

GOROCKFORD QUARTERLY REPORT



FY25, Q1
July - September 2024

GO ROCKFORD
Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



The mission of GoRockford is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.

gorockford.com

GoRockford Mission Statement

GoRockford 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

GoRockford tourism marketing and destination development efforts have broad support among key stakeholders.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



This quarter has been a dynamic fresh start for our region, marked by significant milestones and exciting new initiatives.

One of the highlights was the celebration of GoRockford's 40th anniversary. Nearly 600 attendees joined us at our "40 Forward" luncheon, held at the newly opened Hard Rock Casino

Rockford—an incredible addition to our community. This milestone event reflected on our organization's journey while honoring key contributors through our Tourism Hall of Fame awards.

This quarter, we also launched our new brand, which includes a fresh logo and website that reflects the Rockford region's evolving identity. The updated website enhances our ability to showcase Rockford's unique offerings. Additionally, we introduced a new printed Experience Guide to help promote our region's attractions to visitors and locals alike.

Looking forward, the unveiling of our Destination Master Plan—Thrive 2035—has set the stage for the future. This visionary plan focuses on further developing Rockford's tourism assets, including our waterways, greenspaces, sports facilities, and downtown areas, positioning the region for continued growth.

Major events such as the NAFA Nationals and USA BMX Midwest Nationals contributed millions in economic impact, filling hotel rooms and enhancing Rockford's reputation as a premier destination.

As we look ahead to the coming year, Stroll on State in November and IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford, Illinois in 2025 will further boost Rockford's presence on the global stage. Thank you for your continued support and dedication as we work together to elevate Rockford as a vibrant and welcoming destination for all.

Be well,

John Groh
GoRockford President/CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOROCKFORD NEWS

GoRockford Celebrates 40 Years ____ 3

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Tourism Hall of Fame Winners _____ 4

Destination Master Plan _____ 4

MARKETING

Media Mentions & Placements _____ 5

Earned Media _____ 5

Social Media _____ 5

Social Media Campaigns _____ 6

Brand Refresh _____ 6

Website Statistics _____ 6

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

Sports Sales Highlights _____ 7

Booking Highlights _____ 7

Winnebago County Hotel Statistics ___ 7

MADE FOR ROCKFORD

Made for Rockford Go Team _____ 8

GOROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

GoRockford Board of Directors _____ 9

GoRockford Staff _____ 9

GoROCKFORD NEWS

GOROCKFORD CELEBRATES 40 YEARS



Miles Nielsen & The Rusted Hearts play at the 40th Anniversary Luncheon.

While every anniversary is special, decade-milestone anniversaries have an importance all their own. When a decade-milestone anniversary is your ruby anniversary (**40 years!**), the celebration is bigger and reflection is deeper. To celebrate its 40th anniversary, GoRockford—the organization founded on Sept. 27, 1984 as the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau—hosted on Sept. 27, 2024 a luncheon attended by nearly **600 partners, business leaders, elected officials and supporters.**

The “40 Forward” luncheon at **Hard Rock Live Rockford** in **Hard Rock Casino Rockford** was the first civic gathering in the area’s newest entertainment venue, a state-of-the-art spot inside one of the area’s long-sought-after tourist attractions. This setting was one of many red-letter moments in the ruby anniversary celebration of the organization tasked with putting Rockford on the map as a great place to live, work and play in.

Appreciating these reasons to enjoy the region means more when you know what led to the birth and progress of the organization marketing them.

Before the fall of 1984, promotion of Rockford tourism was the responsibility of a committee under Rockford Chamber of Commerce. In Rockford, as in other parts of Illinois, growing a visitor economy hadn’t been a full-time, proactive effort. That changed in the early 1980s after legislation passed at the state level which allowed state funding to match what money a community could put toward marketing and promotion to grow tourism. As convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) began sprouting across Illinois, Rockford’s was among the first.

The catch in getting the state funding match for a local tourism organization was that it had to be set up as an independent nonprofit, have a full-time director, and focus solely on tourism. So, the chamber and local hospitality executives came together with leaders from Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Cherry Valley, Rockton, Winnebago County and the Rockford Park District to form the **Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB).**

The challenge, apart from the struggling economy, was that Rockford was known as a place to travel to only for business. The goal was to spread the word that Rockford was also a place to go to for fun.

The RACVB’s first director was Wendy Perks Fisher, a former educator and administrator in the arts locally and in Washington, D.C. She served for 20 years, championing—among other successes—Rockford as a destination for amateur sports. One of her team’s pioneering wins was partnering with the park district to bring state, regional and national tournaments to fields and facilities that were full with local use during the week but empty on weekends. **Sportscore (now Mercyhealth Sportscore One)** had opened the year the RACVB was formed.

Current GoRockford President and CEO John Groh, takes particular pride in his team continuing to develop the region as a destination for sports tourism, elevating it over the past decade and a half from national recognition to world-class acceptance. One of GoRockford’s most recent wins is a three-year agreement, starting in 2025, to host **IRONMAN 70.3**, the globally recognized long-distance triathlon—an IRONMAN first for Illinois.



The GoRockford staff shows off the new branded “R” for Rockford, Illinois at the 40th Anniversary Luncheon.

Celebrating a decade-milestone anniversary also means working toward future milestones.

A big portion of the “40 Forward” luncheon was dedicated to a panel discussion on **THRIVE 2035**, the destination master plan that GoRockford has been working on over the past year with strategists who researched opportunities in both Winnebago and Boone counties. Details of the 52-page plan were unveiled to the public at this luncheon. Its focus is on ways to make the most of the areas that the region’s four rivers share: waterways, green spaces, sports facilities, main streets and downtowns.

“All the successes we have had in the past are a catalyst for reaching higher in the next 40 years,” said John Groh GoRockford President/CEO. “Whether people come here for a few hours, a weekend, or choose to live here, we want their experiences to be meaningful and fun. As we work together, GoRockford looks forward to celebrating the advances and wins yet to come. Ever upward. Even higher.”

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

TOURISM HALL OF FAME



Rockford Juneteenth founder Tommy Meeks receives recognition at the 40th Anniversary Lunch on September 27, 2024.

The cap off to the 40 Forward Lunch was the **Tourism Hall of Fame** awards. Four honorees were presented this award.

They are: **Tommy Meeks**, for his nearly 35 years of dedication growing the city's **Juneteenth** celebration from a new small event to thousands of attendees and a major celebration with performances, giveaways, and a community spirit that continues to thrive.

Marco Lenis, for his efforts introducing **soccer to Rockford** in the 1970s which led to Rockford's prominence as a sports destination. With over 50 soccer fields and hundreds of thousands of visitors each year for tournaments, it's safe to say we are a true soccer town.

Painter's District Council 30, Local 607 for their pivotal role in prepping and priming walls throughout the area to prepare them for the almost 60 murals that now decorate our city and region as part of GoRockford's **CRE8IV mural initiative** over the past five years.

Fourth of July Civic Committee, for continuing the legacy of Joe Marino (Mr. Fourth of July) by leading the downtown **Fourth of July celebration** and the annual **Festival of Lights**. These annual events are more than just celebrations—they are traditions.



Top Left: The 4th of July Civic Committee receives their award. Top Right: Marco Lenis is recognized. Bottom Left: Painter's District Council 30, Local 607 accepts their award. Bottom right: Destination Master Plan is unveiled with a panel of local leaders.

DESTINATION MASTER PLAN

During the 40th Anniversary celebration, the Destination Master Plan, **Thrive 2035** was unveiled to the community.

For over a year, a team of strategists and stakeholders collaborated on the design of a new destination vision for our region. This builds on the transformational work of the past decade to further develop our waterways, greenspaces, sports facilities, main streets, and downtowns.

From this process, **five strategic goals** and initiatives were created.

- Invest in Tourism Product
- Create Compelling Experiences
- Create Cool, Vibrant Spaces & Neighborhoods
- Enhance Connectivity & Mobility
- Develop Our Workforce & Attract New Talent

The Thrive 2035 plan can be viewed and downloaded on thrive.2035.com.

MARKETING

MEDIA MENTIONS & PLACEMENTS

GoRockford 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

Yahoo Finance "New casino revenue: Here's how Rockford hopes to spend an additional \$5.5M a year" (9/09/2024) 66,000,000 impressions and \$610,500 Earned Media

Business Insider: "26 popular cities where houses are at least \$100,000 cheaper than the national median" (8/26/2024) 56,400,000 Impressions and \$521,700 Earned Media

Yahoo News "Rockford area restaurants could see up to \$100K in grants" (8/13/2024) 33,300,000 Impressions and \$308,025 Earned Media

Time Out Chicago "The 29 Most Unique Day Trips from Chicago" (08/13/24) 18,600,000 Impressions and \$172,050 Earned Media



Time Out Chicago profiles Rockford as a day trippers location to visit, showcasing Beyer Stadium and Anderson Japanese Gardens.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

343,500 Reach
37,700 Followers



INSTAGRAM

79,200 Reach
19,200 Followers



LINKEDIN

2,419 Followers

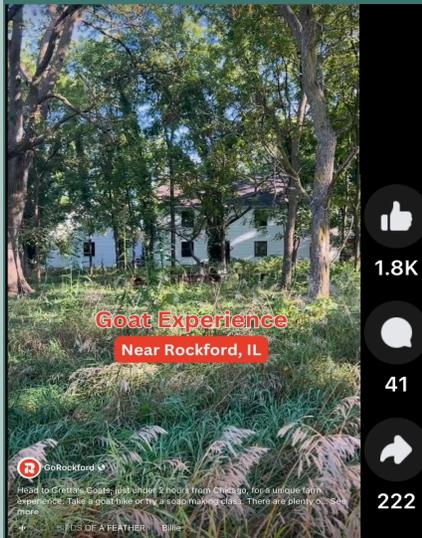


TikTok

46,000 Post Views
1,259 Followers

Top Facebook Post

January 3, 2024 | Impressions 85,148



EARNED MEDIA (July - September 2024)

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



\$2,273,603
Ad equivalency



245,794,905
Total impressions



1,190
Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

JULY

The focus of July was to promote summer activities, the weekly Beats and Bites lunch parties we hosted with River District. The lunch series was every Thursday for 13 weeks and had a new theme each week. Another focus was Independence Day celebrations and promoting summer activities and concert series. Between Facebook and Instagram, viewers were at 110,800 for the month.



AUGUST

One of August's focuses was to promote Rockford 815 Day. This year kicked off at Midway Village Museum for their 50th Anniversary. We promoted the specials and events taking place on 08/15 and we listed these on our website. This day promotes civic pride in the community. We also promoted end of summer activities and our interns created an ice cream tour. The end of August brought the long-awaited opening of the new Hard Rock Casino Rockford. The total viewers for the content was up 40% from 2023 to 167,200,



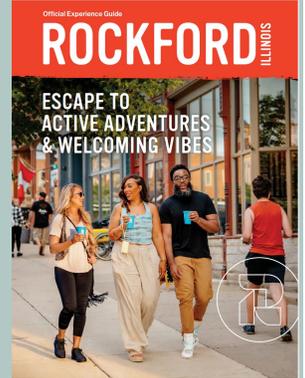
SEPTEMBER

September's focus was promoting all things fall including orchard openings and fall activities. We also focused on promoting the 40 Forward Lunch. The statistics for September were a record high of 274,200 and showed an increase of 91% over the previous year.



GoRockford Brand Refresh

For the past 18 months, the GoRockford team worked on a brand refresh, a brand new Experience Guide, and a new website design. GoRockford has been the website domain and the name of social media channels for years, but this brand refresh helped officially change **Rockford**



Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) to GoRockford. The items were completed this summer, and launched at the **40th Anniversary Lunch** at the Hard Rock Casino Rockford.

Over **30,000 copies** of the new Experience Guide were printed and distributed to **63 attractions and hotels.** The guide will be promoted to visitors, tournaments, and meetings attendees.

The new website has a modern look that allows for new widgets to be used to optimize landing pages. The marketing team can now promote partner listings like never before and incorporate more imagery and video onto landing pages.

The new name GoRockford will catapult the region into a memorable brand, promoting Rockford, Illinois with bold colors, a brand new "R" logo in the logo suite. The main brand color of burnt orange and the shape of the "R" pays homage to the iconic sculpture "The Symbol".



MOST SEARCHED TERMS

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

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- Polish Fest
- Labor Day Parade
- Rhythm of the Heart Festival

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Pearl Lake Beach
- Rock Cut State Park

Website Traffic Sources



155,893 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



The GoRockford team and volunteers work at Tough Mudder Chicago 2024 in August.

NAFA RETURNS TO REGION

The **North American Fastpitch Association (NAFA)** returned for the **2024 Midwest NAFA Nationals on Wednesday, July 10 – Sunday, July 12 at Mercyhealth Sportscore One and Harlem Community Center.** Over **1800 players**, coaches and spectators traveled to the region for the softball tournament. Approximately **120 teams** made up of female players ranging in age from 8U to 18U competed. Rockford has hosted this tournament for over **15 years**. The tournament has continued to grow every year and is estimated have generated **\$706,849** in economic impact.

USA BMX NATIONALS

The **2024 USA BMX Midwest Nationals** was held on **July 19-21, 2024 at Searls Park.** The competition brought over **1,200 athletes** and **3,500 spectators** who filled **2,900 hotel room nights.** Racers traveled from **35 different states.** The competition has been in the region for over **30 years** and its estimated economic impact is **\$1.5 million dollars.**

TWO EVENTS, HUGE IMPACT

The weekend of **August 23-25, 2024**, brought two large events back to the Rockford region. **Opening Weekend Tournament (OWT)**, is the largest two-year college women's volleyball tournament in the U.S. Over **74 teams** were in attendance representing **17 states.** The tournament filled an estimated **1000 hotel rooms** and brought in an estimated economic impact of **\$1.1 million dollars.**

Tough Mudder Chicago, held at the **Chicago-Rockford International Airport**, brought in over **10,000 athletes** and spectators. The event has been held in the region since 2016. The GoRockford team along with volunteers worked both days at the event in the beer tent. The muddy event brought an estimated economic impact of **\$861,769.**

JEHOVAH CONFERENCE RETURNS

The **Jehovah's Witness Conference** returned to the Rockford region for the first time since 2018. The **BMO Center** was filled with attendees over two weekends on **August 16-18 and August 23-25.** The first weekend had over **5,000 attendees** and brought in an estimated economic impact of **\$980,310.** The second weekend brought in an estimated economic impact of **1.6 million dollars.** The conference will return for the next four years, bringing in millions of economic impact.

TRADESHOW HIGHLIGHTS

During this quarter, the sales team attended **Connect Sports in Milwaukee on August 27-29** and had **44 appointments.** **Teams Conference and Expo** was held in **Anaheim, California on September 23-27** and had **40 appointments.**

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

NXT Pro Sports Girls

May 8-11, 2025
1200 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$683,470

Illinois NAHRO National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials August 5-8, 2025

750 Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$190,819

Kerry Ingredients

October 8-11, 2025
1050 Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$334,037

Game Day USA World Series

April 11, May 2, May 23, June 20, July 10, July 17, 2025
4,250 Total Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$2,032,237

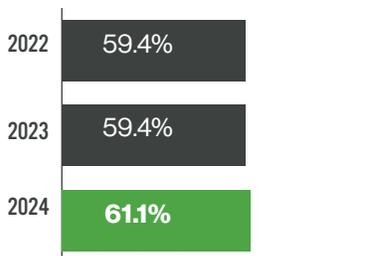
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 11,667 with an economic impact of \$5.1 Million
Number of Bookings: 24



Two of the GoRockford sale's team attend the Connect Sports trade show in Milwaukee in August 2024.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS January - September, 2024

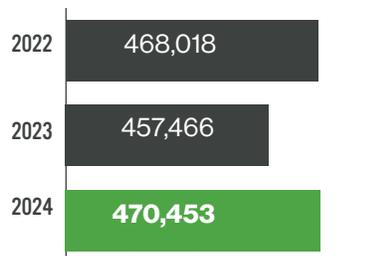
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



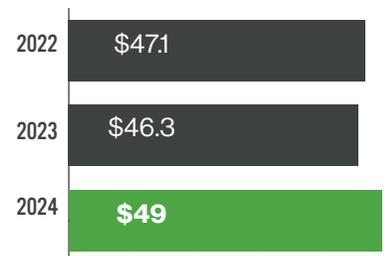
Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



MADE FOR ROCKFORD

MADE FOR ROCKFORD GO TEAM LAUNCHES



Whitney Martin poses at the photo booth at the Go Team launch party.

In July, GoRockford welcomed Whitney Martin to the team as the new **Made for Rockford Program Director**. Her unique background and over 17 years experience as a reporter and news anchor, makes her an asset to the team.

The first Made for Rockford event welcomed **30 local ambassadors** to the “Go Team” during a reception at **The Music Box** in downtown Rockford. These ambassadors will play a key role in helping new residents settle into the community by acting as a “first friend” for those moving to the area. In addition to providing personal support, they will also assist with city tours during job interviews and help answer questions that go beyond what a workplace might cover.

This is just the first phase of the launch, as the group will soon be featured on **MadeForRockford.com**, where their bios will be available for the community to learn more about them. Along with new branding for the Go Team, Made For Rockford officially launched its Facebook page, which gained **1,700 followers** in its first quarter.

RELOCATION EFFORTS

Whitney Martin, along with Conor Brown, CEO of the Northwest Illinois Alliance of Realtors, and Bridget French, Executive Director of College and Career Readiness, traveled to the Chicago suburbs to connect with workers considering a move to Rockford as part of a relocation plan. Through an engaging PowerPoint presentation, they offered a glimpse into what life in Winnebago County could look like. So far, **50 employees** have expressed their intent to relocate, showing strong interest in becoming part of the community.

ATTRACTING NEW TALENT

Made for Rockford is collaborating with some of the region’s largest employers to strengthen community retention efforts and attract new talent. A future initiative will be new resident mixers (those who recently moved to Rockford in 2022). The first mixer will be held in October 2024 at **Lucha Cantina**.

Made for Rockford ^{ILL}



The Go Team poses for a group photo at the Go Team launch party.



Guests mingle at the GoTeam launch at Music Box.

GoROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

GoRockford Board of Directors

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

Geno Iafrate (Vice Chair)
Hard Rock Rockford

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

Mick Gronewold (Treasurer)
Fehr Graham Engineering
& Environmental

Darrell Snorek (Secretary)
Lamonica Beverages

Todd Cagnoni
City of Rockford

Patricia Diduch
Village of Rockton

Duncan Geddes
City of Loves Park

Kevin Frost
City of Rockford

Gretchen Gilmore
Rockford Area Venues &
Entertainment Authority (R.A.V.E.)

Bobby Holzwarth
HolmstromKennedy

Sonya Hoppes
City of South Beloit

Shelton Kay
Rockford Regional Health Council

Dana Martin
Rush University Medical Center

Ricardo Montoya-Picazo
Office of State
Representative Dave Vella

Angela Larson
Greater 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

GoRockford Foundation Board of Directors

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

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

Jennifer Furst
(Immediate Past Chair)
Furst Staffing

**Gina Caruana (Foundation
Secretary)**
Foresight Financial Group

Marco Lenis
(Foundation Treasurer)
Vocational Rehabilitation
Management

Mustafa Abdall
District 815

David Anderson
Spring Creek Partners
& Anderson Japanese
Gardens

Rebecca Francis
Ignite Change Solutions LLC

Theresa Kegley
Movement Fitness

Leslie West
State Farm

GoRockford 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
Social Media and
Communications Specialist



Chenaire Barmore
Community Engagement



Miranda Brook
Customer Experience
Coordinator



Kara Davis
Senior Sales Manager



Elizabeth Falls
Marketing Manager



Julie Huber
Destination Development
Operations Manager



Lindsey Kromm
Accounting Assistant



Whitney Martin
Made for Rockford
Program Director



Emily Plumb
Sales & Servicing
Manager