



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT

FY21, Q2

October - December, 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



The RACVB has stood proudly and boldly in our stance of supporting our community and hospitality partners. Throughout the calendar year, our efforts have been under the premise that our community needs us, and we must be a catalyst for the return of

tourism to our region. The vitality of our economy, quality of life, and the wellbeing of those in our small business and hospitality community depend on it. This work was done with a focus on ways we can give back to our community. It was with great surprise and honor that we were notified of being selected as the 2020 Excelsior Award Recipient. The Excelsior Award, established by the Rockford Register Star in 1979, honors an organization or institution whose work has a positive impact on life in the Rock River Valley.

As the CEO of the RACVB, I have the privilege of viewing the hard work of the RACVB team members behind the scenes, and I am personally astounded by the countless hours and time invested by each of our team members. From the creation of unique marketing ideas, destination defining ideas, sales and service, ensuring creative marketing and promotion, customer experience, support, funding, and fiscal responsibility the RACVB team has and will continue to work with one thing in mind, uplifting our community.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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RACVB NEWS

EXCELSIOR AWARD WINNING RACVB: MOVING ONWARD & UPWARD



2019 CRE8IV Mural Festival Kick-Off

The Excelsior Award, established by the Rockford Register Star in 1979, honors an organization or institution whose work has a positive impact on life in the Rock River Valley. As the CEO of the RACVB, I am honored the RACVB was selected as the 2020 Excelsior Award Recipient. This recognition is shared by the amazing hard work of the RACVB team members and the collaborative relationships of our partners.

The RACVB is thankful for its many partners who help to make the tourism experience memorable. It is with their efforts and partnership we are able to help make tourism the economic driver it has been for our region. As collaboration is key to our agency, it would be difficult to name them all, however we are grateful for the victories experienced

by collaborative efforts with our local attractions, small businesses, restaurants, hoteliers, and hospitality partners.

I am very grateful to those who have believed in and supported our work. From local mayors and city councils, to stakeholders who have advocated for RACVB and our industry, and our dedicated board members – including our former board chairs who nominated us – thank you for believing in Rockford, this region and RACVB.

As the CEO of the RACVB, I have the privilege of seeing the extraordinary work of my team. I see the creative processes, brainstorming, advocacy, countless hours invested, and their ability to remain agile in times of the unknown. The work by the team has

been exemplary of our pledge to ask, “how can we help” and then show up committed to uplift our community in new and creative ways. I want to extend the greatest thank you to their work.

Excelsior is a Latin word translated into English as a motto meaning “Ever upward!” As we look beyond the previous work of the RACVB team, we have begun to set new goals to take our region to the next level. We will not let recent data stop us from investing to reach a new peak as a region. It will only fuel us to show why Winnebago County is resilient. We are a destination. We will move upward. Excelsior.

- John Groh
RACVB President/CEO

CANCELED/POSTPONED EVENTS DUE TO COVID-19

Event Changes Between April 1 - December 31

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	79	172,755	49,666	\$21,020,869
TOTAL	85	201,335	64,046	\$27,476,395

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.

- **Enjoy Illinois** - "Illinois Office of Tourism Announces 31 New Small Businesses Recognized as Makers in the Illinois Made Program" (mentioning Barnstormer Distillery, Fire Department Coffee)
- **Sports Planning Guide** - "Rockford's Home with the FAM Returns, Bringing National Event Operators to Area" (mentioning Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront)
- **WREX-TV** - "Stroll on State 1-hour, commercial free special airs Saturday"
- **Rockford Register Star** - "2020 Excalibur and Excelsior Awards Presented to Linda Zuba and RACVB"
- **Sports Travel Magazine** - "SportsETA Announces Annual Award Winners" (RACVB awarded Event Marketing Campaign of the Year and Locally Created Event of the Year)
- **WIFR-TV** - "RACVB Unveils 'To-Go Tuesdays' to Support Local Food, Beverage Establishments"



Barnstormer Distillery



Fire Department Coffee

EARNED MEDIA (October - December, 2020)

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



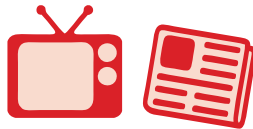
\$837,288

Ad equivalency



90,516,854

Total impressions



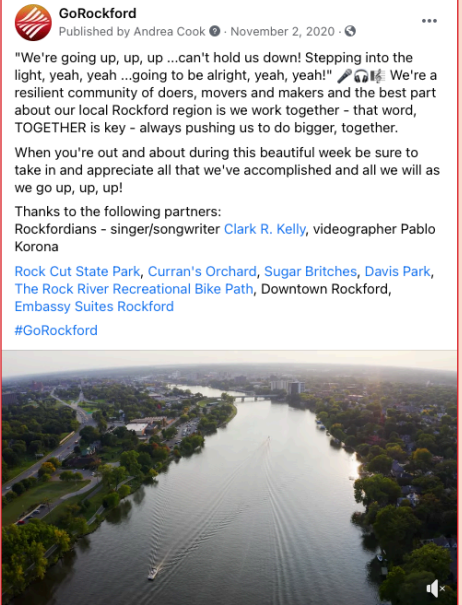
2,818

Number of mentions

SOCIAL MEDIA

TOP FACEBOOK POST

November 2 | 21,099 people reached



FACEBOOK

27,924 page likes
(229 increase)



INSTAGRAM

12,719 followers
(44 increase)



LINKEDIN

1,064 followers
(75 increase)



TWITTER

6,579 followers
(7 decrease)



YOUTUBE

533,891 video views
(10,229 increase)

PROMOTING LOCALLY

During this quarter, RACVB focused marketing efforts on highlighting and promoting local area sites, attractions and eateries. From October 5 - December 18, each of the Rockford region municipalities was highlighted weekly for **To-Go Tuesdays**, a social media promotion and gift card contest aimed to help local restaurants as they were guided to close indoor dining at the time due to stricter COVID-19 mitigations.

In November, RACVB released a **new leisure video**, created by local videographer Pablo Korona, showcasing outdoor activities in the region. The video is set to the song "Up, Up, Up" by local musician, Clark Kelly, who was the winner of RACVB's Stay Home Songs contest. RACVB also worked with local businesses FlyGuyFilms and Film or Die Productions to create a **tour video of Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront** to provide to meeting and event planners.



"Up, Up, Up" leisure video

AUDIOEYE INCORPORATION

RACVB continues to strive to make the GoRockford website and social media pages more accessible to everyone in the community. In addition to adding image descriptions to social media posts, RACVB has also worked with a company called AudioEye to make GoRockford.com more accessible. AudioEye is the most sustainable solution for web content accessibility guidelines and ADA website compliance. A new toolbar appears at the right side of each webpage on the site where people can click to access a tool to have the page content read aloud.

ADVERTISING

Sports Advertising

Digital ads in a variety of sizes were placed with Sports Events and Tourism Association (Sports ETA) and Sports Planning Guide highlighting Mercyhealth Sportscore Two and UW Health Sports Factory.



Sports ETA digital ad

Fall Campaign

Eblast campaign highlighting sites and attractions in the region to enjoy during fall including Klehm Arboretum, local orchards, Toad Hall, Rockford Art Deli, Velvet Robot Coffee Lab, Sister's Cafe, and more.

Stroll on State Advertising

Ads to promote Stroll on State's Merry & Bright Holiday season were placed through the Rockford Register Star, The Rock River Times, Smart Living Weekly, El Sol, Ignite Digital, and Lamar Billboards.

GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

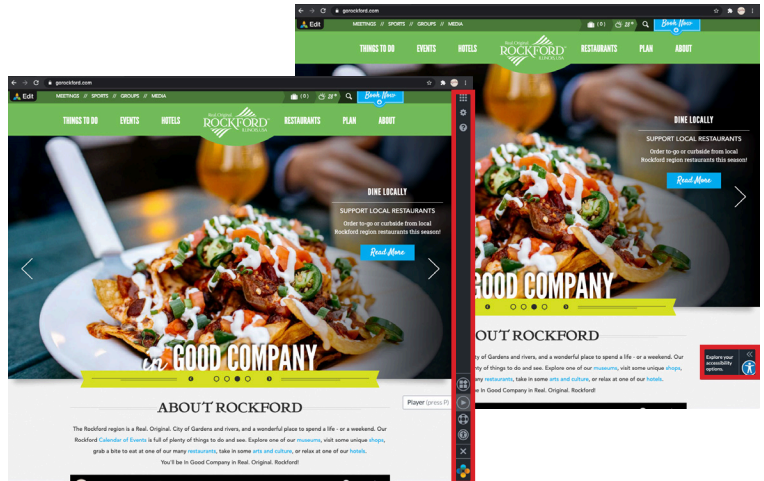
- Sinnissippi Park Lights
- Stroll on State
- Sinnissippi Lights

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- 2020 Festival of Lights
- 8th Annual Stroll on State
- Stroll on State Holiday Special

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Rock Cut State Park
- Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden



GoRockford.com website with AudioEye toolbar (outlined in red)

Website Traffic Sources



SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS SALES HIGHLIGHTS



BMX at Searls Park

RACVB's October booking highlights included the **2021 USA BMX Midwest Nationals** which is set to generate \$1.6 million in tourism economic impact in June, as well as Corrigan Sports Enterprise's **The 2021 District Lacrosse Championships**, a National Cup Series qualifier that will draw teams from 11 states and provide RACVB, the Rockford region and Loves Park-based Mercyhealth Sportscore Two ESPN coverage as part of the event's production in Summer 2021. The Bureau then wrapped up October by winning its fourth and fifth national Sports Events & Tourism Association (SportsETA) Awards since 2016—the **2020 Event Marketing Campaign of the Year** (in recognition of RACVB's work for the 2019 ITTF North American Olympic Trials) and the **2020 Locally Created Event of the Year** (in recognition of the Bureau's work in producing Jurassic Park RKFD + Fred VanVleet Comes Home).

RACVB continued that sales success in

November when it secured 11 baseball tournaments spanning spring and summer 2021. RACVB facilitated two new regional events with the Baseball Players Association (BPA), a byproduct of the Bureau's long-standing partnership with the National Softball Association (NSA). As part of the agreement, BPA and NSA will align 2021 dates at Mercyhealth Sportscore One to maximize family and team registration. Moreover, JP Sports confirmed two **Experience the Turf baseball regionals**, while Game Day USA signed on for seven baseball regional weekends—including the **2021 USA Baseball National Team Identification Series Rockford Regional**—at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two from April-July 2021.

December was highlighted by the commitment of Netlynx Sports to host its premier Junior Volleyball Association (JVA) event, the **2021 Mizuno Showcase** in the Rockford region. The event is scheduled to

bring 200-plus 15U-18U girls volleyball teams to Mercyhealth Indoor Sports Center in Loves Park and to UW Health Sports Factory in Rockford this May, generating an estimated \$2.7 million of visitor spending for our community. In addition to its success in securing these outdoor events, RACVB made steady progress toward securing new business (and rescheduling postponed events) with premier national clients and prospects including: the National Middle School Basketball Association, National Football Association (NFA), Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), World Bboy Classic, Bellator MMA, USA Basketball, USA Wrestling, National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), among many others. For the quarter, RACVB booked **22 sports events** that are projected to total **\$15.3 million in tourism economic impact** for Winnebago County.



Baseball at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two

MEETINGS MARKET UPDATES

Most of this quarter the State of Illinois and Winnebago County was placed in Tier 3 COVID-19 mitigations. Tier 3 mitigations stated that meeting rooms, banquet centers, private party rooms, private clubs and country clubs may not host gatherings, therefore there were no meetings/conventions hosted in this quarter. We continue to promote our venues and hotels and work with meeting planners to reschedule their events as possible.

We hosted **Home with the FAM**, a virtual familiarization tour, of the **Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront & Rockford Conference Center** on October 8. We had approximately 30 meeting planners and partners join us as we toured the brand new property that sits on the Rock River in downtown Rockford. We were able to showcase the meeting rooms, sleeping rooms as well as the restaurant, roof top bar and more. We are aiming to attract business for the convention center that will help produce business that overflows into all parts of Rockford. As we anticipate meetings to return in 2021, the team continues to reach out and solicit meetings, conventions and events to bring to the Rockford region.



Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

North American Fastpitch Association (NAFA) Girls Fastpitch National Tournament

July 1 - 3, 2021
1,200 room nights
\$871,557 EEI

Illinois Gold Fastpitch (NAFA) Midwest Nationals

July 15 - 18, 2021
1,400 room nights
\$869,834 EEI

USA BMX Midwest Nationals

June 17 - 19, 2021
2,500 room nights
\$1,645,989 EEI

Corrigan Sports Enterprises 2021 District Central Championships

July 29 - 31, 2021
2,000 room nights
\$845,203 EEI

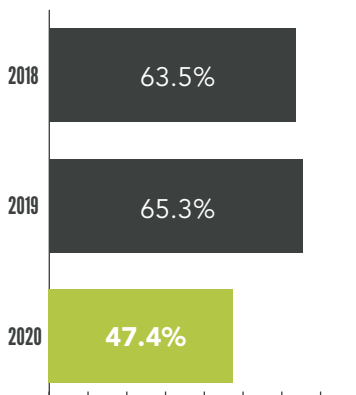
Estimated Economic Impact Total = \$4,232,583



Home with the FAM virtual tour

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - December 2020)

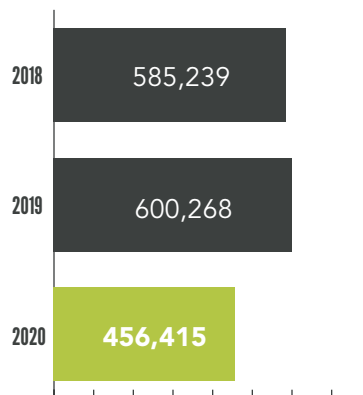
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



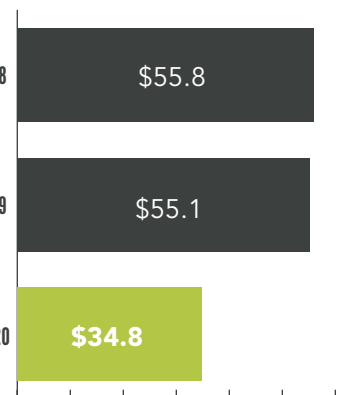
Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

STROLL ON STATE

Despite the pandemic, Stroll on State continued to bring joy to the community with an expanded line up of socially distanced and virtual events. It all started back in September when Santa's Workshop officially opened for the season and volunteers began working their magic to make and repair the downtown holiday décor. By the time the last ornament was put back in the box, over 2,400 volunteer hours and 626 individual shifts were worked! Some of the highlights from 2020 included expanding the footprint, which now includes Davis Park.

Santa Claus was especially busy with letter collections from six locations, virtual visits on three different weekends and special cameo appearances with the Rockford Fire Department. Dasher Dash At-Home Edition allowed runners to utilize their favorite running path, and the new Spread the Light campaign encouraged and celebrated local businesses to create their own seasonal displays throughout the region.

The highlight of the Stroll lineup was the **hour long production televised on WREX** featuring local businesses,



Volunteers at Santa's Workshop

families and volunteers. The production shared the heart behind Stroll on State and stories of resiliency and hope for our community. RACVB partner GrahamSpencer produced **five short videos** highlighting different local businesses and groups that tie into Stroll on State including Rockford Sharefest, Lino's, Janene's Event Design Studio & Social Cafe, Rockford Art Deli, and more. The production ended with firework displays from five locations throughout the community. While 2020 had its challenges, Stroll continued to be a bright spot for the community. A special thank you to our partners, sponsors and volunteers who make Stroll possible every year.



Santa fire truck visit



Downtown fireworks display

2020 SPONSORS

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
Ironworkers Local 498

Television Production Partner
WREX 13

Partner Organizations
City of Rockford
Heartland Community Church
Rockford Sharefest
Fleet Feet Rockford

Friends of Stroll on State
Ware Crane & Rigging
Stenstrom
TreeCare Enterprises
Event Floral
Howe Freightways Inc.
SVL Productions
Luxe Productions

RACVB BOARD & STAFF

RACVB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jennifer Furst (Chair)
FurstStaffing

David Anderson
Anderson Japanese Gardens

Kevin Frost
City of Rockford

Jay Sandine
Rockford Park District

Todd Cagnoni (Vice Chair)
City of Rockford

Marcus Bacon
Radisson Hotel & Conference Center

Tiana McCall
Rock Valley College

Carol Schuster
University of Illinois College of
Medicine Rockford

Noel Nickel (Treasurer)
SwedishAmerican

Nathan Bruck
City of Loves Park

John Penney
Painters District Council No. 30,
Local 607

Darrell Snorek
Lamonica Beverages

Einar Forsman (Secretary)
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Bryan Davis
SupplyCore

Ted Rehl
City of South Beloit

Chad Anderson
Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

Patricia Diduch
Village of Rockton

RACVB STAFF



John Groh
President, CEO



Lindsay Arellano
Vice President of Sales & Service



Martesha Brown
Director of Advancement



Andrea Cook
Senior Manager of
Marketing & Communications



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

