

ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT



FY24, Q3
January - March, 2024



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



In our third quarter we continued to focus on our community partners and engaging in impactful teamwork. As you'll see in this quarterly report, our commitment to collaboration within our community can be seen in the expansion of **Rockford Region Restaurant Week** and this year's

CRE8IV Music & Arts Fest.

Our marketing efforts focused on sharing the best of Rockford and new businesses in the region with engaging content on what it means to be a Rockfordian. We were bowled over by the tournaments and youth athletics that came to Rockford, filling our communities and generating important revenue.

Last year at this time we were starting our **Destination Master Plan: Thrive 2035** process. As near the completion of this project, it is exciting to see all the potential and hope possible in the Rockford Region.

We have engaged with stakeholders, policy makers and residents to evaluate the most important challenges and opportunities that face our city, and it is impressive the passion and commitment so many in our town feel toward Rockford. We look forward to sharing the results and collaborating with the community on what comes next.

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RAVCB NEWS

Restaurant Week	3
Illinois Governor Conference	3

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Big Ideas	4
Destination Development Updates	4

MARKETING

Media Mentions & Placements	5
Earned Media	5
Social Media	5
Social Media Campaigns	6
Website Statistics	6

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

Sports Sales Highlights	7
Booking Highlights	7
Winnebago County Hotel Statistics	7

RACVB BOARD & STAFF

RACVB Board of Directors	8
RACVB Staff	8

RACVB NEWS

ROCKFORD REGION RESTAURANT WEEK BACK



Cornsilog at 27 Aluna is one of the featured dishes during the week.

Rockford Region Restaurant Week 2024 was a record-breaking success. The extended **11-day** (January 25 - February 4) event provided **62 local restaurants** with the opportunity to showcase their culinary specialties for visitors and residents and giving opportunity for the community to vote in the **"Best of"** awards. At a time of year that usually has diminished revenue in the cold months, Rockford Region Restaurant Week is a catalyst for tangible growth and unity in the local food scene.

Underscoring its success, a post-event survey of participating restaurants reported a considerable uptick in sales figures compared to the previous week and on average, a hefty **40% sales increase** was experienced by many restaurants.

With their first winter being open, "Restaurant Week really helped to showcase we were open to the public and it was a success from the overall experience to the feedback we received and increase in sales during our otherwise quieter months," **said Brent Murray, Dairyhäus owner and winner of Best Dessert.**

Over **1,800 votes** were cast for the **"Best of"** awards over the 11-day event.

A DOUBLE WIN AT GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau has reason to celebrate after capturing two prestigious awards at the **2024 Illinois Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism**. With its unwavering dedication to excellence and community collaboration, RACVB's recent recognition underlines its pivotal role in promoting tourism and civic pride in the Rockford region.

The first of the awards was **Best Cooperative Partnership Budget A** for RACVB's efforts in hosting the 2023 **Midwestern and Pacific Coast Synchronized Skating Sectional Championships**. The event showcased a seamless partnership between RACVB, BMO Center, Skating Council of Illinois and the City of Rockford, executing a large-scale sporting event that drew participants and visitors from across the region.



The RACVB Team celebrates their Best Cooperative Partnership Budget A at the Governor's Conference Awards in Peoria March 19, 2024.

RACVB received **Best Event or Festival Budget A** for our signature event, **Stroll on State**. By offering an array of festive activities, themed attractions and local culinary delights, Stroll has become a cherished event for Rockford, embodying the essence of community engagement and shared celebration.

These awards underscore RACVB's ability to forge strong partnerships and leverage resources to the benefit of the entire community. The attention brought by these accolades serves as a testament to our organization's commitment to not only deliver exceptional experiences but to do so responsibly and economically. The dual honors at the Governor's Conference mark a significant achievement for the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, rewarding its efforts to elevate the city's spirit while fostering community growth and togetherness.



-  **Best Cocktail or Brew:**
Ernie's Midtown Pub
-  **Best Deal:**
Cheezy's Grilled Cheeses
-  **Best Dessert:** Dairyhäus
-  **Best Experience:**
Hidden Creek Estates
-  **Best Main Course:**
SALT.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

IN ROCKFORD BIG IDEAS COULD LEAD TO REAL CHANGE



RACVB hosts Big Ideas dinner at the City Market on February 7, 2024.

On February 7, 2024, RACVB brought back its **Big Ideas Dinner**, a gathering of board members, elected officials, industry colleagues, and community leaders in partnership with members of our **Destination Master Plan Steering Committee** and consultants at MMGY NextFactor to learn from **four tourism industry thought leaders** from communities across the nation who have successfully launched innovative initiatives in their regions.

After months of in-depth research into the Rockford region, the Destination Master Plan process was in the important stage of working with community members to develop **Big Ideas** for the future of the Rockford Region. In TED Talk-style presentations Mark Miller, managing director of planning and design for **Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.**, Kalene Griffith, president/CEO at **Visit Bentonville**, Josh Schamberger, president, **Think Iowa City**, and Marla Roe, executive director, **Visit Frisco** provided inspirational discussions on topics related to community and destination marketing, management, development, and growth.



Ink Factory, a Chicago based artist, storyboards the conversation during the dinner to save for future ideas.

encouraged a collaborative dialogue among all attendees, fostering a shared vision for innovation and growth in the local tourism industry and the community at large.

RACVB Works to Enhance Destination

In 2014, RACVB launched the ambitious **Forest City Beautiful** project to transform downtown into a vibrant hub, sparking business growth and community pride. This initiative kicked off with a makeover of public spaces - from restoring landscapes and planting colorful seasonal containers to setting up cozy seating spots, convenient trash cans, navigational signs, and eye-catching public art. Fast forward, and the program has flourished, introducing landmark placemaking elements like the iconic "Rockford" letters at Davis Park, managing over **850 street banners**, and rolling out the CRE8IV Transformational Art murals, adding a splash of creativity across the city.

The CRE8IV Mural Transformational Arts Program is gearing up for its most engaging season yet, with a 3-day festival at the end of May. Supported by a **\$235,000 grant** from the state and general sponsors, donors and partners, the festival will highlight the talent, imagination and culture of the Rockford region.

A heartfelt shoutout to our community stakeholders - your unwavering support fuels the Forest City Beautiful initiative and CRE8IV every year, making our collective dream of a more attractive, engaging, and spirited community a reality. Here's to a future where beauty and creativity lead the way.

MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

RACVB attracts visitors to the Rockford region by working with regional and national media outlets. Our marketing team promotes local events, partnering with the community to attract visitors and improving our economy.

NATIONAL MEDIA MENTIONS

Yahoo! News: "Long-awaited COVID relief arrives for Rockford-area restaurants" (2/26/2024) 60,800,000 Impressions and \$224,960 Earned Media

Architectural Digest: "29 Frank Lloyd Wright Homes You Can Actually Visit" (1/12/2024) 9,150,000 Impressions and \$33,855 Earned Media

Thrillist: "The Most Beautiful Places in Illinois Feature Waterfalls, Stunning Vistas, and Wildflowers" (3/12/2024) 2,480,000 Impressions and \$9,176 Earned Media



The Laurent House Photo: Andrew Patlaga, courtesy of the Laurent House Foundation

Laurent House (1948)

Rockford, Illinois

The Laurent House is particularly special in Wright's catalog of work, as it was the only home he designed for someone with a disability, Kenneth Laurent, who used a wheelchair, and his wife, Phyllis. "This house helps me focus on my capabilities, not my disability. That is the true gift Mr. Wright gave to me," Kenneth said about the property. Admission: \$25. [Book a tour here.](#)

Architectural Digest covers the Laurent House in Rockford in their January article.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

1.5 Million Impressions
35,500 Followers



INSTAGRAM

166,400 Impressions
17,700 Followers



LINKEDIN

2,005 Followers



X

2,700 Impressions
6,473 Followers

Top Facebook Post

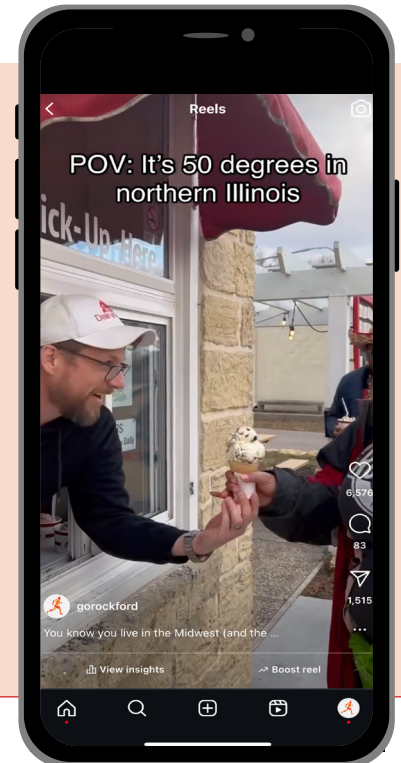
January 3, 2024 | Impressions 103,377

GoRockford
January 3

New year, new businesses in the Rockford region! 🎉 Cheers to these new businesses that recently opened in Rockford! Make it a goal to support local in 2024!

- **Taco Libre** | 501 E. State St., Ro | 501 E. State St., Rockford
- **Keebler Kitchen** | 5811 Forest Hills Road, Rockford
- **Union Rockford The Lounge** | 112 N. Second St., Rockford... [See more](#)

Katryna Kirby and 411 others
138 comments 485 shares



EARNED MEDIA (January - March, 2024)

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



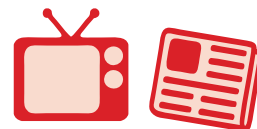
\$3,607,531

Ad equivalency



461,138,484

Total impressions



977

Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

JANUARY

January's focus was **Rockford Region Restaurant Week** (see sidebar for results) and new businesses in the region. Part of what led to such high results for Rockford Region Restaurant Week was 17 local restaurant partners offered giveaways, which helped boost excitement. The campaign successfully reached an impressive audience of **799,600** viewers, with **over 16,700** individuals actively engaging across **47** posts.

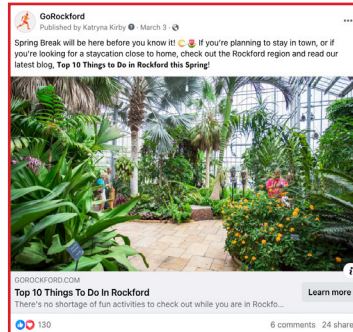
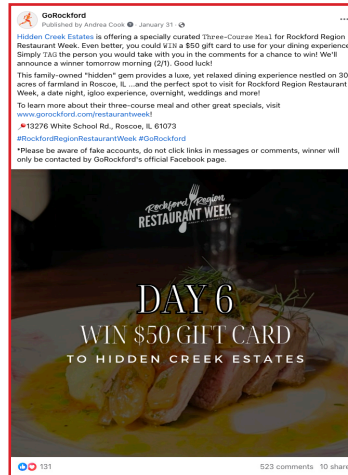


FEBRUARY

February's **Black History Month** campaign included a poem from recent city of Rockford youth poet laureate **Trinity Rucker**. At only 13 years old, Rucker has won accolades and performs locally. Additional featured locals were **Tedd Snowden** of Farmers Rising, **David Ruffin** of Ethnic Heritage Museum, and **Karen Waller** of AARC at Booker T Washington Community Center. The posts had over 200,000 viewers.

MARCH

March focused on Spring break in Rockford and Women's History Month. Locals featured were Samantha Hockmann of Tinker Swiss Cottage, Alderperson Gabrielle Torina and Julie Thomas of Rockford Symphony Orchestra. March's social media brought in **463,900 viewers** across **37 posts**.



Rockford Region Restaurant Week Boosts Local Revenue

Rockford Region Restaurant Week 2024

boasted impressive social media engagement, with awareness on Facebook and Instagram soaring **almost 800,000** a **107% increase** from Rockford Region Restaurant Week 2023.

The event attracted **15,000** individuals to engage in giveaways and

saw a notable increase in voting, reaching **1,805 participants**. Notably, over **900 new followers** were gained on social media channels, tripling the usual monthly growth rate. Post-event surveys revealed a significant sales surge for participating restaurants, with an **average revenue increase of 40%**, and one reported a remarkable **150% spike in revenue**. Specials for the week were a hit, with offerings selling **30% higher** on average, and one location noting that **75%** of their sales comprised the featured dishes. Media coverage contributed to heightened awareness, with **255 mentions** amplifying reach. Marketing efforts also included a Google advertising campaign, billboards, social media advertising and working with a local influencer, Davarion Jarvelle. Overall, the event showcased the region's culinary diversity, community engagement, and economic vitality.



GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

Rockford Events
Things To Do In Rockford, IL
Restaurants in Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

Rockford Region Restaurant Week
43rd Annual Rockford Home Show
St. Patrick's Day Festival & Paddyfest

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Anderson Japanese Gardens
Burpee Museum
Discovery Center Museum

Website Traffic Sources



5.1%
Paid Search

0.5%
Other

90,187 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



Athletes warm up during the IKWF tournament in March 2024 at the BMO Center.

A ROCK AND BOWL QUARTER FOR SALES

This quarter the Rockford region had visiting bowlers galore. The **Illinois State United States Bowling Congress (USBC) Bowling Association Championship Tournament** returned to Rockford after a three year absence. USBC is taking place over seven consecutive weekends, bringing over **1,000 teams** with more than **4,000 bowlers**. For the 30th year the Rockford region hosted the **Illinois High School Girls Bowling State Finals** at Cherry Bowl bringing in **24 teams** and over **500 spectators** and included a recorded number of wheelchair participants with **seven bowlers**. Hosting the girls' state finals for the past 30 years and

bringing USBC back to Rockford is a true testament to the great facilities and welcoming accommodations our region offers. The combined events generated almost **\$1 million** in economic impact.

STARZ VOLLEYBALL

The **Starz Volleyball Forest City Classic Tournament** started the tournament season off at the UW Health Sports Factory. The tournament was held **March 1-2** and hosted girls aged 11-18 and boys 13-14 and booked an estimated **700 rooms** with an economic impact of over **\$600,000**.

YOUTH ATHLETES DOMINATE IN MARCH

The second weekend of March was extremely busy with two major youth sports tournaments. The area celebrated the 22nd year of hosting **Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation (IKWF)** at the BMO Center, and simultaneously Rockford hosted the **2024 Rockin' Rockford AAU Grand Prix Volleyball** tournament at the UW Health Sports Factory and Mercyhealth Sportscore Two. Collectively, participants, coaches, and fans who traveled to the region drew an estimated **\$1.7 million** during their stay.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

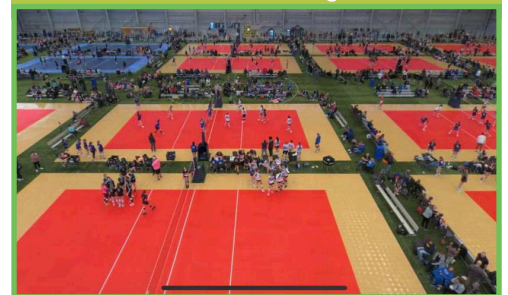
National Collegiate Table Tennis Association
April 4-6, 2025
400 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$240,000

World Wake Association Regional Championships (Rider Experience Central)
June 21-23, 2024
800 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$455,639

Chicagoland Summer Classic
June 14-15, 2024
700 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$432,000

North American Fastpitch Men's Masters World Series
August 14-18, 2025
Mercyhealth Sportscore One
Estimated Economic Impact \$398,000

Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 17,462 with an economic impact of \$3.3 Million
Number of Bookings: 22

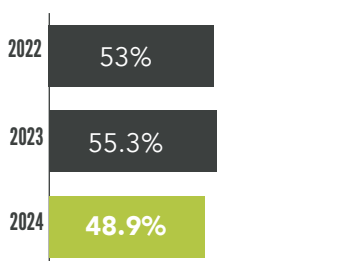


Teams prepare to compete in 2024 Rockin' Rockford AAU Grand Prix Volley in March.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS

January - March, 2024

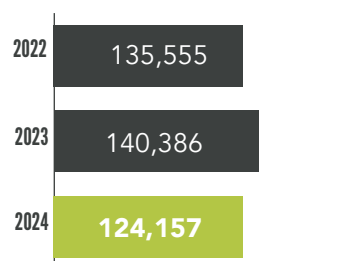
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



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

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

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
HolmstromKennedy

Sonya Hoppes
City of South Beloit

Geno Iafrate
Hard Rock Rockford

Shelton Kay
Crusader Community Health

Dana Martin
Rush Oak Park Hospital

Ricardo Montoya-Picazo
Office of State
Representative Dave Vella

Caitlin Pusateri
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Jay Sandine
Rockford Park District

Richard Shuga
Painters District Council
No. 30 Local 607

Patrick Thompson
Winnebago County

Kirk Weitzel
Rock Hospitality

RACVB STAFF



John Groh
President, CEO



Kristen Paul
Executive Vice President



Lindsay Arellano
Vice President of
Sales & Service



Joanne Nold
Vice President of Finance



Amanda August
Receptionist/Administrative
Assistant



Chenaire Barmore
Community Engagement
Coordinator



Kara Davis
Senior Sales Manager



Elizabeth Falls
Marketing Manager



Julie Huber
Destination Development
Operations Manager



Lindsey Kromm
Accounting Assistant



Brandi Liantonio
Executive Assistant



Emily Plumb
Sales & Servicing Manager

