

ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT

FY22, Q2

October - December, 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.



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



This past calendar year remained one of uncertainty as we endured our second year living in a global pandemic that has affected billions of lives. In spite of this uncertainty, every day, the team at RACVB perseveres and strives to “drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.” This mission

keeps us firmly grounded and motivates us to build on the momentum of 2021 with optimism for continued recovery in 2022 and beyond.

Read more about our momentum in **“Celebrating the Highlights of 2021;”** I suspect you’ll be pleasantly surprised at the array of tourism and livability activities RACVB and our community accomplished in the past twelve months. As a result, hotel stays began to rebound, along with visitor spending. See **“Winnebago County Hotel Stats”** for more details.

New in this quarterly edition, you’ll find our first update on the Rockford Relocation Marketing Campaign, **“Applying RACVB Expertise to Attracting New Residents.”** This initiative, a collaboration of the RACVB, the City of Rockford and the Greater Rockford Growth Partnership, is working to drive regional residential growth and talent attraction, while also improving existing residents’ perception of the region. We will continue to provide updates in these quarterly reports.

In the year ahead, serving our community will be equal in importance to serving our employees. Like most organizations, we understand the critical importance of persistently ensuring the safety and satisfaction of our team members. We are investing in organizational development tools that nurture our culture of collaboration, recognition and belonging, because we know that by taking care of each other, we will embolden our ability to serve the community to which we are deeply dedicated.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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RACVB NEWS

CELEBRATING THE HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021

After our 2020 focus on leading the way toward the safe return to tourism and financial recovery, 2021 began to yield improvements in group travel and a return to our signature programs, CRE8IV and Stroll on State. In this final quarterly report of calendar year 2021, **we celebrate highlights from the past twelve months** and thank our board, staff, funders, and partners for their commitment to creative collaborations on behalf of our community.



To-Go Rockford Region Restaurant Week

We kicked off the new year with our inaugural **To-Go Rockford Region Restaurant Week**, January 18 - 24, 2021. While still in “lockdown” from the pandemic, regional residents were encouraged to buy local from favorite restaurants, brewers, wineries, and retailers. The return of in-person gatherings was not far behind when in February we welcomed Illinois State Bowling Congress (USBC)’s Women’s and Open Tournaments spanning eight weekends, from February through May 2.

March marked a significant heightening of our organizational values when we publicly shared nine **Welcoming Diversity Commitment Statements** that guide RACVB in doing our part to create a stronger sense of belonging in our region. These commitments were developed through listening to individuals representing the minority and LGBTQ+ community. Our Welcoming Diversity website and video serve as a resource for residents and visitors including ways to engage with the Bureau, minority-owned business listings, and a calendar of community events and programs that reflect diversity and inclusivity.

Our attraction of sports tournaments heated up in March and April with Triple Crown Sports

2021 **Post Season Women’s WNIT Basketball** (estimated economic impact of \$403,000) and Mercyhealth Sportscore Two hosting the Rockford Raptors’ largest tournament, The Puri Cup, Sponsored by Puma. This two-weekend tournament brought in 650 teams from across the nation, increasing hotel occupancy to a high of 85% during the second weekend of the tournament. Sporting events continued throughout the summer, with USA BMX Nationals, G3X Lacrosse/Team Illinois Lacrosse Summer Invitational Tournament, and All In Volleyball 2021 McHenry County College VB Invitational.

In May, the RACVB was honored to host our own industry’s state association, the Illinois Council of Convention & Visitors Bureaus at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront. We welcomed more than 65 delegates from destination management bureaus around the state of Illinois to share best practices, discuss trends and provide education.



WNIT Basketball

CELEBRATING THE HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021 (CONT.)



CRE8IV Mural

CRE8IV Transformational Art returned to the region this past summer with murals expanding beyond downtown Rockford to Loves Park, Pecatonica, and Rockton. Seeing our beautification efforts stretch north and west is a testament to the power of art, our CRE8IV model, and the partnership of a myriad of sponsors, workers, artists, volunteers, and municipalities. In addition, CRE8IV Sculptures moved forward with the placement of 16 pieces that will remain in place until 2023.

RACVB's deep experience and proven success in marketing the region earned us the opportunity to lead the **Rockford Relocation Marketing Campaign**, a collaboration with the City of Rockford and the Greater Rockford Growth Partnership. Tackling the marketing challenge of increasing the population in Rockford and Winnebago County, the Relocation Marketing Team is working to drive regional residential growth and talent attraction while also improving existing residents' perception of the region.

In advance of launching the campaign (scheduled for first quarter 2022), we worked to generate positive awareness of the region by reestablishing our partnership with national public relations firm DCI and also partnered with Pablo Korona to revive "Our City, Our Story" video profiles about residents who chose to live in our area. Videos in the 2021 season showcased artist Brett Whitacre; Dr. Nicole Macaulay and restaurateur Thad Denthriff II; Armando Cardenas, businessman and member of the Coalition of Latino Leaders; and Steve Shannon, Radio DJ for 97ZOK.

Our capstone event for 2021 was the in-person **return of the ever-magical Stroll on State for its ninth season**. An estimated 62,250 guests returned to downtown Rockford on Saturday, November 27, including 745 runners participating in the Dasher Dash 5K Race. The event, designed following safe gathering protocols, included an expanded footprint, three

tree lightings, a parade, fireworks, and the ever-popular letters to Santa.

Ending the year on a high note, **RACVB was recognized at the Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism** with two Excellence in Illinois Tourism Awards. We earned Best Branding Initiative for the 2019 International Table Tennis Federation North American Olympic Trials and Best Cooperative Partnership for the 2018 Sports Illinois Sports Huddle. We appreciate our peers' recognition of our success in leading our region as a premier destination for tourism!



Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism

This past calendar year remained one of uncertainty as the pandemic continued, however as leisure and group travel returned, **hotel stays increased and tourism's positive impact on our local economy began to bounce back**. Driving this momentum forward will be the focus of the year ahead as we continue to create an environment of belonging, attract and welcome new citizens, and develop and promote a destination that's enticing to visitors and residents alike.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

STROLL ON STATE

Stroll on State, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, **made a triumphant return to an in-person experience** on Saturday, November 27, reaching an estimated 62,500 guests in downtown Rockford, a significant increase from the last in-person event in 2019 that was impacted due to inclement weather. Of the 62,500 visitors 25% were from outside of Winnebago County.

Rockford residents and visitors were welcomed back to this festive event filled with collaboration, partnership, multiple tree lightings, fireworks, Santa, music, and opportunities to shop and support local businesses. Stroll on State continues to create a joyful experience for Rockford families and visitors. This year was particularly heart-warming as we returned to an in-person festival and added elements to create a safe environment while amplifying the attractions. **Changes to this year's event included a larger footprint (Davis Park), three tree lighting ceremonies, new location for fireworks, Santa pop-up visits, outdoor letters to Santa, and additional spacing for vendors at the outdoor market.**

The RACVB could not produce this annual event without the support, services, and donations of many community partners, volunteers, and sponsors.

Other numbers that tell the story of Stroll 2021 include:

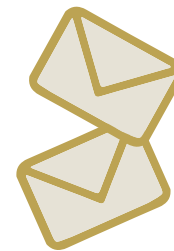
- 49 sponsors and partners
- 3,142 volunteer hours before, during, and after the event
- 745 5K Dasher Dash Runners
- 49 food and retail vendors
- 324 ornaments adorning the official City of Rockford Christmas Tree
- 170 large gift boxes and trees decorating downtown
- 573 letters written to Santa by children from 11 states
- 9 parade balloons, including the new official Stroll on State inflatable
- 113 decorated Jeep® parade entries



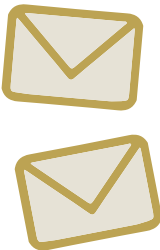
745
Dasher Dash participants



3,142
volunteer hours



573
letters to Santa written (from 11 states)



9 parade balloons including the new, official Stroll on State balloon

STROLL ON STATE SPONSORS

Parade Sponsor



Presented by



Brought to you by



Supporting Sponsors

OSF Healthcare • Northwestern Illinois Building Trades • UW Health • PCI Pharma Services • Pierce Distribution • LaMonica Beverages • I Want Smart • T-Mobile • Chicago Blackhawks Foundation • Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23 • Mercyhealth • Rockford Casino – A Hard Rock Opening Act • Amazon • Xfinity • FirstStaffing • Accuride • Country Financial • ComEd • William Charles Construction • Project First Rate • Pearson Plumbing & Heating • Roofers & Waterproofer Local 11 • HolmstromKennedy

Partner Organizations

BMO Harris Bank Center • City of Rockford • Rockford Mass Transit District • Rockford Park District • Rockford Sharefest • Two Men and a Truck

Friends of Stroll on State

Bud Light • City First Church • Coalition of Latino Leaders • Event Floral • Forest City Fairytale Company • Howe Freightways, Inc. • J. Carlson Growers • Lino's • Luxe Productions • Montel Technologies • Rockford Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce • Screw City Jeeps • Soar Assembly • Stella Artois • Stenstrom • Sugar Britches • SVL Productions • Tree Care Enterprises

Media Sponsors

13 WREX • 23 WIFR • El Sol • La Bamba Radio • Mid-West Family Broadcasting • Northwest Quarterly • Soar Radio • The Rock River Times • Townsquare Media

MARKETING

APPLYING RACVB EXPERTISE TO ATTRACTING NEW RESIDENTS

Encouraging people to visit Rockford is one thing, **inviting them to live here is another and yet both are tightly aligned**. Both require an in-depth knowledge of area attractions and amenities, expertise in marketing strategy and execution, and a track record for successfully promoting the uniqueness of our region.

The Rockford Relocation initiative is a collaboration of the RACVB, the City of Rockford and the Greater Rockford Growth Partnership. Our work to date has been funded by the City of Rockford, Woodward Charitable Trust and RACVB – thanks to our partners for their investment in our community!

We kicked off the effort by gathering diverse experts from around the region to tackle the assigned marketing challenge of increasing the population in Rockford and Winnebago County. The Relocation Marketing Team set two objectives. One, **drive regional residential growth and talent attraction** and two, **improve existing residents' perception of the region**.

Knowing that effective marketing is built upon a solid understanding of the market and the opportunity, we began the effort by partnering with GrahamSpencer on research and analysis. We explored similar campaigns and set benchmarks with Northwest Arkansas (check out findingNWA.com), Cincinnati Experience and Ascend West Virginia, while also understanding what's happening with our neighbors to the south in Peoria. All these examples are part of the current explosion of promotions spurred by the societal shift toward remote working and acknowledgement that, for many workers, they no longer need to live and work in the same community.

To set our region apart from other communities, our research phase also explored why people who have recently moved to our region chose Rockford. We conducted one-to-one interviews and spoke with human resources professionals who recruit workers to our area. This qualitative research uncovered several themes. People moved here for family connections, good jobs and/or affordable living. These motives were reinforced by the attractiveness of our diverse population, strong neighborhoods, downtown amenities, options for rural lifestyles, quality educational institutions, proximity to a major airport, and abundance of outdoor activities.

Out of the gate, our campaign will focus on "boomerangers," those who would choose to move back to



Downtown Rockford

our region after spending time away studying or working. This group already knows the region and likely has family in the area or within the Midwest. Our campaign creative will speak directly to this audience, and we'll connect with them through digital targeting and perhaps a little nudging from their families who want them to come home.

Concurrently with the research phase, RACVB initiated a national media relations effort to create awareness of our region. Our PR firm is currently pitching stories to publications, writers and influencers who specialize in tourism and livability stories. In addition, we partnered with Pablo Korona to revive "Our City, Our Story" video profiles about residents who chose to live in our area. With the support of local consultancy, Social Kat, we are pushing these stories out through our social media channels and through our 815 Ambassadors program.

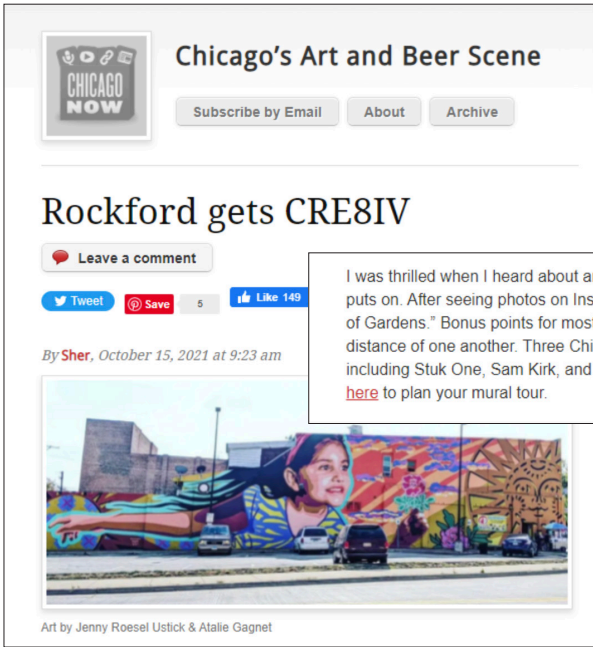
With a solid foundation of research, analysis, and campaign planning, **we have moved into creative development** – the colorful, excitement-generating component of marketing – with greater confidence in our ability to generate results. RACVB is thrilled to be collaboratively leading this effort on behalf of our region and excited about the prospect of welcoming new residents to Rockford.

MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

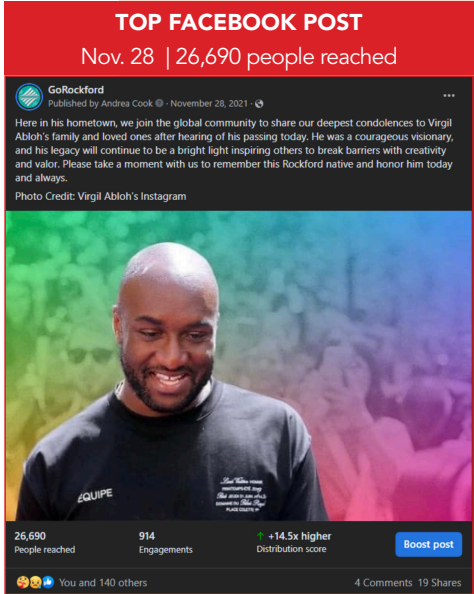
RACVB Marketing team focuses on Stroll's success during Quarter 2 and works very closely with local media to spread the word about the festive celebration along with continued promotion of the region.

- **WQRF-TV** - "Rockford's Christmas Tree Brings Holiday Spirit"
- **ChicagoNow** - "Rockford Gets CRE8IV"
- **WIFR-TV** - "Stroll on State Returns to In-Person this Year"
- **Rock River Current** - "Stroll on State Draws an Estimated 62,500 people to downtown"
- **Illinois News Today** - "Stroll on State will Return to Rockford in 2021 with a New Attraction"



ChicagoNow article

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

105,003 page reach
29,547 followers



INSTAGRAM

66,008 page reach
13,300 followers



LINKEDIN

1,241 followers



TWITTER

15,322 impressions
6,540 followers

EARNED MEDIA (October - December, 2021)

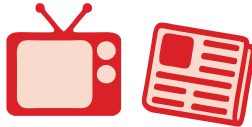
RACVB works to attract visitors by directly pitching stories to media. We focus pitches on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.



\$5,629,477
Ad equivalency



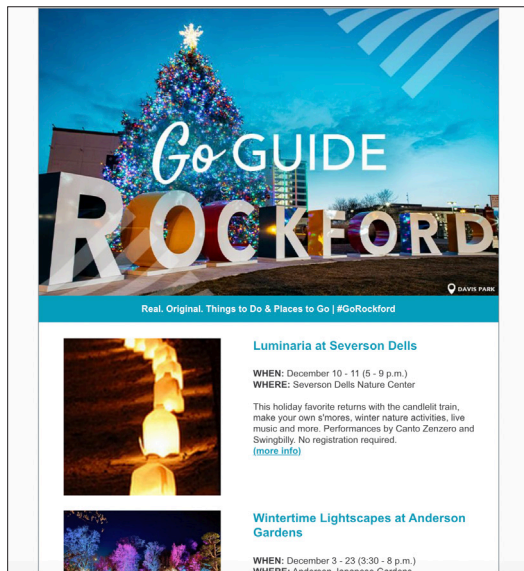
608,592,429
Total impressions



1,053
Number of mentions

ROCKFORD REGIONAL PROMOTIONS

Key to the marketing strategy is to ensure we support our local partners, attractions, and venues with events that would attract visitors and also benefit residents in our region. This support integrates promotion on our social media, website listings, event calendar inclusion, features in our weekly Go Guide, press releases, and other promotional tactics to increase visibility and visitation for our partners. In addition to the tactics above, we have continued regular weekly interviews with the RACVB on "What's Happening in the Rockford region." Stations and media partners include WIFR's The Morning Blend, WXRJ's Real ROCK Radio 104.9, B103 with Matt Hall and Chelsea Meyer, 95.3 The Bull with Steve Summers, WROK's NewsTalk 1440 with Riley O'Neil and 96.7 The Eagle with Double T, SOAR Radio's JD Morning Show with Justin Francis.



Go Guide eblast

Several news releases were sent to local media partners and stakeholders during the second quarter. News releases included Stroll on State, Dasher Dash 5K Run, CRE8IV, and a new visitor-focused Poetry Slam event at the RPL Nordlof.

GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Stroll on State
- Rockford, IL
- Things to do in Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- 2021 Festival of Lights
- Rockton Christmas Walk
- 815 Outside's Choose Your Adventure Challenge

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Burpee Museum of Natural History
- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Coronado Performing Arts Center

Website Traffic Sources

72%
Organic

10%
Social

13%
Direct

4%
Referral

106,303 total website visitors

ADVERTISING

Sports Advertising

A half page print advertisement was placed in the December 2021 issue of SportsEvents along with a featured advertorial highlighting the Rockford Region as a premier sports tournament destination.



Stroll on State Advertising

We executed a full marketing campaign from concept, research, ad designs and finally ad placements for Stroll on State utilizing 15 companies in the Rockford region in radio, TV, print, billboards, and targeted digital advertising in addition to social media ads. The goal of the campaign was foremost to spread the word about Stroll on State while ensuring we reached our entire community by partnering with mediums used by diverse audiences.



SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS SALES HIGHLIGHTS

Starting the second quarter off strong, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Rockford Park District worked together to welcome the **Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference's 2021 Women's Golf Championship at Aldeen Golf Course** October 1-3. The Championship included eight competing teams from the Midwest and individuals from over 15 colleges. St. Norbert College was the host college, and chose to host the tournament in Rockford, IL due to the central location and the quality of Aldeen Golf Course. This was the first time Aldeen was the host course, and we are glad to say that we will welcome the championship back in 2022. This tournament brought approximately \$61,000 of economic impact to the community.



Aldeen Golf Club

during the 2021 cycle. Other states that have hosted tournaments of this caliber include Indiana, South Dakota, and Arizona. Participants visited the Rockford region this weekend from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Nebraska.

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau was pleased to welcome the **2021 National Dart Association Regional Tournament** to the Rockford region from Friday to Sunday, November 5-7, 2021. Approximately 200 players competed in Singles, Doubles and Mixed Triple Combo games. The approximately 200 visitors projected an estimated \$83,000 of economic impact while visiting the Rockford region. The dart boards used during the tournament were provided by Arachnid360, a local company in Loves Park, IL. The tournament is one of three National Dart Association regional events

After a year off due to COVID-19, the annual **Al Dvorak Memorial Wrestling tournament** was once again hosted at Harlem High School December 18-19, 2021. This year's tournament brought in 37 teams from across the Midwest and an estimated \$120,000 of economic impact into the community.

Tournaments and events like this help to create a positive economic impact for locally owned businesses and generate tax revenue that assists in funding core functions of our region such as police, fire, and safety.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

IHSA Girls State Bowling Finals

February 2022
350 room nights
\$158,000 EEI

Professional Disc Golf Forest City Frenzy

June 2022
100 room nights
\$32,000 EEI

Corrigan Sports The 2022 District Central Lacrosse Championships

July 2022
1,000 room nights
\$600,000 EEI

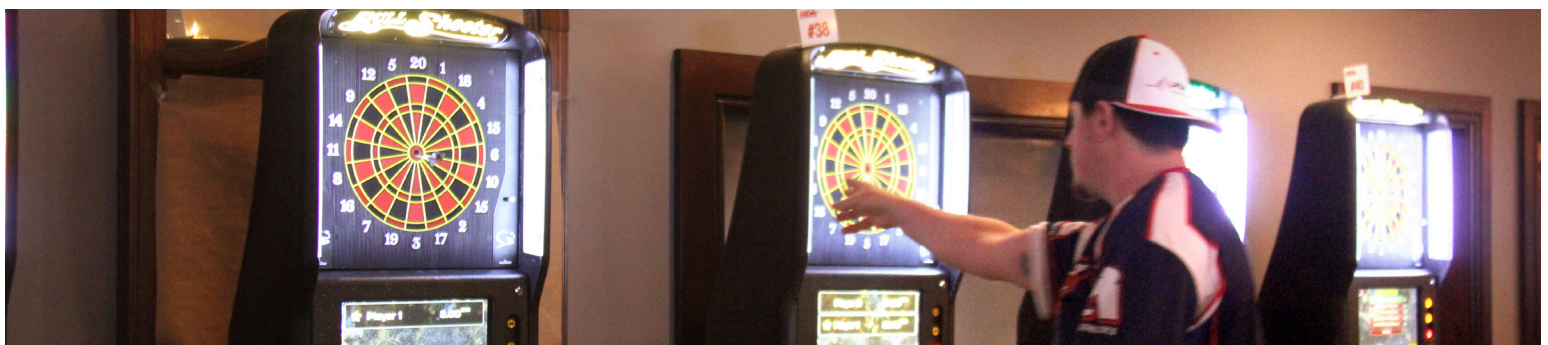
Tough Mudder

August 2022
500 room nights
\$205,000 EEI

All in Volleyball Opening Weekend Tournament

August 2022
250 room nights
\$197,000 EEI

EEI Total = \$1,192,000



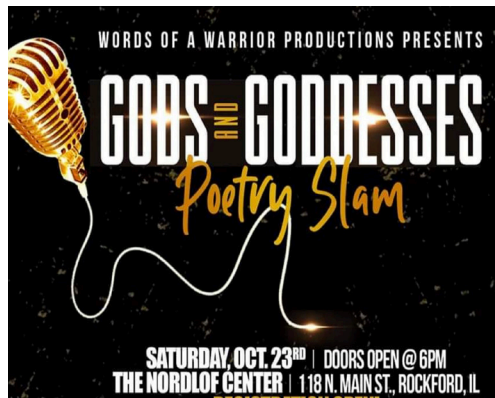
Darts tournament

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

MEETINGS SALES HIGHLIGHTS

The first (to be annual) **The Gods & Goddesses Poetry Slam competition** was held in downtown Rockford at the Nordloff Center on October 22-24. The event featured 16 of the top slam poets in the nation. The Rockford Convention & Visitors Bureau assisted with the event including securing rooms, helping with press and promotional opportunities. The slam was picked up and promoted by Yvonne Boose from Northern Public Radio. We look forward to welcoming this event back in 2022.

In November, we were honored to help host the **Illinois Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives**



The Gods & Goddesses Poetry Slam

at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront alongside the Rockford Chamber of Commerce. This meeting was planned for 2020 but rescheduled to this year because of the pandemic. The event brought in approximately 250 room nights and produced an estimated economic impact of \$66,000. The attendees from around the state were able to enjoy different parts of downtown, including an off-site session hosted at The Indoor City Market.

Group sales manager Kara Davis attended a religious trade show in Round Rock, TX called **Connect Faith**. Connect Faith is an annual education and appointment-based trade show that brings together religious meeting planners and DMOs. Kara represented Rockford during **40 face-to-face appointments with potential religious meeting planners** from around the US. There was interest by the planners to come to Rockford in the spring for a familiarization tour. The sales team has begun the process of planning the tour to showcase our meeting spaces, hotels, and other attractions.



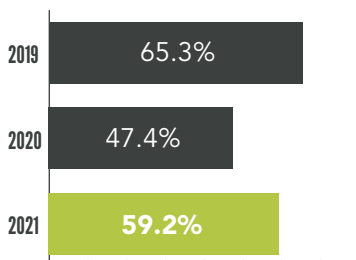
Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront



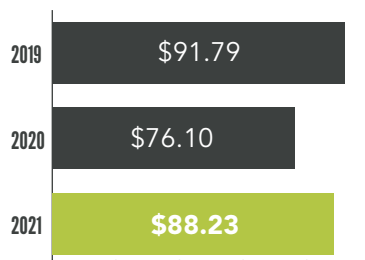
Connect Faith

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS (January - December 2021)

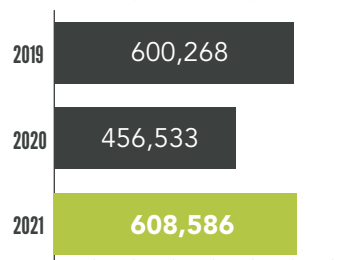
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



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
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Ted Rehl
City of South Beloit

Carol Schuster (Treasurer)
University of Illinois College of
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Mick Gronewold
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Destination Development
Events Manager



Martesha Brown
Director of Marketing &
Communications



Kara Davis
Group Sales Manager



Julie Huber
Destination Development
Operations Manager



Desheanda Ingram
Executive Assistant



Janet Jacobs
Marketing Assistant



Lindsey Kromm
Accounting Assistant



Joanne Nold
Director of Finance
& Administration



Dan Obert
Marketing &
Communications Manager



Kristen Paul
Director of Destination
Development



Emily Twigg
Office Coordinator/
Receptionist

