

ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

QUARTERLY REPORT



FY24, Q4
April - June, 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



Our fourth quarter was marked by big awards, exciting endings and inspiring beginnings. We started the summer awarding **33 restaurants** over **\$496,000** utilizing Rep. West Winnebago County Restaurant Grant. This grant provided necessary relief to local restaurants that supported our community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Then in celebration of the sunsetting of our **CRE8IV initiative**, we ended the program with the **CRE8IV: Arts and Music Fest**, a three-day event filled with local and regional musicians, murals, sculpture installations, and art projects all provided for free to the Rockford community. CRE8IV allowed us to share our love for Rockford by bringing art to every corner of the community. Though we expect to continue to encourage and share art around the city, we plan to turn our focus on how to impact, improve, and influence the future of Rockford with the **Destination Master Plan: Thrive 2035**.

To end the quarter, we announced our new three-year partnership with **IRONMAN**, bringing a new **70.3 km** race to Rockford. This impressive partnership was made possible with help from an Illinois Office of Tourism grant that helps communities alleviate the cost of hosting events. The **IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford-Illinois** partnership starts in 2025 and we're excited to bring this amazing opportunity to our community.

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau continuously works to share the impressive opportunities in our community. We will always advocate for the city by saying, "GoRockford! Be amazed by all we have to offer!"

Be well,

John Groh
RACVB president/CEO

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RACVB NEWS

GRANT AIDS LOCAL RESTAURANTS

In a collaborative effort to support the vibrant culinary landscape of the Rockford region, **Illinois State Representative Maurice West** and the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) announced the distribution of state-funded grants totaling **\$469,475.35** to **33 local businesses**. Restaurants were eligible to apply for the grant based on increases in their taxes for adhering to



Emily Hurd of Norwegian speaks at the Restaurant Grant news conference.

COVID-19 pandemic closures and mandates.

Expressing his commitment to aiding local businesses, Rep. Maurice West remarked, "Our restaurants are part of the heart and soul of our communities, providing not just meals, but also employment opportunities and gathering spaces. The grants we've awarded are a testament to our unwavering dedication to preserving the fabric of Rockford's culinary community." A second round of awards is anticipated to be completed in late September.

ROCKFORD OFFERS AN ADVENTURE ALL ITS OWN

The third free digital passport program, the **Rockford Adventure Trail** launched in June. The trail features over **30 attractions** throughout the Rockford region, including museums, parks, preserves, and more. Participants check into the various locations and earn points that can be redeemed for fun prizes.

The two previous digital passports include **Rockford Pizza Hop** and **Rockford Public Art Trail**. The digital passport program has been successful, driving more visitation and awareness to the region. With over **6,500 check-ins** (many from out of state visitors), the program has been a great addition to the marketing efforts of the RACVB. Adventurers can sign up at gorockford.com/adventuretrail.

IRONMAN 70.3 ROCKFORD ILLINOIS ANNOUNCED

RACVB with assistance from an Illinois Office of Tourism grant was able to attract **IRONMAN**, the global leader in long-distance triathlon to bring a new event to the City of Rockford. **IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford-Illinois** Triathlon is the first IRONMAN event to be held in the State of Illinois and will bring in an estimated **10,000 athletes and spectators** to the city.

"IRONMAN 70.3 athletes push themselves to continually improve, to be better each day, to not settle for less than their personal best. The city of Rockford is like that too," said **John Groh, president/CEO of RACVB**.

Athletes start the race by Terese Agnew's "Rockmen" sculpture that stands guard over the city and can expect river views, park greenways, and scenic neighborhoods on their way, swimming, biking, and running to a finish line in downtown Rockford.



IRONMAN 70.3 Race Director Eric Atnip speaks at the IRONMAN news conference on June 22, 2024.



The RACVB team poses in front of the "Rockmen", dressed in IRONMAN shirts for the IRONMAN news conference on June 24, 2024.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

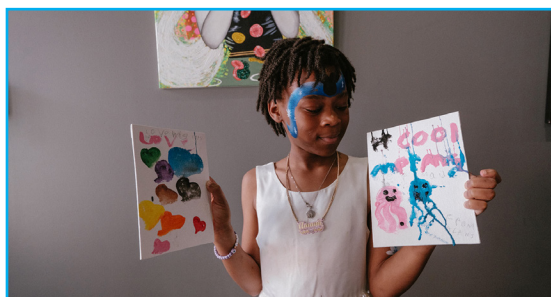
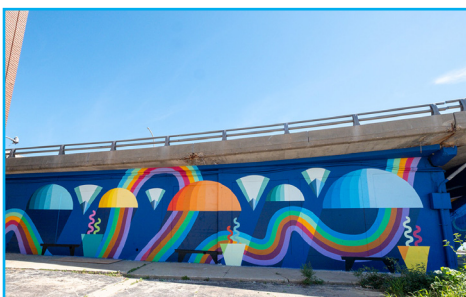
CRE8IV: A FITTING END TO A BEAUTIFUL INITIATIVE



Local muralist Dice White paints a mini mural during the festival.

In 2019, RACVB began the **CRE8IV: Transformational Art** initiative to build pride in the Rockford community by enhancing the beauty of our neighborhoods and provide access to art for residents and visitors alike. After five years, the CRE8IV initiative sunsetted with a three-day festival supported by a state grant and many local sponsors. **CRE8IV: Music & Arts Fest** was a free event providing an exciting and lively start to summer for everyone in Rockford to enjoy and helped close the CRE8IV initiative, proving the impact it had on the community.

“While there is sadness about this being our last year, it was an honor to have had over 400 artists want to be a part of CRE8IV over the past 5 years and we look forward to supporting Rockford in new ways in the years to come,” said **Kristen Paul, RACVB Executive Vice President**. The CRE8IV initiative is responsible for the installation of **57 mural projects** and **16 sculptures** around the Rockford region. RACVB is grateful for the support of our sponsors and longtime partners of the CRE8IV program, Painters Union District 30, Local 607 John D. Brubaker Family Foundation, and Collins Aerospace. Without their partnership, and the partnership of many other local sponsors this initiative would not have been as successful. The future in the region is bright with the addition of these beautiful masterpieces.





By the Numbers

- 57 Completed Murals
- 16 Sculptures
- 72 Sponsorships
- 400+ Artist Applications
- 1 Street Mural
- 4 Sock Monkeys in Murals
- 125 Stops on Public Art Trail
- 1 Rockford Peaches Mural



MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

RACVB garners media mentions and placements to draw visitors to the Rockford region. Collaborating with regional and national media outlets, our team diligently seeks and shares captivating stories and compelling content centered experiences in Rockford, visiting the region and destination development.

NATIONAL MEDIA MENTIONS

MSN: "The Midwestern city named to be the country's top real-estate market" (4/26/2024) 136,000,000 impressions and \$503,200 Earned Media

Wall Street Journal: "Rockford Is Now America's Top Housing Market After an Improbable Turnaround" (4/25/2024) 31,800,000 Impressions and \$117,660 Earned Media

Fox Business: "The mayor of America's top real estate market explains how it flipped the housing script" (05/30/2024) 16.6 Million Impressions and \$153,000 in Earned Media

Yahoo News: "Your turn: Rockford Promise can grow even more with your help" (5/25/2024) 24,200,000 Impressions and \$89,540 Earned Media

Patch.com: "In First for Illinois, Ironman 70.3 Series Coming To Rockford" (6/24/2024) 12,100,000 Impressions and \$44,770 Earned Media



The Wall Street Journal profiles Rockford as a top housing market in their April article.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

1.9 Million Impressions
36,620 Followers



INSTAGRAM

397,100 Impressions
19,100 Followers



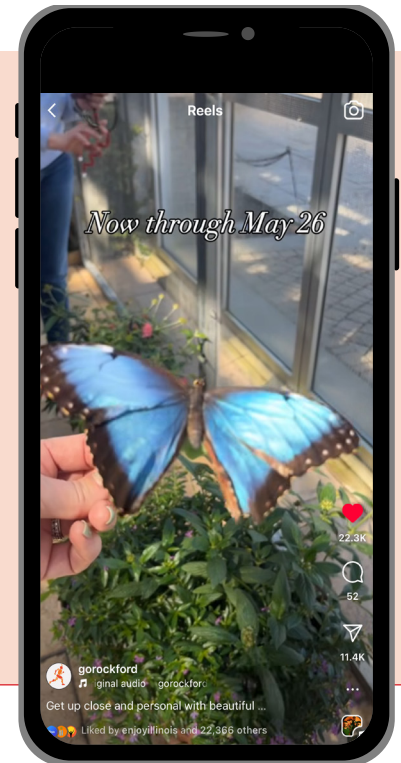
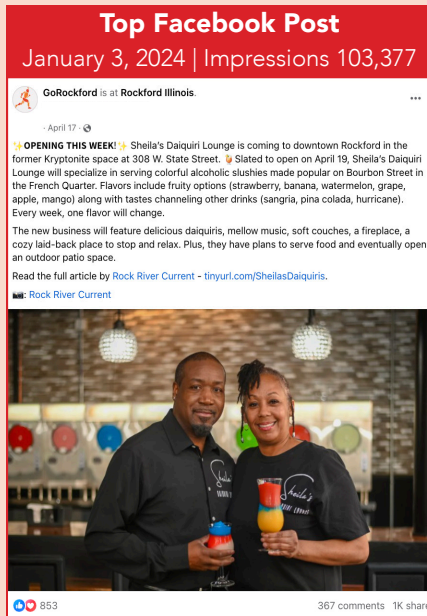
LINKEDIN

2,319 Followers



X

1,245 Impressions
6,496 Followers



EARNED MEDIA (April - June, 2024)

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



\$5,831,795

Ad equivalency



663,652,768

Total impressions



924

Number of mentions

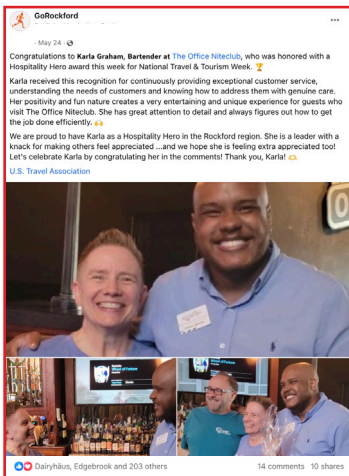
MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

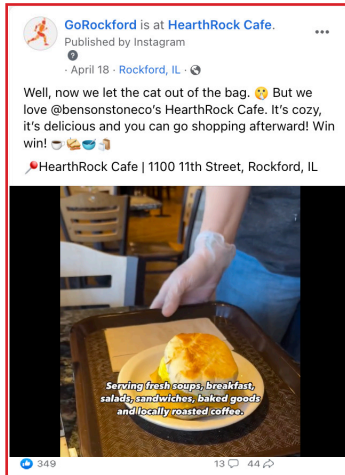
APRIL

April's focus was promoting spring activities including the best places to see spring blooms. Promoting new business openings was also a focus. This month also included a post that went semi-viral about the Secret Life of Butterflies at the Nicholas Conservatory (shown on last page) with over **22,336 likes** on Instagram. The reel received an phenomenal **373,617** plays. April's posts had over **529,000** viewers across **39** posts.



MAY

May's campaigns included promoting the **CRE8IV Music & Arts Fest** and **National Travel & Tourism Week**. Local partners provided over **25 giveaways** for the week and the RACVB made special travel baskets to promote local partners. With the flurry of events, farmer's markets and the hospitality heroes, there was an increase in posts for the month, with **63**. The viewers for the month was an astounding **1.2 million**.



JUNE

June kicked off **CRE8IV Music & Arts** and also highlighted the **13 new mural projects** added in 2024 throughout the month. June's focus was also summer fun in the region including live music. The total engagement for the month was over **593,600 viewers** across **57** posts.



National Travel and Tourism Week Campaign

RACVB celebrated National Travel and Tourism Week, **May 19-25**. The campaign included **Hospitality Heroes Awards**, a travel sweepstakes, social media giveaways and booth activations at area attractions.

The Hospitality Heroes nominations opened in March and individuals were nominated by their peers for contributions to the hospitality industry. There were five winners in five categories. The winners were presented with an award, gift card and a Rockford themed basket during the week.

Hospitality Hero Award Recipients:

- 🌟 **Tina Sumner, Holiday Inn Express**
- 🌟 **Gina Brown, Discovery Center**
- 🌟 **Donna Johnson, Savor/ASM**
- 🌟 **Karla Graham, The Office**
- 🌟 **Milton Phillips, UW Health Sports Factory**

With the generous support of local businesses, RACVB was able to offer in person and social media giveaways in person to hotels, attractions and restaurants during this celebration of travel and tourism.

The campaign drove sign-ups for a summer sweepstakes to the GoRockford website to drive new enews subscribers. The results of this campaign were astounding, with over **1,233 contest submissions**, and over **50,000 visitors** to the website (up 57% over the previous May).

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

CRE8IV Music & Arts Festival
Old Settlers Days
Rockford Area Pride Parade

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

CRE8IV Music & Arts Festival
Old Settlers Days
Rockford Area Pride Parade

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Anderson Japanese Gardens
Beyer Stadium
Rockford City Market

Website Traffic Sources

68.7%
Organic

14.9%
Direct

8%
Paid Search

0.6%
Other

121,654 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



A wake boarder completes a jump at the World Wakeboard Association Regional Championships in June.

ALL LACROSSE ROCKFORD

The **Upper Midwest Lacrosse Conference (UMLC)**, returned for their second year with teams representing states across the Midwest, bringing an estimated **1,000 attendees** on **April 19-21**. **Team Illinois Lacrosse** returned **May 4-5** and brought close to **7,000 visitors** and an estimated economic impact of **\$503,082**. Both events were held at MercyHealth Sportscore Two.

ULTIMATE FRISBEE DOMINATES

Neuqua-Valley Ultimate Frisbee, a club of co-ed middle and high school age players hosted their **Neuqua Knockout** qualifying tournament in Rockford on **May 4-5**. The

tournament hosted over **96 teams** from across the United States. On **June 7-8**, the **Ultiworld** held their **High School National Invite** ultimate frisbee tournament, including **32 high school teams**. Both events generated an estimated **\$523,526** of economic impact and were held at MercyHealth Sportscore Two.

SPRING OF FIRSTS

Many first time events came Rockford this spring, introducing new visitors to our community. **NXT PRO Circuit** basketball tournament, held at UW Health Sports Factory from **April 11-14**, hosted **74 teams** from all around the Midwest bringing in over **3,000 attendees**. **World Wake Association's Wakeboard and Wakesurf Central Regional Championship**, held **June 21-23**, hosted over **400 competitors** with an estimated economic impact of close to **\$500,000**.

DISC GOLF MANIA

On **June 1-2**, **Forest City Frenzy**, a disc golf tournament returned to Anna Page and Ingersoll Memorial Parks. The tournament brought **280 players** and around **350 spectators** from 15 different states and the providing an estimated **\$133,973** in visitor spending to the region.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford, Illinois

June 22, 2025
7,000 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact: \$8.1 million

Fire & Iron Motorcycle Regional Rally

July 17-20, 2025
1,200 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$479,775

The Gaming Outsider

October 11-12, 2024
50 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$76,430

Ride-Illinois Bike Tour

June 8-10, 2025
200 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$50,449

Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 20,600 with an economic impact of \$10.5 Million
Number of Bookings: 25

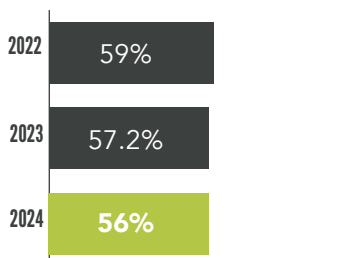


Spectators watch the exciting wakeboarding event at World Wakeboard Association Regional Championships.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS

January - June, 2024

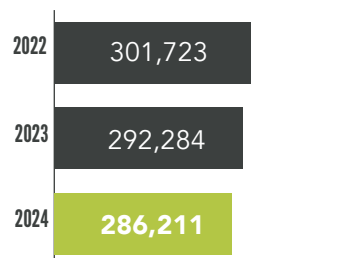
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



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

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

Duncan Geddes
Parks Chamber of Commerce

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

