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With Fresh Eyes: Seeing our Region through the Visitor's Lens

By John Groh, President/CEO, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

A few years ago, as a visitor to the beautiful California coastal towns of Monterey and Carmel by the Sea, I overheard a resident lament, "Why do tourists love it here so much? The traffic is awful!" As a visitor, I could think of multiple reasons to love the bay area, however the comment also reminded me that locals tend to notice the pitfalls and can lose sight of the pleasures.

That's why RACVB works diligently to position Rockford positively, pitching stories to the media on why our locale is a great place to visit and live. In sharing highlights from a few recent media placements, I hope these fresh perspectives inspire you enjoy the sites and attractions of our region...and share them with those in your social network.

Katie Mills Giorgio at Matador Network told her readers that Rockford "offers beautiful landscapes and plenty of family-friendly adventures that make it a great destination for people who love the outdoors. The city and Winnebago County have more than 10,000 acres of protected recreational land, as well as 42 forest preserves for hiking, camping, fishing, and kayaking."

As locals, we often joke that "eating is recreation" and without a doubt, we have a reputation for outstanding pizzerias, upscale dining, and quaint cafes. "When you're ready to nosh, you'll find plenty of vegan options, including Pig Minds Brewing Company, America's first vegan brewery. The Spicy Peanut Tofu Zoodle Bowl is delicious, while its 10-beer flight is a generous tasting," according to Cortney Fries from Chicago Parent Magazine in her article "Cool Places to Travel with Your Kids Before School Starts." She further noted that, "Prairie Street Brewing Company has a fantastic patio along Rock River, plus kids can't get enough of their arcade games. Grab brunch at The Norwegian. Families eat up breakfast treats like the Swedish Cinnamon Knot."

A view on Rockford's livability was reported by Brunno Braga in Travel Noire's, "8 Cities Black Americans Should Consider for Career Growth In 2022." Brunno stated, "Being Illinois' fourth-largest metro, Rockford is starting to rise to the occasion with its unique nature attributes and a revitalized downtown, ranking as one of the Cities with the Lowest Cost of Living in America (Niche) and Top 50 Most Diverse Mid-Size Cities (WalletHub)." He shared data that over the last decade, we welcomed Black Americans at an increased growth rate of 9.2%, which is above the national average.

Our story of welcoming diversity continued in perspectives shared by reporters who picked up on our new Rockford Peaches Fan trail. "If you've binge-watched the Amazon TV series, 'A League of Their Own,' or seen just the 1992 movie, you should head to Rockford to learn more about the real-life professional women's baseball team made famous on screen," wrote Michele Herrmann in a Forbes article titled "New Rockford Peaches Fan Trail Goes to Bat In Promoting The City's Past And Present"

This Peaches story also received fresh eyes from travel writer Rachel Chang from Travel + Leisure who wrote, "Rockford, Ill. may have become a household name in Hollywood thanks to the beloved 1992 film 'A League of Their Own,' starring Geena Davis and Tom Hanks, but fast-forward to today, the charming town is filled with just as much female-led spirit and grit off-screen as its iconic baseball team was portrayed." Her article, "The Small Illinois Town from 'A League of Their Own' Is Filled With Female-owned Businesses" reported that, "Much like the new show, the city (Rockford) symbolizes an

unparalleled sense of female empowerment in the form of its tributes to its history as well as its roster of diverse, women-owned businesses.”

Sharing these highlights, further reminds me of the power of a fresh perspective and how the viewpoints of these five nationally published writers – along with 17 other travel and livability reporters who have written about Rockford in the past year – created nearly two billion positive impressions of Rockford. As the digital sharing continues, we’ll rack up even higher numbers on readership, which will likely inspire more folks to visit and see Real. Original. Rockford through their own eyes – and perhaps you too!

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