



GOROCKFORD QUARTERLY REPORT

FY25, Q2
October - December 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, we proudly hosted our flagship event, **Stroll on State**, which remains a cornerstone of community celebration and economic growth. The 12th annual event welcomed an incredible **60,000 attendees**, undeterred by record-breaking cold. Stroll on State brought joy to thousands, and provided a meaningful boost to local businesses, underscoring its impact on our downtown.

Complementing this success was our holiday marketing campaign, which highlighted Rockford's charm and appeal to audiences near and far. Through billboards in Chicago and Milwaukee, we generated over **2.5 million impressions**, while an additional **1.5 million impressions** came from targeted digital channels.

In November, we introduced the **Rockford Area Coffee Trail**, featuring **13 local coffee shops**. This exciting initiative highlights the unique flavors of Rockford while reinforcing our dedication to creating meaningful and memorable visitor experiences.

Reflecting on 2024, we celebrated several key milestones: our **40th anniversary**, a comprehensive rebrand, the launch of a new website and experience guide, and the long-awaited opening of the **Hard Rock Casino Rockford**. These accomplishments reflect the strength and vibrancy of our community.

As we look to 2025, we are thrilled to embark on new transformative projects. The implementation of our **Destination Master Plan—Thrive 2035** will guide our future growth, while major events, including the **IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford**, promise to elevate our global presence.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we are positioning Rockford as a vibrant, welcoming destination for residents and visitors alike.

Be well,

John Groh
GoRockford President/CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOROCKFORD NEWS

Stroll on State.....	3
Holidays in Rockford Campaign.....	3
Coffee Trail Launch.....	3

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Value of Sponsorships.....	4
New Permanent Sculptures.....	4

MARKETING

Media Mentions & Placements.....	5
Earned Media.....	5
Social Media.....	5
Social Media Campaigns.....	6
FAM Trips.....	6
Website Statistics.....	6

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

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

MADE FOR ROCKFORD

New Resident Mixer.....	8
Billboard Campaign.....	8

GOROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

GoRockford Board of Directors.....	9
GoRockford Staff.....	9

GoROCKFORD NEWS

STROLL ON STATE BRINGS JOY TO ALL



Two girls visit with Santa at Stroll on State on November 30, 2025.

The 12th annual **Stroll on State**, presented by Illinois Bank & Trust, was in full swing on **Saturday, November 30, 2024**. Midwest's Best Holiday Fest supports the revitalization efforts in downtown Rockford and is also a strong economic driver for local businesses during Small Business Saturday. Rockford area residents and visitors came together to enjoy and support a day highlighted by the City's tree lighting ceremony, parade, fireworks, Santa visits, live music on two stages, and opportunities to shop and support local businesses. The GoRockford team produces the event with support, services and donations nearly **100 community partners**, volunteers and sponsors.

Stroll on State continues to boost the local economy with strong attendance and participation numbers each year. Despite frigid temperatures at the 2024 event, this year an estimated **60,000 guests** bundled up and celebrated in downtown Rockford for the coldest Stroll on State to date.

"Stroll on State thrives because of the incredible support from our community – partners, sponsors, volunteers, business owners and attendees – who each play a vital role in making it all happen," said **Kristen Paul, GoRockford executive vice president**. "For twelve years, Stroll on State has been a gift that gives back to our community during the holiday season, and we are pleased that 60,000 people joined us this year despite the record cold weather conditions. We are also especially proud that Stroll was able to directly give back to **10 local nonprofits** through bar, S'more and hot chocolate revenues and the toy drive."

"This event is also a driving force behind much of the vitality of our downtown and supporting local business owners during the holidays," said **Mayor Tom McNamara**. "The continued success of Stroll on State reminds us that the future is bright for tourism in our community, there's so much potential

for continued economic growth and creating so many more unforgettable experiences in downtown Rockford."



A billboard encourages visitation to holiday locations in Rockford.

HOLIDAYS IN ROCKFORD CAMPAIGN

GoRockford worked with three vendors to encourage Holiday visitation in Rockford, with a tourism grant from the Illinois Office of Tourism. Advertising included billboards in Milwaukee and Chicago suburbs. The digital strategy included social media advertising on Facebook and Instagram, social media remarketing and Google advertising.

The impressions from billboards are estimated at **2.5 million**. Social media and Google advertising generated over **1.5 million impressions**. Included with holiday marketing was the **Rockford Holiday Photo Challenge**, a digital passport, which visitors and residents could use to check in with photos at holiday-themed locations. Attractions included light displays, holiday bars and special holiday events. The photo challenge was tied into our winter getaway email sign ups. This yielded **301 new emails** for e-newsletters and over **80 photos** submitted by users that can be used in future holiday promotion.

COFFEE TRAIL LAUNCHES

The GoRockford team released the **Rockford Area Coffee Trail** in November, a digital passport designed for coffee enthusiasts to explore and

enjoy the local coffee scene throughout the Rockford region. Designated to promote the **13 local coffee shops**, over **200 visitors and residents** have signed up so far to explore local brews.

Participants can use their digital passport to check into various locations on the coffee trail and receive prizes, such as a coffee trail sticker pack and coffee trail



The logo for the Rockford Area Coffee Trail pays homage to vintage cartoon characters.

mug. The Rockford Area Coffee Trail will be available until September 2025. This is the fourth digital passport launched since 2023. Visitors and residents can sign up for the coffee trail at gorockford.com/coffeetrail.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

VALUE OF SPONSORSHIPS AND VOLUNTEERS



Rudolf shines brightly above the crowd at the Stroll on State holiday drone show, sponsored by Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23.

Sponsors, partner organizations, the Illinois Office of Tourism, and volunteers played a pivotal role in the success of GoRockford's events and initiatives in 2024.

CELEBRATING SPONSORS

This year, GoRockford partnered with **151 sponsors** and **donors** to support a wide range of events and initiatives,

including Stroll on State, Dasher Dash 5k, CRE8IV murals and sculptures, CRE8IV Music & Arts Fest, Forest City Beautiful, and 40 Forward Luncheon. Each sponsorship represents more than financial support—it signifies an investment in the city's bright future. Tourism grants from the Illinois Office of Tourism helped fund CRE8IV Music & Arts and Stroll on State 2024.

THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERS

GoRockford's accomplishments in 2024 would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of its volunteers. Over **4,000 hours** were logged this year starting with hosting community art activities at the three-day CRE8IV Music & Arts Fest. Santa's workshop opened in September to create, repair and set up

all of the downtown holiday decorations and event needs. In addition, volunteers dedicated two full days for decoration days, Stroll day, including the City Tree, and Back in the Box. Without volunteers, these events could not be possible.

Top Left: Hard Rock Casino Rockford sponsors a new Rockford balloon at the Stroll on State parade. Bottom left: A Forest City Beautiful planter provides seasonal beauty year-round. Bottom right: Collins Aerospace sponsors another science-themed mural, completed in 2024.



NEW PERMANENT SCULPTURES

As part of the CRE8IV sculpture program, GoRockford works with local sponsors to add sculptures designed to enrich the region. Sculptures are typically placed on lease, but some sculptures have been placed permanently thanks to generous local donations.

Hold Me Up Donated for permanent display by Dean Alan Olson Foundation

Hold Me Up, by veteran Ben Pierce, symbolizes respect and gratitude toward our veterans.



Magical Thinking Donated for permanent display by David & Colleen Anderson Charitable Foundation and Bucciferro Family McDonald's.

Magical Thinking, by Actual Size Artworks, brings fun and whimsy to downtown Rockford.



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

People: *“Rosie O’Donnell, Geena Davis, Lori Petty and the Rest of the Rockford Peaches Have an Epic A League of Their Own Reunion”* (11/26/24), 71,400,000 Impressions and \$264,180 Earned Media

Midwest Living: *“Your Guide to the Best Outdoor Ice-Skating Rinks in the Midwest”* (12/12/24) 232,000 Impressions and \$858.40 Earned Media

Family Destinations Guide: *“The One-Of-A-Kind Natural History Museum In Illinois That Will Transport You To Another World”* (12/24/2024) 1,400,000 Impressions and \$5,130 Earned Media

Yahoo News: *“Rockford welcomes two new sculptures to the city”* (11/13/2024) 60,500,000 Impressions and \$223,850 Earned Media

Your Guide to the Best Outdoor Ice-Skating Rinks in the Midwest



Midwest Living profiles Nicholas Conservatory's eclipse lagoon as one of the Best Places to Skate in the Midwest.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

3.6 Million Views
39,800 Followers



INSTAGRAM

706,100 Views
19600 Followers



LINKEDIN

2,474 Followers

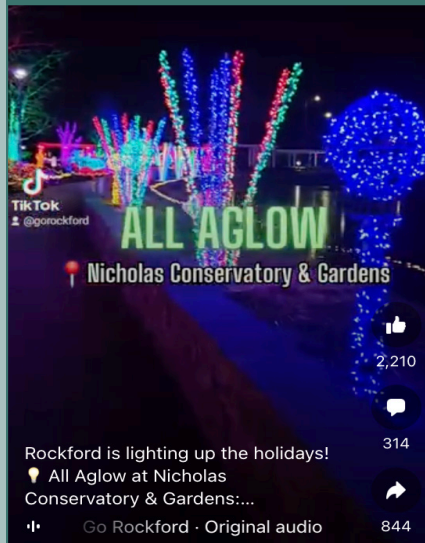


TikTok

70,000 Post Views
1,470 Followers

Top Facebook Post

Dec. 16, 2024 | Impressions 284,928



EARNED MEDIA (October - December 2024)

GoRockford works to attract visitors by directly pitching stories to media. Pitches are focused on economic development, tourism marketing and travel public relations.



\$5,544,000

Ad equivalency



462,000,000

Total impressions



799

Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

OCTOBER

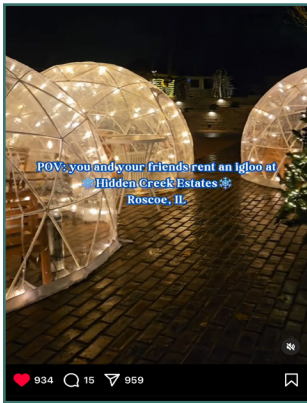
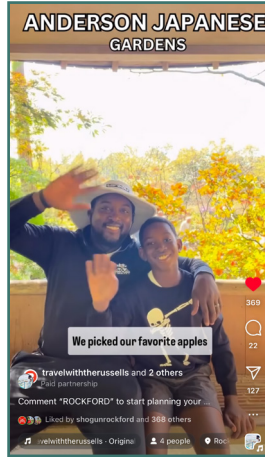
October's campaign included fall activities, and Halloween events. The engagement over the previous October showed a **183% increase** on Facebook. Viewers between Facebook and Instagram were **784,700**. We supported the Eerie Autumn Lights, a first time event at Klehm Arboretum by creating social media posts, blogs, and an ad for the event. The Eerie Autumn Lights campaign generated **248,200** views and was one of the top searched events on our website.

NOVEMBER

The holidays in Rockford campaign kicked off with promoting Stroll on State in November. The Stroll on State campaign included carousel ads, blogs and a t-shirt contest to design a new t-shirt. Viewers in November between channels were **1.9 million views**. This did include paid social media viewers, however, the month still had an organic increase of **173%**. The marketing team also partnered with Hidden Creek Estates to promote igloo dining. The Hidden Creek posts generated **158,600 views** between Facebook and Instagram.

DECEMBER

December continued the holidays in Rockford campaign, with an added layer of experiencing the holidays in downtown Rockford. There were two carousel ads in December, resulting in **283,735 impressions** on ads. Total viewership between Facebook and Instagram was at a record of **1.6 million** viewers.



FAM Trips Help Travelers

This quarter, several influencers and a travel writer visited the Rockford region to inspire others to travel for fall activities.

Travel With The Russells (Left)

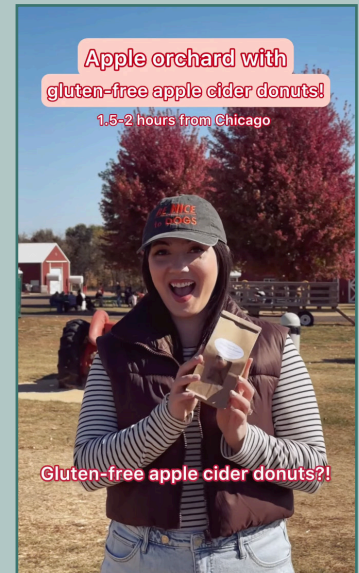
A family out of Chicago, this family visited in October profiled their journey in several reels. Their itinerary included Anderson Japanese Gardens, Eerie Autumn Lights, and dinner at Ambiance. Their three reels had **29,716 views**.

Gluten Free Girlies

This influencer visited Edward's Apple Orchard West and tried their gluten free apple cider donuts. Her post had **13,647 views**.

Huda.Explores and TravelWithTkl

A family out of Chicago visited several locations in Rockford including the Top at the Embassy Suites. Their posted generated **27,743 viewers**.



MOST SEARCHED TERMS

Rockford Events

Stroll on State

Things To Do In Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

Stroll on State

Festival of Lights

Eerie Autumn Lights

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Anderson Japanese Gardens

Coronado Theater

Burpee Museum

Website Traffic Sources



187,311 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



College rowers compete in the Head of the Rock Regatta on October 13, 2024.

HEAD OF THE ROCK REGATTA

Rockford YMCA Rowing hosted their annual **Head of the Rock Regatta** on **October 13**. The Head of the Rock Regatta is a race of **5,000 meters (3.2 miles)** on the **Rock River**, beginning at **Martin Park** and finishing at the **YMCA**. It is a sanctioned event of the United States Rowing Association, requiring the observance of US Rowing rules of racing. The event brings in around **7,500 attendees**, **500 room nights** and an estimated economic impact of **\$924,000**.

TEAM ILLINOIS LACROSSE

Team Illinois Lacrosse hosted their **Fall Invitational & Showcase** on **October 26-27** at **MercyHealth Sportscore Two**. The top midwest lacrosse teams competed in this elite event that offers athletes a unique opportunity to showcase their talents in front of over **60 college coaches**.

The influx of athletes, coaches and attendees generated an estimated economic impact of **\$287,000**, **7,000 attendees**, and approximately **800 hotel rooms**, greatly benefiting local area businesses. Teams traveled here from around the Midwest including Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Minnesota, Iowa and Missouri.

LEATHERNECK BOWLING

The **Leatherneck Bowling Tournament** took place from **November 9-10** which brought it **100 collegiate teams (800 bowlers)** to the region. The tournament has four divisions, and bowling took place at **Don Carter Lanes**, **The Cherry Bowl**, and **Park Lanes Bowl**. This tournament filled approximately **800 room nights** with visitors projected to spend an estimated **\$329,000** while visiting the Rockford region.

TRADESHOW HIGHLIGHTS

The GoRockford sales team attended **The Sports Congress December 8-11** in Punta Gorda, FL. Sports Congress attracts top level decision-makers from the world of amateur sport and sports events. The attendees of this unique conference are senior level executives who represent sport rights holders and Olympic National Governing Bodies (NGBs), the destinations who desire to host their events as well as many suppliers to this industry. GoRockford met with **20 rights holders** and was also a sponsor of an off-site activation that included 40 people, 20 of which were rights holders from various sports.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

USA/BMX Midwest Nationals

July 13-14, 2025
500 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$980,391

All in Volleyball

August 2025 and 2026
2,000 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$1.6 Million

Rockford Homeschool Basketball

January 11-12, 2025
400 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$193,900

Star Spirit

January 11, 2025
250 Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$131,500

Professional Women's Bowling Association

September 13, 2025
100 Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$131,000

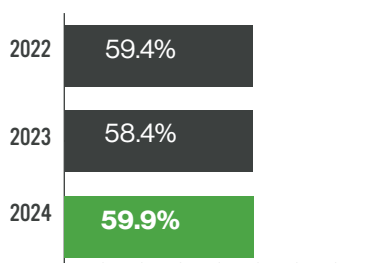
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 15,050 with an economic impact of \$5.1 Million
Number of Bookings: 29



Teams at Fall Invitational Showcase enjoy inflatables and giveaways on October 26-27, 2025.

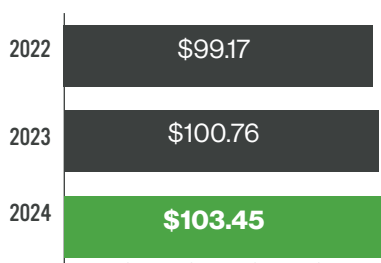
WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS January - December, 2024

Year to Date Hotel Occupancy

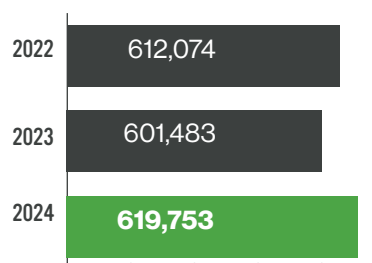


Sales Efforts

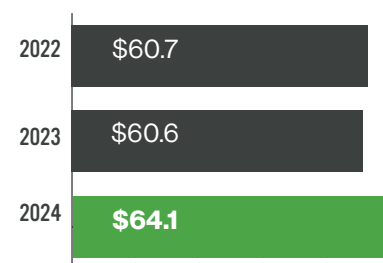
Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



GoRockford FY25, Q2

MADE FOR ROCKFORD

NEW RESIDENT MIXER



New Rockford residents pose at the Made For Rockford photobooth during the new resident mixer at Lucha Cantina.

The program hosted its first-ever new resident mixer at Lucha Cantina, drawing 40 attendees who recently relocated to Rockford. Guests were introduced to local volunteers from the Go Team and participated in “get-to-know-me” games, fostering meaningful connections. For some, this was their first opportunity to engage socially outside of work since moving to the area.

MIDWEST AEROSPACE CONFERENCE

Made for Rockford represented the community at the Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce’s Midwest Aerospace Conference with a booth showcasing the program’s initiatives. Notably, over **30% of attendees** were from outside the region, broadening awareness of Rockford’s opportunities.

CITY TOURS FOR JOB APPLICANTS

Director Whitney Martin and Go Team volunteers partnered with some of Rockford’s largest employers to provide personalized city tours for out-of-town job candidates. These tours offered potential hires a first-hand look at local landmarks and neighborhoods, helping them envision Rockford as their future home beyond a surface-level Google search.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT

Whitney Martin addressed graduating student teachers from District 205, emphasizing Rockford’s affordability and the advantages of launching a career in Rockford Public Schools. A follow-up presentation is planned for spring to reach the next cohort.

BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN FOR HOLIDAY TRAVELERS

A nostalgic billboard campaign launched in November targeting individuals returning to Rockford for the holidays. The campaign encouraged these visitors to consider moving back, directing them to the Made for Rockford website. This effort expanded during the Christmas and New Year’s holidays with a digital advertising push, strategically following visitors back to their home destinations with reminders that they don’t always have to say goodbye.



Billboard and digital campaign targets former residents returning home for the holidays.

OUR CITY, OUR STORY RELAUNCH

Made for Rockford became the main sponsor of the relaunch of **Our City, Our Story**, a documentary-style series celebrating the unique people who make Rockford their home. This season emphasizes the stories of “boomerangers”—individuals who left Rockford but chose to return.



GoROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

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