



ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT

FY23, Q3

January - March, 2023



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 hard, but rewarding, work of our region's new Destination Master Plan has begun. Over the last several months, the RACVB team, partners and stakeholders have met to discuss the process, initiate an RFP for the consultant and select the consultant who will guide the production of the plan. MMGY NextFactor, selected as the lead consultant, will participate in an immersion visit in June.

With stakeholder and public input, the plan will assess, consider and make recommendations related to items such as product analysis and current asset inventory (including outdoor recreation, hotel and meeting spaces, sports facilities, wayfinding, events and festivals, and transportation). Visitor profiles and the current state of visitation will be analyzed with the understanding of potential future visitor audiences.

It is key that the plan have immediate actionable items as well as goals that extend into the next decade. Each action must move our destination forward and set our region up for tourism success well into the future.

The Destination Master Plan is possible due in part to a \$277,500 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration as well as funding from the state of Illinois. We are thankful for this opportunity to identify any gaps, create a stronger community to live and work in and grow a resilient tourism economy.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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RACVB NEWS

DESTINATION MASTER PLANNING IS UNDERWAY

MMGY NextFactor has been selected as the lead consulting firm RACVB will work with to develop a new Destination Master Plan. The plan will guide the recovery, growth and resiliency of the tourism sector in the greater Rockford area, including Winnebago and Boone counties, over the next decade.

They will work with their partners, Hunden Strategic Partners, SMARInsights, Eight Fifteen Capital and C2 Consulting, to complete the plan. This team will zoom in to analyze key elements such as visitor experience, our tourism products, infrastructure and industry workforce. They'll zoom out to assess future needs, industry and consumer trends, and help us envision our future.

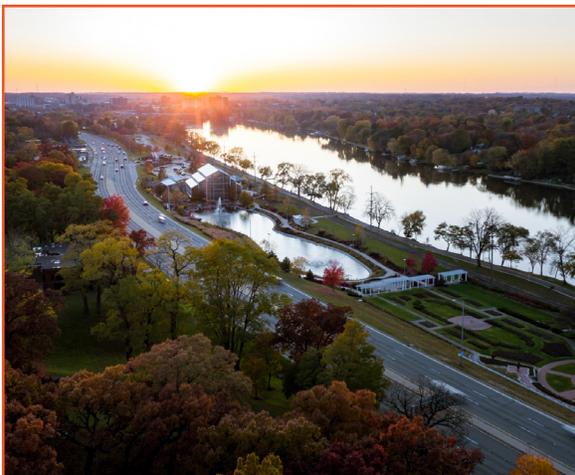
MMGY NextFactor was selected because of their specialization in travel and tourism and experience in having delivered insights and strategies to more than 330 destinations around the world. The needs of our market fully align with their philosophy that "to be a leader in the tourism sector today is to be an architect of future economies, societies and possibilities."

What's next? As the work begins, we will engage with hotels, attractions, local leaders, residents and many others

through one-to-one interviews, surveys, focus groups and town halls. Zooming in to gain community perspective is one of the most vital elements of this project.

We will rely on a variety of perspectives to set the course, ensuring the diversity of our community is reflected in final recommendations of our master plan.

The plan will be completed by **June 2024**.



The Rock River is one of the assets that attracts visitors.



Lino's Restaurant in Rockford won the "Best For All" award for 2023 Rockford Region Restaurant Week.

RESTAURANT WEEK WINNERS

Rockford area residents and visitors flocked to **52** (23 being new to the event) participating restaurants, bars and food establishments for **Rockford Region Restaurant Week** (Jan. 31 – Feb. 6). Restaurant-goers voted for Restaurant Week's "best of" awards on GoRockford.com.

"We were blown away by the enthusiasm for our Restaurant Week feature menu," said **(Paul Sletten)** executive chef and president of Abreo LLC. "It was the single busiest week we've had in January or February since opening in 2005, 18 years. We want to thank everyone who came out to dine with us and all the other amazing Rockford Restaurants."

Over **1,300 votes** were cast during the seven-day run for the "Best of" awards.



- ★ Best For All: Lino's
- ★ Best Bite: The Norwegian
- ★ Best Restaurant Week Package: Alchemy at Aldeen Supper Club
- ★ Best Atmosphere & Vibes: Ernie's Midtown Pub
- ★ Best Cocktail or Brew: 8th Ward Pub

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

FOREST CITY BEAUTIFUL PROGRAM ENHANCES PUBLIC SPACES

First impressions are key to welcoming visitors and give a sense of pride for our residents. Since 2014, **Forest City Beautiful**, a partnership between the City of Rockford and RACVB, collaborates to maintain the I-90/East State St. gateway, downtown and central city public spaces, street banners and directional signage.

The third quarter brought excitement as the Destination Development team was given the green light to allocate grant funds secured by Senator Steve Stadelman from the State of Illinois for the enhancement of downtown Rockford. The addition of **21** new planters, of which 6 will be placed at S. Main and Morgan St., will bring the total to **105 planters** that will bring seasonal color and texture to the downtown and central city walkways. Moreover, **4** outdoor café tables and chairs will be installed along S. Main St. and Wyman St. near the BMO Center. Shoppers and visitors alike can enjoy a beautiful walk, grab a coffee or lunch or sit and enjoy the beautiful surroundings.



By the Numbers

- 🌲 RACVB raises \$60,000 each year for Forest City Beautiful projects
- 🌲 105 planters in the downtown and central city walkways
- 🌲 21 planters to be added in 2023
- 🌲 4 outdoor café spaces to be installed in 2023
- 🌲 853 banners around town are maintained each year.



MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

RACVB attracts visitors to the Rockford region by working with regional and national media outlets. The team focuses on finding and sharing stories and content related to economic development and tourism marketing that motivate visitors to travel the area.

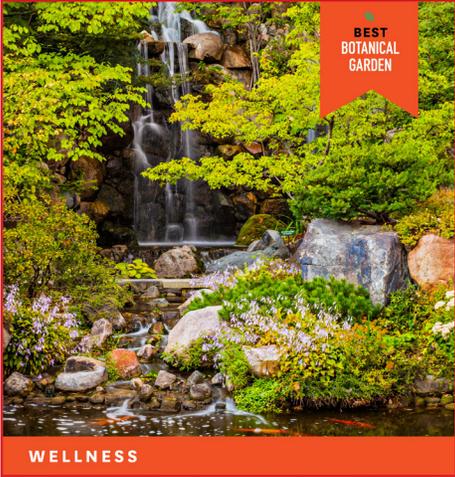
NATIONAL MEDIA MENTIONS

Livability: "3 Winter Road Trips Worth Braving the Cold" (1/19/2023) 251,968 Impressions and \$2,331 Earned Media.

Family Destinations: "15 Best Things to Do in Rockford, IL" (2/15/2023) 2,050,000 Impressions and \$18,962 Earned Media.



Livability's winter road trips article highlighted Rockford locations Stockholm Inn and the Nicolas Conservatory and Gardens.



Anderson Gardens won Midwest Living's Best Botanical Garden in the "Best of the Midwest Awards 2023".

SOCIAL MEDIA

- FACEBOOK**
93,154 Page Reach
30,315 Followers
- INSTAGRAM**
60,972 Page Reach
14,702 Followers
- LINKEDIN**
1,771 Followers
- TWITTER**
7,810 Impressions
6,541 Followers



EARNED MEDIA (January - March, 2023)

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



\$2,430,731
Ad equivalency



237,000,000
Total impressions



1,420
Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

This quarter there were three major social media campaigns that had impressive engagement.

JANUARY

The focus of January's campaigns was **Rockford Region Restaurant Week**. Postings included video, specials and the winners of restaurant week. The campaign reach was **223,669** viewers and **4,599** people engaged across 33 posts.



FEBRUARY

February's **"Black Joy"** profile campaign was created in honor of Black History Month. The campaign reach was **41,305** viewers and **2,132** people engaged across 4 posts.



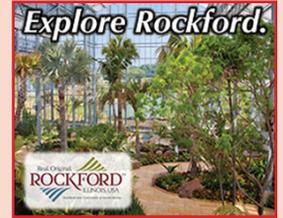
MARCH

March's campaign celebrated Women's History month with **"Women of the 815"**. The campaign reach was **116,497** viewers and **4,307** people engaged across 7 posts.



GEOLOCATION CAMPAIGN

In January, the marketing department coordinated a geolocation campaign for the **2023 Midwest & Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Championship**. The main objective of the campaign was to capture attendees at the BMO Center who visited Rockford during the 2023 Midwest & Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Championship. Visitors were retargeted with **"Explore Rockford"** Google and Facebook Ads.



In February, this campaign drew **159,025** impressions. In March, this campaign drew **174,784** impressions for a grand total of **333,809** impressions for February and March. The campaign resulted in a **15% increase** in web traffic from the same quarter in 2022. In 2023 there were **78,144** unique visitors versus **65,959** in 2022.



GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Things to Do in Rockford, IL
- Rockford, IL
- Events in Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- Rockford Region Restaurant Week
- 42nd Annual Rockford Home Show
- WWE: Road to WrestleMania Supershow

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Burpee Museum of Natural History
- Discovery Center Museum
- Anderson Japanese Gardens

Website Traffic Sources



100,515 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



A synchronized skating team performs their program.

SYNCHRONIZED SKATING

The Rockford Region and BMO Center hosted **163** synchronized skating teams from across the Midwest and Pacific Coast from **January 25-29**. Teams comprised of eight to 25 skaters and ranged in ages from 5 to 60 years old. Over **5,000** hotel rooms were booked in over **83** different hotels. The sectional championships drove economic growth in the Rockford region by drawing in an estimated economic impact of **\$2.9 million** for the week.

IKWF

Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation was hosted at BMO Center and brought **1,000 athletes** March 9-11, 2023.

This marks a nearly two-decade partnership with the IKWF, the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau and the BMO Center.

"The IKWF is proud to continue to bring our State Championship to Rockford," said Gene Lee, IKWF Vice President of the Board of Directors. "It is a goal for all of our youth wrestlers to compete on the big stage in the BMO Center." Beyond the 1,000 wrestlers, an expected **3,500- 4,000 spectators** attended. The tournament brought an estimated **\$1.3 million** for the region, thanks to visitor spending in transportation, retail, food and beverage, lodging and recreation.

IHSA BOWLING FINALS

In February Cherry Bowl hosted **IHSA Girls State Bowling Finals**. Approximately **225 bowlers** and **30 teams** from throughout Illinois competed in singles and team games at The Cherry Bowl in Rockford. The tournament guests spent an estimated **\$190,534** while visiting the Rockford region.

ROCKFORD VOLLEYBALL

The Amateur Athletic Union hosted The Rockin' Rockford Grand Prix Volleyball Tournament March 11-12 and brought an estimated **\$841,000** to the region with over **5,000** total visitors. UW Health Sports Factory and Mercyhealth Sportscore Two hosted the tournament.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

Illinois Sister City Convention

April 21-22, 2023
40 Room Nights
Economic Impact \$21,644

Illinois Association of Snowmobile Clubs

November 3-6, 2023
80 Room Nights
Economic Impact \$45,485

2024 Illinois USBC Open State Tournament

February-May 2024
2,500 Room Nights
Economic Impact \$731,000

NAFA Midwest Nationals

July 12-15, 2023
1400 Room Nights
Economic Impact \$181,000

Future Hotel Room Nights Booked: 14,586 with an economic impact of \$5,671,201.

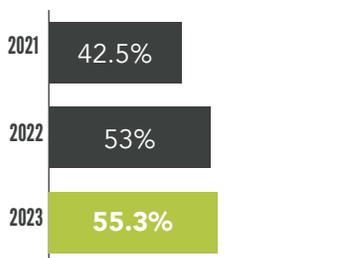
Number of Bookings: 38



Decorated skate cookies were a delicious delight for synchronized skating guests.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS January - March 2023

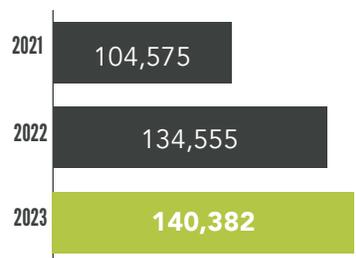
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



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

Carol Schuster (Chair)
University of Illinois College of
Medicine - Rockford

Tinana McCall (Vice Chair)
Illinois Department of Commerce and
Economic Opportunity

Chad Anderson (Treasurer)
Anderson Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram

Darrell Snorek (Secretary)
Lamonica Beverages

Nathan Bruck
City of Loves Park

Todd Cagnoni
City of Rockford

Patricia Diduch
Village of Rockton

Kevin Frost
City of Rockford

Jennifer Furst
FurstStaffing

Mick Gronewold
Fehr Graham Engineering
& Environmental

Bobby Holzwarth
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Sonya Hoppes
City of South Beloit

Geno Iafate
Hard Rock Rockford

Shelton Kay
Crusader Community Health

Dana Martin
Rush Oak Park Hospital

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Office of State
Representative Dave Vella

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Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Jay Sandine
Rockford Park District

Richard Shuga
Painters District Council
No. 30 Local 607

Therese Thill
Rockford Area Economic
Development Council

Patrick Thompson
Winnebago County

Kirk Weitzel
Rock Hospitality

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Group Sales Manager



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Operations Manager



Janet Jacobs
Marketing Assistant



Lindsey Kromm
Accounting Assistant



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Customer Experience &
Marketing Coordinator



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Executive Assistant



Emily Plumb
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