The RACVB team looks forward to continued work with partners and industry experts to get it back to the ten-year consecutive stretch of positive economic growth. During this recovery phase, we will remain focused on ways to better serve our local area sites, attractions and hotel partners.



## CANCELED/POSTPONED EVENTS DUE TO COVID-19

### Event Changes Between April 1 - September 30

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

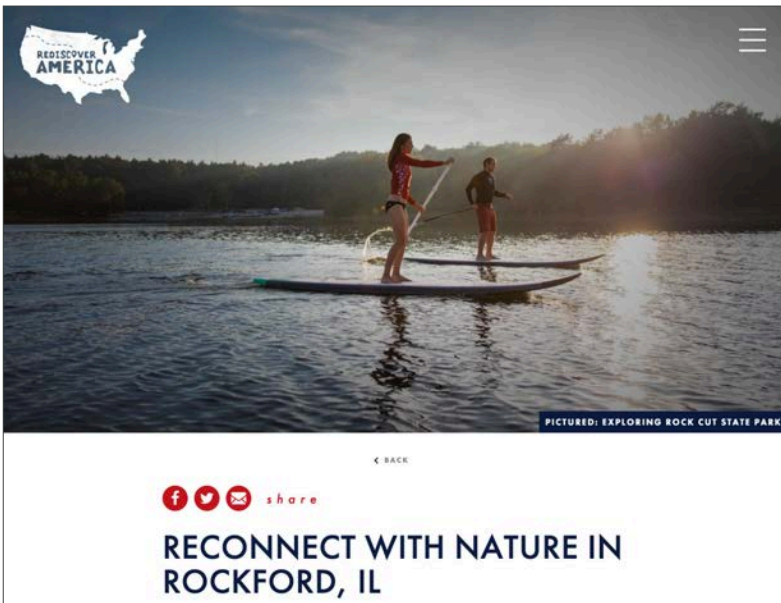
	NUMBER OF EVENTS	ATTENDANCE	ROOM NIGHTS	ECONOMIC IMPACT
Postponed events	6	28,580	14,380	\$6,455,526
Cancelled events	76	160,505	46,191	\$19,701,779
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>189,085</b>	<b>60,571</b>	<b>\$26,157,305</b>

# 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.

- **Travel Awaits** - "9 Beautiful Hikes in Northern Illinois"  
*Pierce Lake Trail, Rock Cut State Park*
- **Corporate Event News** - "Rockford, Illinois Gains First Full-Service Conventional Hotel, Plays to Drive-In Market"  
*Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront*
- **Travel Awaits** - "8 Incredible Botanical Gardens to Experience in the Midwest"  
*Anderson Japanese Gardens*
- **Rediscover America** - "Reconnect with Nature in Rockford, IL"



Rediscover America article

## EARNED MEDIA (July - September, 2020)

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



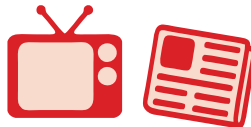
**\$202,627**

Ad equivalency



**21,905,205**

Total impressions



**2,839**

Number of mentions

## SOCIAL MEDIA



**FACEBOOK**

27,695 page likes  
(120 increase)

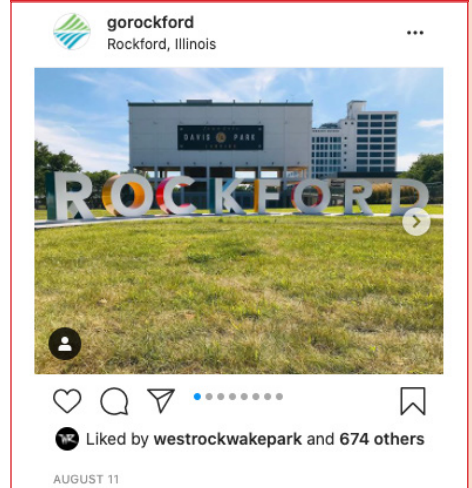


**INSTAGRAM**

12,675 followers  
(290 increase)

### TOP INSTAGRAM POST

August 11 | 6,180 impressions



**LINKEDIN**

989 followers  
(67 increase)



**TWITTER**

6,586 followers  
(5 increase)



**YOUTUBE**

523,662 video views  
(11,057 increase)



## PROMOTING LOCALLY

During this quarter, RACVB launched a redesigned weekly eblast called the **Go Guide**. The weekly eblast highlights 3 - 4 local events occurring in the upcoming week, a featured video, and three local businesses, guiding people where to Eat, Shop, and Explore. These events and attractions are also showcased in a weekly page in **The Rock River Times** as well as **media spots on radio and television** including B103, WXRX, WROK, The Eagle and WIFR TV.

**Seven news releases and advisories** were sent out during the first quarter to local media partners and stakeholders. Topics of the news releases included winners of the "Our Journey" microgrants, announcement of the 2019 tourism numbers for Winnebago County, and unveiling of the new downtown ROCKFORD letters.

RACVB was proud to unveil the permanent art installation in August located at Davis Park. Vibrant 4-foot tall aluminum **"ROCKFORD" letters** adorn the north lawn of the park. The letters were created under the direction of the RACVB as part of the team's commitment to placemaking and public beautification and funded by a grant from the state of Illinois.

In September, RACVB also released **"Stay Home Songs: The Album,"** a locally-produced 11-track playlist on the GoRockford YouTube channel. "The Album" songs were created in the spring amidst the shelter-at-home order as part of Stay Home Songs, RACVB's free community songwriting contest.

## GOROCKFORD FALL DIGITAL CAMPAIGN

RACVB launched a two month digital display and direct email marketing campaign that featured sites and attractions including the Rock River, Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront, Klehm Arboretum, Anderson Japanese Gardens, Curran's Orchard, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, downtown Rockford murals, and West Rock Wake Park.



ROCKFORD letters at Davis Park

## GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

### MOST SEARCHED TERMS

Rock Cut State Park  
Things to do in Rockford IL  
Rockford IL

### MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

4th of July Fireworks at Rivets Stadium  
Rockford Speedway  
North End City Market

### MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Rock Cut State Park  
Anderson Japanese Gardens  
Pearl Lake

## Website Traffic Sources



# SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

## SPORTS SALES HIGHLIGHTS

RACVB's sports sales team began the first quarter of fiscal year 2021 in the midst of a short tournament play window as COVID-19 related restrictions lightened up in July. The Bureau welcomed a variety of baseball, lacrosse, softball and soccer groups into town for a few weekends of tournament play, including the addition of two new weekends as part of the **Experience the Turf Rockford series** in partnership with long-time client JP Sports. When restrictions limited tournament play again by early August, though, RACVB shifted back toward longer-term rescheduling efforts with existing clients and revamped new business sales processes highlighted by virtual programs and creative organic outreach.

From August 3-21, RACVB attended the **Sports Events & Tourism Association (SportsETA) SportsBIZ Xchange** as part of a month-long schedule of virtual business appointments and industry networking opportunities for destinations and sports events rights holders around the nation. RACVB continued bid and event scheduling conversations with national partners including Baseball Players Association, National Softball Association, USA BMX, Spartan Race, Drone Racing



Tough Mudder 2018

League, National Junior College Athletic Association, USA Wrestling and much more throughout the show. On the heels of the SportsBIZ Xchange, RACVB organized a partnership call with the **Baseball Players Association, National Softball Association** and the Rockford Park District to set the stage for a four-event booking agreement at Mercyhealth Sportscore One in spring and summer 2021. Moreover, the Bureau spearheaded the bid process that featured tourism event operator Elite Tournaments during its efforts to locate a host destination for the 2021 Intercollegiate Women's Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA) JUNK Brands Midwest Cup—an event that RACVB successfully recruited, sponsored and hosted as the largest lacrosse event (94 teams at its peak in 2017, 75 teams in 2018) ever held at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two and the region. Despite

the efforts, Elite Tournaments chose another venue in Indiana due primarily to lighter pandemic-related restrictions. For similar pandemic-related reasons, the Sports Facilities Companies (SFC) launch of Hype Nation Volleyball events at the UW Health Sports Factory would be delayed until 2022.

In September, the GoRockford team continued laying the foundation for a busy 2021 and beyond by leading competitive sales efforts for: 2021 Mizuno Volleyball Showcase (what would be the largest volleyball event ever hosted in the region), seven Game Day USA 2021 baseball regional events (including the return of a USA Baseball National Team Identification Series event weekend), two JP Sports 2021 baseball regionals, 2021 USA BMX Midwest Nationals, 2021 Corrigan Sports Enterprises JUNK Mid-American Lacrosse Festival, 2021 Tough Mudder, 2022 USA Wrestling 16U National Dual Championships, among many others. As part of these notable client events (which are still in tentative status through the end of the first quarter), these bookings alone would bring major tourism events and impact to Mercyhealth Sportscore One, Mercyhealth Sportscore Two, UW Health Sports Factory, and the Chicago Rockford International Airport while generating \$9,557,545 in projected tourism impact for the greater Rockford area economy.



Mercyhealth Sportscore Two



## MEETINGS MARKET UPDATES

The sales team continues to work with meeting planners to reschedule events that have been cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19. Like sports, the meetings market has suffered because of the current mitigations. The team continues to touch base with clients and secure bookings for 2021.



Embassy Suites by Hilton ribbon cutting

On a positive note, the new **Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront & Rockford Conference Center**, located in downtown Rockford near the Main Street District, opened in July of 2020. The hotel is built within the former Amerock Building, a 104-year-old factory building, built by William Ziock Jr. for his textile businesses. The hotel features 160 two-room suites, some with floor to ceiling windows, a seasonal rooftop restaurant and outdoor deck, a salon and spa, indoor swimming pool, a business center, a first floor restaurant and patio, and is adjacent to Davis Park. In addition to the hotel, there is also a 13,000 square foot conference center attached to the hotel. The main ballroom consists of 7,400 square feet of meeting space to comfortably accommodate up to 550 people. The conference center is used to host meetings, weddings, reunions, exhibits, training sessions, symposiums, conferences and more.

## BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

### Baseball Players Association (BPA) and National Softball Association (NSA) Combined Regional Tournament

May 27 - 29, 2021 & June 17 - 19, 2021  
300 room nights  
\$89,900 EEI

### Tough Mudder

August 14 - 15, 2021  
500 room nights  
\$614,607 EEI

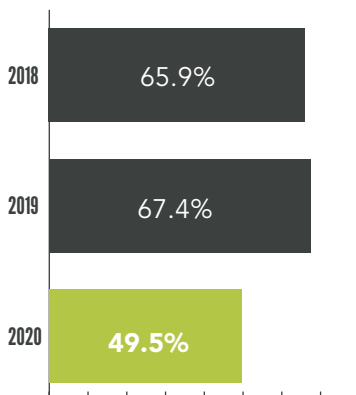
Estimated Economic Impact Total = **\$704,507**



Embassy Suites by Hilton rooftop

## WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - September 2020)

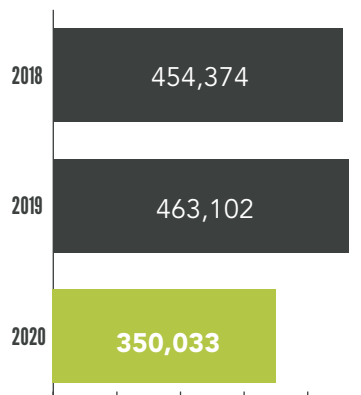
### Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



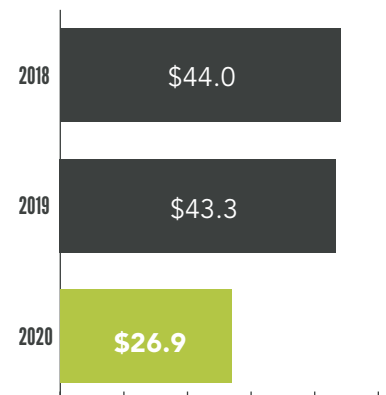
### Year to Date Average Room Rate



### Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



### Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



# DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

## STROLL ON STATE

Alongside many sponsors, community partners and volunteers, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) has been working diligently behind the scenes to develop Stroll on State Reimagined. We were excited to finalize our plan during the first quarter to ensure the event's core remains to inspire hope, awe and wonder this holiday season through the eight 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. Some of the 2020 highlights include:

- Expanded decorations in downtown Rockford and Davis Park



Stroll on State 2019

- Relocation of the official City of Rockford Christmas Tree to Davis Park.
- Extended SantaLand at Rockford City Hall and six drop-off locations for letters to Santa
- Exciting special promotions to help support local businesses and encourage shopping local during the holiday season.
- A Merry & Bright Holiday television production on Channel 13, co-produced by WREX, RACVB, and Heartland Community Church that will feature a tree lighting program from 6-7 p.m. that will conclude with fireworks at multiple locations city-wide, on Saturday, November 28.

As we look back at this year's planning, we must thank those who see and understand the vision behind this year's reimagined event and have shown as such through their volunteer, in-kind and financial support. Thank you to all of our 2020 sponsors and supporters, including our Presenting Sponsor Illinois Bank & Trust.

### DASHER DASH "AT HOME" 5K RUN/WALK

In addition to Stroll, Dasher Dash supported by Fleet Feet returns as a "At Home" 5k run/walk. This year's Dasher Dash is an at-home edition that gives each participant the flexibility to complete the run anytime between November 28-December 24, and to compete for hometown pride. Participants can make their run/walk 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.

## 2020 SPONSORS

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

### Stroll on State Presenting Sponsor

Illinois Bank & Trust

### Davis Park Winter Wonderland Sponsor

The Power Connection IBEW 364 & NECA

### Community Fireworks Sponsors

OSF HealthCare

Pierce Distribution

### Santa Visits Sponsor

Butitta Brothers

### Holiday Cheer Sponsor

Xfinity

### Clean Hands, Open Doors Sponsor

Winnebago County

### City Tree Sponsor

Northwestern Illinois Building Trades Union

### Holiday Tree Sponsors

Illinois State Lottery

Roofers & Waterproofers Local 11

### Letters to Santa Sponsor

FurstStaffing & FurstProfessionals

### Dasher Dash Virtual 5K Sponsor

SwedishAmerican

### Stroll on State Website Sponsor

Project First Rate

### Holiday Spirit Sponsors

PCI Pharma Services

Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23

Pearson Plumbing & Heating

ComEd

David & Colleen Anderson Family

Cleo

Two Men and a Truck

### Television Production Partner

WREX 13

### Partner Organizations

City of Rockford

Heartland Community Church

Rockford Sharefest

Fleet Feet Rockford



# RACVB BOARD & STAFF

## RACVB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Jennifer Furst** (Chair)  
FurstStaffing

**David Anderson**  
Anderson Japanese Gardens

**Daniel Fellars**  
Winnebago County

**Ted Rehl**  
City of South Beloit

**Todd Cagnoni** (Vice Chair)  
City of Rockford

**Marcus Bacon**  
Radisson Hotel & Conference Center

**Kevin Frost**  
City of Rockford

**Jay Sandine**  
Rockford Park District

**Noel Nickel** (Treasurer)  
SwedishAmerican

**Nathan Bruck**  
City of Loves Park

**Tiana McCall**  
Rock Valley College

**Carol Schuster**  
University of Illinois College of  
Medicine Rockford

**Einar Forsman** (Secretary)  
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

**Bryan Davis**  
SupplyCore

**Mike Nelson**  
Valley Expo Displays

**Darrell Snorek**  
Lamonica Beverages

**Chad Anderson**  
Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

**Patricia Diduch**  
Village of Rockton

**John Penney**  
Painters District Council No. 30,  
Local 607

## RACVB STAFF



**John Groh**  
President, CEO



**Lindsay Arellano**  
Vice President of Sales & Service



**Martesha Brown**  
Director of Advancement



**Andrea Cook**  
Senior Manager of  
Marketing & Comm.



**Kara Davis**  
Executive Assistant



**Heidi Gee**  
Office Coordinator/Receptionist



**Elizabeth Miller**  
Creative Services Manager



**Joanne Nold**  
Director of Finance  
& Administration



**Kristen Paul**  
Director of Destination Development



**Nick Povalitis**  
Vice President of Marketing &  
Sports Development



**Austin Taylor**  
Group & Event Services Manager

