

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2021

## Strolling Together Again: Stroll on State Returns to Downtown Rockford

*Expanded footprint, three tree lightings and refreshed entertainment planned*

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 28, 2021

**Rockford, IL** – The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is excited to announce that the ninth annual **Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust**, is set to return to downtown Rockford on Saturday, November 27.

Once again, the Stroll on State team - including partners, volunteers and sponsors - is planning, working and giving to transform downtown Rockford into a winter wonderland. During the event, from 2 – 9 p.m., there will be new enhancements, attractions, live entertainment, vendors and more for eventgoers to enjoy.

The free community event, which is always held the Saturday after Thanksgiving in downtown Rockford, attracts tens of thousands of guests every year.

“As we approach Stroll on State’s ninth year in the Rockford region, we are thankful to be able to gather in-person to celebrate the start of the holiday season. I am reminded that our community is filled with so many selfless, big-hearted people and businesses who help our RACVB team put on this amazing event,” said **Kristen Paul, RACVB director of destination development**. “The magic of the season shines through our downtown during Stroll and brings people together. We are truly thankful to our partners, volunteers, patrons, sponsors and vendors for their support throughout the years and this year.”

### Sponsor Support Makes Stroll Possible, Free to Attend

In total, 22 companies and organizations are providing financial support through sponsorship of this year’s Stroll on State and Dasher Dash 5K. Their investment allows RACVB to present the event as a gift to the community.

“Illinois Bank & Trust has been the presenting sponsor of Stroll on State since 2015 and each year the event seems to be even more enjoyable for our team, families and friends. We are grateful for our invaluable partnership with the RACVB which allows us to bring happiness to so many people during the holiday season. As we look to the years ahead, we are truly excited about continuing this time-honored tradition in the Rockford community,” said **Jeff Hultman, CEO of Illinois Bank & Trust**. “Our company tagline is ‘Great Things Happen,’ and this event is a prime example of how great things can happen when you have a community that comes together to bring such joy to the Rockford community just in time for the holidays.”

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Additional local businesses, organizations and media outlets provide invaluable support to the production of Stroll on State. A complete list is on pages 6 and 7 of this release.

"We're excited to have a traditional in-person Stroll on State event planned for this year. It is one of my favorite events because it is a powerful example of the welcoming nature of Rockford, as we unite for an entertaining and enjoyable kickoff to the holiday season," said **Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara**. "Most importantly, Stroll illustrates the diverse and progressive spirit of our city, providing a unique opportunity for visitors and residents alike to join together in celebration."

**Stroll's Safe Return:** To ensure a safe return to Stroll on State, RACVB and planning partners have worked closely with the Winnebago County Health Department and the City of Rockford. To minimize transmission of Covid-19 and to comply with event industry best practices several updates have been made for this year's event including: a larger footprint, multiple tree lighting ceremonies, a new time and location for fireworks, Santa pop-up visits, indoor and outdoor Letters to Santa mailbox locations, requiring masks or face coverings for all indoor locations, additional space between vendors at outdoor markets and hand sanitizing stations located throughout the event, among other enhancements.

## Stroll's Top 9 Announcements for Year 9 in 2021

### 1. The Event is Back Completely In-Person

After adjusting the festivities to an online virtual format last year, this year's event will be completely in-person. The streets of downtown Rockford will once again be filled with holiday magic and decked out with decorations and lights.

### 2. Three Tree Lightings & Stages

One of the most popular moments of years past – the Tree Lighting Ceremony – will take place at three different locations and at different times.

- At 5 p.m. a tree lighting ceremony will take place at the Silver Bell Tree and Stage at Eddie Green Place on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> and E. State St.
- Then at 6 p.m. the Rockford City Tree, sponsored by the Northwestern Illinois Building Trades, will be lighted at Davis Park.
- Finally, at 7 p.m. the third tree lighting will take place at the Jingle Bell Tree and Stage at the corner of N. Main. St. and Mulberry St.

Hosting three tree lighting ceremonies allows for crowds to be better spread out – rather than all together for one ceremony, avoiding what has traditionally been the largest concentration of guests gathered during Stroll. The different times also allow those with younger children and those who do not want to stay out as late the opportunity to customize the festival to their own schedule.

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Each stage will host a holiday storytime reading, a visit from Santa, live music and tree lighting. Stroll on State will partner with three community groups to produce the three lighting ceremonies:

- SOAR Radio and SOAR Assembly,
- Coalition of Latino Leaders and Rockford Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and
- City First Church

### 3. **Fireworks – New Time and Location**

**Sky Lights Fireworks, presented by Pierce Distribution**, will once again light up the skies of downtown Rockford except this time they will be launched from the Jefferson Street Bridge at 8 p.m. Viewers will be able to see the fireworks from anywhere in the festival if they can see the Jefferson Street Bridge. This change will allow for more spacing while the skies burst with color.

### 4. **Davis Park will be Fully Festive, Sponsored by UW Health**

The most beautiful tree in the Rockford region, the Rockford City Tree, sponsored by the Northwestern Illinois Building Trades, will be lit in Davis Park at 6 p.m. Gather with friends and family and enjoy the magical moment while coming together as a community.

Elsewhere in the park, there will be a stage with performances, hot chocolate and s'mores, fire pits and adult beverages. There will even be a special appearance with Ana and Kristof with their special reindeer friends.

### 5. **Stroll's Parade Returns with Inflatable Balloons**

**Stroll on State's Holiday Parade, sponsored by The Power Connection – IBEW 364 & NECA** steps off on S. Main Street at Chestnut Street at 2 p.m. and will move north to State Street then east across the State Street Bridge, ending at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Parade onlookers are encouraged to find a spot along the route starting at 1 p.m. The parade will feature eight large-scale holiday-themed and character balloons including Frosty the Snowman and Butterscotch, several festive floats, live music DJs, and a few extra surprises are expected – including Santa & Mrs. Claus' official arrival in Rockford for the holidays.

**Call for Parade Entries:** Local organizations and businesses are invited to participate in the parade. The parade committee is pleased to provide commercially prepared floats for rental and use. Deadline to register is November 5. For pricing options and information, contact Nicole Blough at [strollonstate@gorockford.com](mailto:strollonstate@gorockford.com). Visit [www.gorockford.com/stroll-on-state/parade/](http://www.gorockford.com/stroll-on-state/parade/) for a list of rules, more information and to download a registration form.

### 6. **Letters to Santa**

During Stroll, your favorite group of elves will be back at Rockford City Hall to collect letters and give them to Santa! Sponsored by FurstStaffing, kids can write a letter to Santa, decorate the paper and mail it on-site to the North Pole.

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In addition to inside City Hall, there will also be three outside locations throughout the festival to mail your letter to Santa. Those locations can be found outside City Hall, near the Davis Park City Tree and at JS Social Café.

## 7. Free Ice Skating at BMO Harris Bank Center

Take a break from strolling the grounds and lace up some ice skates at the BMO Harris Bank Center – on the IceHogs' new home ice rink – put on by the **Rockford Park District** and the **Rockford IceHogs**. Ice skates available free of charge.

Additionally, there will be street hockey provided by the **Chicago Blackhawks Foundation** along with family-friendly activities powered by the Rockford Park District in the lot outside of the BMO Harris Bank Center.

## 8. Starlight Theatre will Dazzle the Crowd

Rockford's best local talent will appear inside Veterans Memorial Hall with various showtimes from 2 - 9 p.m. Intended for all ages, performers will present *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical*. Do not miss this opportunity to take a moment inside out of the weather and appreciate all the local talent in the area.

## 9. Blitzen's Ball, a Character Dance Party for Kids

From princesses to heroes and everything in between this dance party is produced by **Forest City Fairytale Company** and will take place inside Stewart Square. Kids and families are invited to make fun memories together throughout the day (2 – 9 p.m.) at this new Stroll event.

## Classic Attractions

In 2021, the main Stroll event grounds will be along State Street in downtown Rockford bordered by Jefferson, Church, Chestnut and Third Streets while also extending south into Davis Park.

The popular **Hot Chocolate Express** will be at two locations, in Davis Park and next to **MovieLand**, sponsored by **Xfinity** which features a special recipe hot chocolate with sprinkles of marshmallows.

**Rudolph's Reindeer Village**, sponsored by **Mercyhealth** will once again be created in Davis Park. A couple of reindeer who power Santa's sleigh will be there to enjoy the winter wonderland.

## Additional Event Favorites:

- **Santa Visits** will be different this year to keep kids, who currently cannot be vaccinated, healthy. In prior years, kids and families waited in line for up to an hour to visit with Santa. This year, Santa Claus will explore the grounds of Stroll on State. He plans to see kids during story time readings at the three stages, while riding in the parade, and he may even be seen serving hot chocolate and s'mores, visiting his reindeer and riding a Zamboni.

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- **Randy Finch and the Ice Brigades, sponsored by OSF HealthCare,** are back outside the Rockford Register Star building to showcase their amazing ice sculpture creations.
- The popular **Fire & Ice, sponsored by OSF HealthCare,** will wow crowds again as blocks of ice dissolve into beautiful bonfires that create an enchanting display at the corner of East State Street and N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, as well as outside of Veterans Memorial Hall.
- **S'mores stations** will be set up in four locations. Whether you just took off the ice skates or are watching a holiday movie, Stroll grill masters will grill these tasty treats all night.
- **Horse & Wagon Rides, sponsored by Amazon** will be in one location – there will be one continuous loop on the west side of the Rock River with pick up and drop off locations near the corner of Wyman and Elm Streets.
- Two **Holiday Markets** will host local retail and food vendors and are sponsored by **T-Mobile** and the **Chicago Blackhawks Foundation**.
- A full listing of events and attractions is available at [www.strollonstate.com](http://www.strollonstate.com)

## Santa's Visits Throughout Rockford

Even after the Stroll festivities wrap up, Santa Claus will make his way through Rockford on a City of Rockford fire truck spreading Christmas cheer on three Saturdays - December 4<sup>th</sup>, December 11<sup>th</sup>, and December 18<sup>th</sup>. The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and Rockford Fire Department will also ride along for an experience we know kids will enjoy. Routes and approximate times will be released each week on GoRockford and Stroll on State Facebook pages.

## Parking and Transportation

**There will be parking options specified on detailed maps.** On-street parking, parking decks and surface parking lots will be available as posted. The event map with suggested parking areas is available at [www.strollonstate.com](http://www.strollonstate.com). There also will be **three Remote Parking Lots** with free shuttle bus transportation, **sponsored by Rockford Mass Transit District**, again this year at the YMCA, 200 Y Boulevard (*handicapped accessible paratransit buses are available*); Forest City Church, 1280 S. Alpine Road; and a third location which will be determined and later announced. Shuttle buses run continuously from 1 – 9:30 p.m.

## Shop on Small Business Saturday

Stroll on State takes place in conjunction with Small Business Saturday, an annual holiday shopping tradition that gets communities out in support of shopping local. Locally owned businesses throughout the River District will offer holiday specials and fun events. Guests are encouraged to shop local throughout the region during the holiday season.

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## Volunteers Help Make It Happen

Stroll on State is made possible with the help of several organizations, businesses and volunteers. Once again **Rockford Sharefest** is spearheading the volunteer efforts. Volunteer Workshops are held Saturday mornings from 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. and Tuesday evenings from 6 – 9 p.m. at 310 Winnebago Street, on the corner of S. 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. Workshops end on Tuesday, November 23. Volunteers are needed for the downtown decorating days on Friday and Saturday, November 19-20. Those looking to lend a helping hand the day of the festival can get more information about available opportunities at [www.strollonstate.com](http://www.strollonstate.com).

## Supporters & Partners

Led by the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, in addition to many partners, the following entities have come together to generously support Stroll on State:

### Presenting Sponsor:

- Illinois Bank & Trust

### Parade Presenting Sponsor:

- The Power Connection IBEW 364 & NECA

### Supporting Sponsors:

- Amazon
- Chicago Blackhawks Foundation
- ComEd
- FurstStaffing
- HolmstromKennedyPC
- I Want Smart
- LaMonica Beverages
- Mercyhealth
- Northwestern Illinois Building Trades Union
- OSF HealthCare
- PCI Pharma Services
- Pearson Plumbing & Heating
- Pierce Distribution
- Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23
- Project First Rate
- T-Mobile
- UW Health
- Xfinity

### Friends of Stroll on State:

- Bud Light
- City First Church
- Coalition of Latino Leaders
- Event Floral
- Forest City Fairytale Company
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Howe Freightways Inc.
- Lino's
- Luxe Productions
- Montel Technologies, LLC
- SOAR Assembly
- SOAR Radio
- Stella Artois
- Stenstrom Companies
- Sugar Britches
- SVL Productions
- Tree Care Enterprises
- Two Men and a Truck

### Dasher Dash 5K Sponsor:

- I Want Smart



# STROLL<sup>on</sup>STATE<sup>®</sup>



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<b>Partner Organizations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• BMO Harris Bank Center</li><li>• City of Rockford</li><li>• Rockford Mass Transit District</li><li>• Rockford Park District</li><li>• Rockford Sharefest</li></ul>	<b>Media Sponsors:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mid-West Family Broadcasting</li><li>• Northwest Quarterly</li><li>• SOAR Radio</li><li>• The Rock River Times</li><li>• Townsquare Media</li><li>• WREX</li></ul>
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**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)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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