



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT

FY22, Q1
July - September, 2021



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.



grockford.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



Community leadership has long been a hallmark of Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB). We eagerly seek out opportunities to partner with other leaders throughout the region to work in lockstep toward making our community its Real. Original. best.

From supporting small businesses with pandemic survival and economic recovery; to chartering our Welcoming Diversity commitment (and encouraging others to do the same); to seeking innovative, new revenue streams; and beautifying public spaces with art, RACVB has continued to play a lead role in community collaborations.

Our confidence in leading and ability to deliver results is strengthened by our board of directors. The talent, perspectives, and diversity of this group of leaders was further fortified this quarter with the addition of four new members, Dana Martin, Talent Acquisition Manager, Rosecrance Health Network; Ricardo Montoya-Picazo, Chief of Staff, Office of State Representative Dave Vella; Pat Thompson, County Administrator, Winnebago County; Shelton Kay, Vice President Community Services, Crusader Community Health; and Mick Gronewald, Principal/Chairman of the Board, Fehr Graham Engineering and Environmental.

I look forward to working with these new members and our entire board in forging new, innovative ways to lead travel, tourism, and most of all, economic recovery for our region.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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RACVB NEWS

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

As we continue to reflect on 2020 and analyze its effect on our society and economy, we have a new set of data to add to the mix. We recently received the 2020 Economic Impact of Visitor Spending in Winnebago County. We are still analyzing this information for themes and insights that will help us plan for the future of tourism in our county, however in the interim, a few nuggets of information are worth mentioning.

In 2020, visitors to Winnebago County directly contributed \$358.5 million to our economy, representing a decline of -25.8% over 2019 spending. However, when comparing us to the top 10 Illinois counties and cities by population, our decline in Winnebago County and Rockford was among the lowest. In contrast, both Cook County and Chicago – our state’s largest markets – were down the most at more than -58%, which is not surprising, due to the inseparable link between major urban centers and visitation. Cities like Chicago have a broader variety of products – including convention centers, a heavy reliance on business and international travel - and greater inventory of hotel rooms to accommodate visitors.

Among the 10 second tier Illinois cities most like Rockford, we fared better than all but one (Joliet). As mentioned above, we are still analyzing this information, but believe that one element in our favor is our product mix. And more specifically, our abundance of outdoor areas, attractions and activities. One only needs to visit on of our 40+ forest preserves or stroll along the Rock River Recreation Path to observe walkers, cyclists, kayakers, and water skiers, as well as children playing in Shorewood and Martin Parks and families visiting Sinnissippi Gardens and Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens.



Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens



Rock River Recreation Path

Throughout the pandemic, we learned that the poor ventilation of indoor spaces was hazardous to our health, so the whole world fled to the outdoors. Particularly in the U.S., consumers spent their COVID-19 Stimulus Checks on everything from bikes to backpacks, escalating growth in the Outdoor Gear and Equipment Market to new heights. According to the Outdoor Foundation, in 2020, 53 percent of Americans participated in outdoor recreation at least once, the highest participation rate on record. Not only that, but 7.1 million more Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2020 than in 2019. That’s a lot of trail traffic!

Growth in “getting outside” bodes well for the Rockford Region, where our vast network and variety of outdoor recreation, includes 30,000 acres of protected space, four rivers, extensive walking paths and mountain biking trails, and more than 3,000 acres of woodlands, lakes, hiking & horse trails, and camping – all at Rock Cut State Park.

Outdoor recreation makes Winnebago County a highly desirable place to live and visit. As RACVB works day-in and day-out to bring tourists and visitors back to Rockford, we are leveraging our outdoor assets to move the needle from our -25.8% decline in the visitor economy to zero. And from zero, we plan to bounce back to our pre-pandemic streak of 10 straight years of increases in visitor spending.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

STROLL ON STATE

Once again, RACVB is focusing time and talent -- as well as a wee bit of holiday magic -- to transform downtown Rockford into a Merry & Bright wonderland on **Saturday, November 27**. Stroll on State returns to its in-person splendor for 2021.

"As we approach our ninth year, 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."

In total, **22 companies and organizations** provide financial support through sponsorship of this year's Stroll on State and Dasher Dash 5K. Please visit gorockford.com for a complete list.

"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." said Jeff Hultman, CEO. "Our company tagline is 'Great Things Happen,' and this event is a prime example of how great things can happen when a community comes together."

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. Guests will see several updates designed to minimize transmission of Covid-19 and to comply with event industry health and safety best practices.

Other highlights of Stroll 2021 include:

- Three Tree Lightings and Stages
- Fireworks from Jefferson Street Bridge for greater visibility
- Fully Festive Davis Park
- Holiday Parade with Inflatable Balloons
- Ever-popular Letters to Santa
- Free Ice Skating at BMO Harris Bank Center
- The Best Christmas Pageant Ever: The Musical with Starlight Theatre
- Blitzen's Ball, Character Dance Party for Kids

Plus, guests can enjoy Stroll all-time favorites including Hot Chocolate Express, Rudolph's Reindeer Village, Santa Visits, Randy Finch and the Ice Brigades ice sculptures, Fire & Ice display, S'mores stations. Horse & Wagon Rides, Two Holiday Markets full listing of activities and helpful tips is available at www.strollonstate.com

CRE8IV SUMMER

Our destination development team continually strives to instill pride among residents and create a desire for visitors to book a stay. More than ever, we achieved this in Summer 2021 through the expansion of CRE8IV: Transformational Art.

Collaborating with community leaders from Rockford, Loves Park, Pecatonica and Rockton -- along with artists and sponsors -- CRE8IV featured murals in 12 locations. Eleven local and visiting lead artists worked throughout the summer to create large-scale, vibrant murals designed to not only beautify, but inspire interaction and gathering.



2021 CRE8IV mural



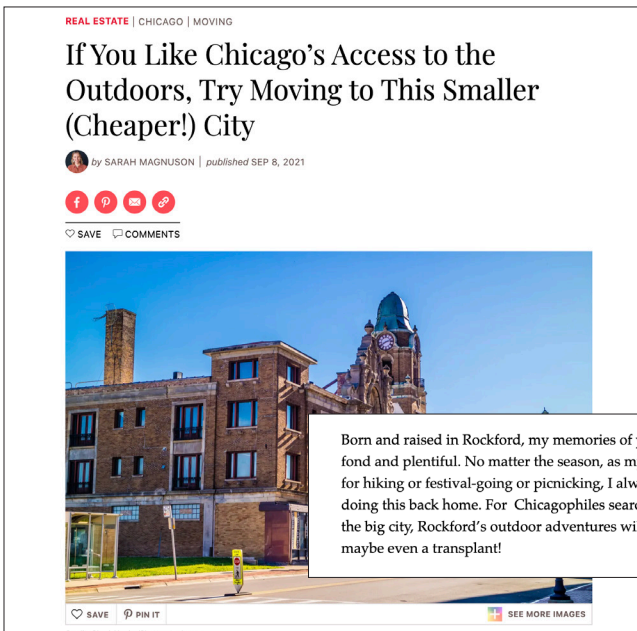
Davis Park

MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

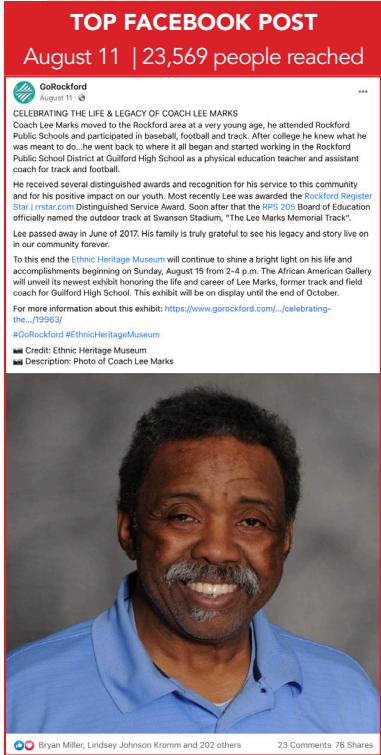
RACVB attracts visitors to the Rockford region by working with regional and national media outlets. Pitches focus on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.

- **ABC 7 Eyewitness News** - "Museums, Japanese Gardens and Wakeboarding in Rockford on 1 Tank of Gas"
- **Insurify** - "Insurify's 2021 Best Cities for Road Trips Awards"
- **13 WREX** - "Stroll on State Just 2 Months Away, Volunteers Needed"
- **23 WIFR** - "Painting Begins on CRE8IV Mural in Loves Park"
- **Apartment Therapy** - "If You Like Chicago's Access to the Outdoors, Try Moving to This Smaller (Cheaper!) City"



Apartment Therapy article

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK
376,905 page reach
30,306 followers

INSTAGRAM
208,360 page reach
13,000 followers

LINKEDIN
1,218 followers

TWITTER
55,565 impressions
6,525 followers

YOUTUBE
5,387 video views
810 subscribers

EARNED MEDIA (July - September, 2021)

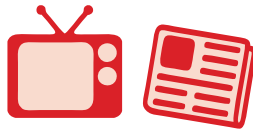
RACVB works to attract visitors by directly pitching stories to media. We focus pitches on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.



\$1,410,000
Ad equivalency



152,387,000
Total impressions



793
Number of mentions

ROCKFORD REGIONAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Through a private/public partnership with the Woodward Foundation and the City of Rockford, the RACVB began work on a regional marketing campaign targeted to **retain and attract new residents to the region**. As a part of the campaign strategy development this quarter, RACVB hosted a series of discussions, "Voice of the Customer" interviews, and other research to determine target audiences and value propositions. RACVB also initiated a positive stories campaign including securing a partnership with the national media organization DCI for "livability" national story pitches and revitalization of the "Our City, Our Story" series with videos to be launched in the next quarter.



Our City, Our Story logo

ROCKFORD REGION PROMOTIONS

Several news releases were sent out during the first quarter to local media partners and stakeholders. Some highlights include the Rock River Robotics Off-Season Competition, Tough Mudder, NJCAA Volleyball tournament, NACC Women's Golf Championship, Dasher Dash, WWII Bomber Airplane Display, Cycle on 2nd, and CRE8IV Mural Pop-up Events.

RACVB was proud to unveil newly-installed murals through **Pop-up celebrations** in collaboration with many partners and sponsors. The vibrancy of the CRE8IV murals will add to the continued destination placemaking efforts and quality of place for residents and visitors.



CRE8IV pop-up celebration

GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Wine Lifestyle
- Rockford, IL
- Tamale Fest Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- 4th of July Events
- 42nd Annual Festa Italiana
- Rockford Outdoor City Market

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Pearl Lake
- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Davis Park

Website Traffic Sources

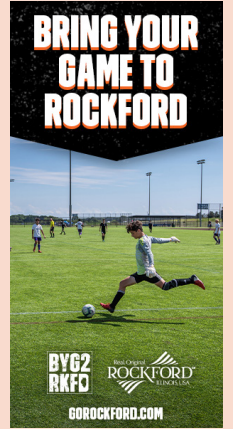


114,785 total website visitors

ADVERTISING

Sports Advertising

Digital ads for Facebook and Google were created for Sports Destination Management. Imagery included soccer at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two with the tagline "Bring Your Game to Rockford." A full page print ad was also created for SportsETA, staying consistent with the Mercyhealth Sportscore Two imagery.



Meetings Market Advertising

A print ad was created for Small Market Meetings Magazine. The ad features downtown Rockford, Anderson Japanese Gardens, Prairie Street Brewhouse and Embassy Suites.

Stroll on State Advertising

To promote Stroll on State, a print ad showcasing the Stroll on State parade was created for Midwest Living's special Illinois Holiday Advertorial.

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SALES HIGHLIGHTS

Sports activities in the Rockford region ramped up last quarter with different sporting events hitting our courts, fields and water. Starting off in July, Corrigan Sports hosted the **2021 Lacrosse District Central National Cup** at Mercyhealth Sportscore Two in Loves Park, IL. The event featured 58 girl's high school, middle school, and youth club teams with a total attendance of 2,500.

RACVB and the Rockford Park District heartily welcomed the **2021 National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Opening Weekend Tournament (OWT)** on August 20 - 22. This tournament brought in 49 junior college women's volleyball teams and 650 Individual athletes. This tournament produced an estimated \$135,000 of economic impact to the region.

A popular obstacle course built around teamwork, sweat and mud returned to Rockford August 14 and 15 when **Tough Mudder** held its fifth Obstacle Style Race in the region. This year's event featured three parts with the most popular being the traditional option, featuring a classic 10-mile obstacle course and a 5K race. The second offering, the Regional Toughest Mudder Central, took place



Tough Mudder

overnight from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. with racers running a five-mile loop as many times as possible in the 12-hour period. Finally, two races were held for kids both Saturday and Sunday.

This year's event attracted an estimated 7,000 people for Saturday and 1,500 for Sunday, along with an estimated \$1.2 million dollars in economic impact/spending.

Our summer sports line up also included cribbage, lacrosse, golf, baseball, softball, track and field, soccer, water ski (show ski) and a robotics competition. **The Rock River Robotics Off-Season Competition (R2OC)**, a premier STEM-engagement showcase event showcased 18 teams from four states. Normally held indoors at the Rock Valley College PE Center, R2OC made the move outdoors to City Market to account for pandemic-related planning.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

Words of Warrior

The Gods and Goddesses Poetry Slam: A National Competition
October 23, 2021
50 room nights
\$17,000 EEI

Illinois Gold Fastpitch/NAFA

2021 NAFA College Exposure Showcase
October 23 - 24, 2021
300 room nights
\$135,000 EEI

National Dart Association

2021 Regional Dart Tournament
November 5 - 7, 2021
155 room nights
\$61,900 EEI

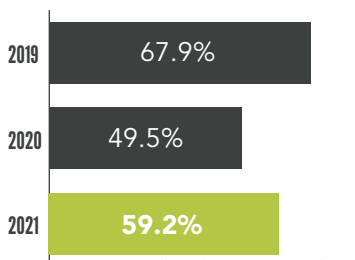
Devorak Wrestling Tournament

December 18 - 19, 2021
200 room nights
\$122,000 EEI

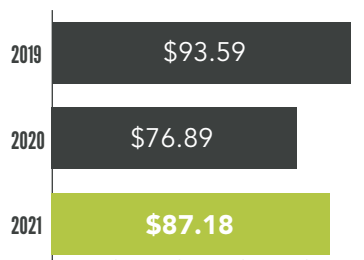
EEI Total = **\$424,036**

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - September 2021)

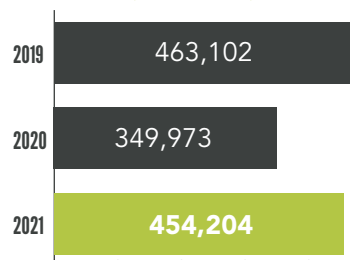
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



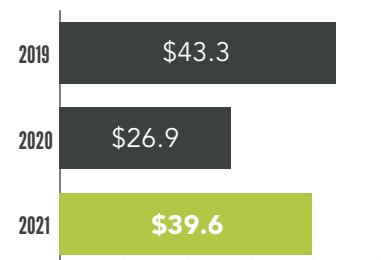
Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



RACVB BOARD & STAFF

RACVB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jennifer Furst (Chair)
FurstStaffing

David Anderson
Anderson Japanese Gardens

Einar Forsman
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Ricardo Montoya-Picazo
Office of State Representative
Dave Vella

John Penney (Vice Chair)
Painters District Council No. 30,
Local 607

Marcus Bacon
Radisson Hotel & Conference Center

Kevin Frost
City of Rockford

Ted Rehl
City of South Beloit

Carol Schuster (Treasurer)
University of Illinois College of
Medicine Rockford

Nathan Bruck
City of Loves Park

Mick Gronewold
Fehr Graham Engineering
& Environmental

Jay Sandine
Rockford Park District

Tiana McCall (Secretary)

Todd Cagnoni
City of Rockford

Shelton Kay
Crusader Community Health

Darrell Snorek
Lamonica Beverages

Chad Anderson
Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

Patricia Diduch
Village of Rockton

Dana Martin
Rosecrance Health Network

Patrick Thompson
Winnebago County

RACVB STAFF



John Groh
President, CEO



Lindsay Arellano
Vice President of Sales &
Service



Nicole Blough
Destination Development
Events Manager



Martesha Brown
Director of Advancement



Kara Davis
Executive Assistant



Julie Huber
Destination Development
Operations Manager



Desheanda Ingram
Executive Assistant



Janet Jacobs
Marketing Assistant



Lindsey Kromm
Accounting Assistant



Elizabeth Miller
Creative Services Manager



Joanne Nold
Director of Finance
& Administration



Dan Obert
Marketing &
Communications Manager



Kristen Paul
Director of Destination
Development



Emily Twigg
Office Coordinator/
Receptionist

