



GOROCKFORD QUARTERLY REPORT

FY25, Q3
January - March, 2025

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, GoRockford proudly celebrated the fifth year of **Rockford Restaurant Week**, which set new records with **65 participating businesses**. Engagement soared, with many businesses reporting a **35 percent increase** in revenue over the prior year's period. Marketing efforts included billboards in the Chicago suburbs and Rockford, generating over **1.5 million impressions**.

The **Made for Rockford** program continued to grow with the launch of the **New Resident Guide** in partnership with the **Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce**, and a successful Made for Rockford mixer that brought together more than **60 new residents** at the **Embassy Suites** rooftop. The new 'Go Team initiative also began training volunteers to serve as ambassadors for Rockford's newest residents.

Community outreach remained a strong focus this quarter. Our team engaged with partners across the region, from highlighting the arts with supporting local exhibits like the opening **Camp Grant Exhibit at Midway Village Museum** and the **Impressionist Immersive Exhibit** (a partnership between **Rockford Art Museum** and **Discovery Center Museum**). We also spotlighted milestone anniversaries, such as **Zammuto's 100th year**, amplifying pride in Rockford's rich heritage.

In sports tourism, Rockford hosted major events including the **Rockin' Rockford Grand Prix** volleyball tournament and the **NXT Pro Girls Basketball Tournament**, resulting in over 3,200 hotel room nights and an estimated \$1.7 million in combined economic impact. Additionally, GoRockford joined with **BMO Center** and **Rockford IceHogs** to announce Rockford as the host city for the prestigious **2026 AHL All-Star Classic** at **BMO Center**.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to Rockford's success. Together, we are driving momentum, building pride, and positioning our community for a vibrant future.

Be well,

John Groh
GoRockford President/CEO

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GoROCKFORD NEWS

ROCKFORD RESTAURANT WEEK A WIN FOR THE COMMUNITY



Lia Pennacchi accepts the "Best Experience" award for Plume, which opened in 2024.

The fifth year of Rockford Restaurant Week kicked off with a record number of participants, **65 local businesses** in the Rockford region. The eleven-day celebration of local culinary talents encouraged visitors and residents to experience the Rockford region culinary scene and special menus. A new format this year encouraged restaurants to offer either fixed price menus or bundled meal deals. The results? Engagement was better than ever, with a record number of website visitors and social media engagement.

According to a post Rockford Restaurant Week survey, most restaurants experienced an overall increase in sales, with several reporting rises of over **35 percent** and an average increase of just over **20 percent**. Notably, one restaurant sold **477 fixed-price menus** this year compared to 277 previously, while another restaurant saw a significant boost during Restaurant Week, with **476 meals sold**—marking a **37 percent** year-over-year increase.

"Rockford Restaurant Week this year was such a blast for us and the busiest one to date! Thank you to GoRockford for putting this event together and to the Rockford community for supporting such a great event, said **Patrick Alberto, 27 Aluna owner and chef.**"

Website traffic on gorockford.com for Rockford Restaurant Week information surged to **89,815 views** in 2025, a dramatic increase from **19,440 views** in 2024. Social media engagement skyrocketed to over **1 million views**, a more than **100 percent** increase.

Marketing efforts included billboards in both the Chicago suburbs and Rockford, generating over 1.5 million impressions. Rockford Restaurant Week closed out a 3-month digital campaign, with a Google remarketing



- ★ Best Experience
Plume
- ★ Best Main Course
27 Aluna
- ★ Best Dessert
Lucha Cantina
- ★ Best Deal
Hidden Creek Estates
- ★ Best Cocktail or Brew
8th Ward Pub
- ★ Best Deal
Sticky Rice Bites
- ★ Best Cocktail or Brew
Abreo

campaign. Impressions for the campaign were **387,330** with **17,061 clicks** to the landing page. Rockford Restaurant Week was the top organic search query for the GoRockford page in Q3 at over **4,000 clicks**.

A photo challenge generated over **200 photos** from residents and visitors sharing their dining experience. **Seventeen restaurants** offered promotional giveaways, which were promoted on GoRockford social channels.

Over **20 restaurants** were featured in local media broadcasts and articles. Google analytics reported over **51,000 referrals** to partner websites, with an uptick during the Rockford Restaurant Week period.

The Best of Awards (left sidebar) received over **1,300 votes** and resulted in the first-ever tie in two categories. The results show the community initiative is a great way to engage residents and visitors to experience the best dining the region has to offer.

THIRD ROUND OF RESTAURANT GRANT

GoRockford administered a third round of **Restaurant Relief Grants**, aimed at helping restaurants, bars, and coffee shops still struggling with high unemployment taxes following the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of **51 local businesses** received **\$189,871.52** in much-needed financial support. State Representative Maurice West helped secure the funding.

"Rockford's restaurants, bars and coffee shops are more than just businesses—they're the heart of our community," said **Illinois State Representative Maurice West**.

"This grant program provides critical support to help them recover and thrive. I'm proud to see another round of funding go directly to local establishments, ensuring they can continue serving our residents and creating jobs. Investing in our small businesses means investing in the future of Rockford."

Seventeen of the 51 recipients are first-time applicants, highlighting the ongoing need for assistance. Grant amounts varied based on COVID-19's impact on each business's unemployment tax rates.

Since launching, the program has awarded **\$855,158.06** across three rounds to **52 local businesses**, reinforcing the importance of supporting Rockford's hospitality sector.

The grants were awarded to eligible businesses in Winnebago County through an application and review process. All applicants who met eligibility criteria received grants. For additional information about the Restaurant Relief Grant Program, please visit **GoRockford.com/Restaurant-Grant**.



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS



A model fashions her creation at Cleta's Stay and Sew fashion show in February.

This quarter GoRockford was involved in a variety of events and outreach efforts to engage partners. In January, the team attended the **AHL All Star Game** news conference at **BMO Center**. In February, the team was invited to **Ernie's Midtown Pub** for lunch. The restaurant graciously offered lunch to celebrate their success of Rockford Restaurant Week. The GoRockford team highlighted black-owned businesses as part of

Black History Month, and commissioned photography at **Cleta's Stay at Sew** for their fashion show. **Big Timber Axe Throwing** moved to a new location in downtown Rockford, and the GoRockford team tried their hands at axe throwing on their opening day. Also in February, was the opening of the **Camp Grant Exhibit** at **Midway Village Museum**, a multi-million dollar exhibit years in the making, highlight the military training camp open in Rockford for World War I and World War II. In March, GoRockford highlighted a milestone anniversary for **Zammuto's**, their 100th with a social media reel which had **214,592 impressions** on all social channels. Also in March, the quarterly meeting with hoteliers was held at **BMO Center** and included a behind the scenes tour for over **40 hoteliers**. One week later, GoRockford held the quarterly marketing partnership meeting with marketing partners (attractions, retail, dining) at **Prairie Street Brewing Co.**



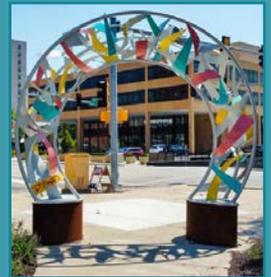
Top Left: The GoRockford Team enjoys lunch at Ernie's Midtown Pub. Top Right: A child enjoys the new Camp Grant Exhibit at Midway Village Museum. Bottom left: Zammuto's owner Zina Horton displays her photo. Bottom right: ASM General Manager Gretchen Gilmore gives a tour of BMO Center for hoteliers during the GoRockford quarterly hotel meeting.

A LOOK AHEAD

GoRockford's Destination Development team is hard at work enhancing our community's vibrancy. Through the **Forest City Beautiful** initiative, they continue to beautify downtown with seasonal plantings and streetscape improvements.

This year, **CRE8IV: transformational ART** is expanding with new sculptures across the region, although no new murals are planned for 2025.

Planning is underway for **Stroll on State**, Rockford's signature holiday festival taking place this November. These impactful projects are funded through generous sponsorships and could not happen without the incredible support of the community. Learn more about these initiatives at GoRockford.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

Realtor.com: *“Surprising Illinois City Becomes The Hottest Housing Market for the First Time”* (01/14/2025), 39,200,000 Impressions and \$1,450,400 Earned Media

Chicago Tribune: *“Rockford’s version of the Mag Mile is Thriving. A TIF worked wonders for it.”* (03/30/2025) 57,000,000 Impressions and \$2,109,000 Earned Media

The New York Times: The Athletic: *“Blackhawks affiliate Rockford IceHogs to host 2026 AHL All-Star Classic”* (01/12/2025) 4,290,000 Impressions and \$396,825 Earned Media

Blackhawks affiliate Rockford IceHogs to host 2026 AHL All-Star Classic



The New York Times subsidiary The Athletic covers the announcement of the 2026 AHL All-Star Classic at BMO Center.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

2.1 Million Views
41,828 Followers



INSTAGRAM

442,200 Views
19,970 Followers



LINKEDIN

3,000 Followers



TikTok

39,490 Post Views
1,669 Followers

Top Facebook Post

March 25, 2025 | Impressions 221,506



EARNED MEDIA (January - March 2025)

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



\$10,800,000
Ad equivalency



1,160,000,000
Total impressions



886
Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

JANUARY

The main focus of January was highlighting Rockford Restaurant Week and the offerings available. The social media engagement was at a record high for January, with a **105% increase** over 2024. GoRockford also worked with **Illinois Foodies** (239K followers) to promote Rockford Restaurant Week. Total views for January were **1.08 million**. January's efforts also highlighted winter activities and events such as the **Illinois Snow Sculpting Competition**.



FEBRUARY

Celebrating **Black History Month** was the highlight of February. Several social media posts highlighted black-owned businesses in the region including restaurants, bars and retail. A reel for the **Ethnic Heritage Museum** showcased their **Ruben's Pharmacy Exhibit** for Black History Month. Also highlighted in February was the **Impressionists Immersive Exhibition** a collaboration between the Rockford Art Museum and Discovery Center Museum. February's views were at **486,400**.



MARCH

Women's History Month was a focus of March including celebrating women owned businesses in the region. March's social media also covered St. Patrick's Day festivities and spring break ideas in the region. Overall, the engagement showed a **139% increase** over 2024, with viewers at **998,500**.



THREE-MONTH CAMPAIGN RESULTS

Rockford Restaurant Week was the culmination of an extensive three-month campaign to promote the Rockford region for winter travel. Kicking off with **Stroll on State**, the campaign led to marketing "**Holidays in Rockford**", and ended with Rockford Restaurant Week. The three-month campaign included a variety of vendors and marketing channels. The results were impactful, showing high impressions and an impressive click-through rate. By completing a longer campaign, GoRockford was able to negotiate lower campaign costs.

DIGITAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

GoRockford worked with Madden Media on a digital marketing campaign which included Meta (Facebook and Instagram), TikTok, Google



remarketing and Meta remarketing. The campaign included Azira for Stroll on State marketing. With Azira, Madden was able to look back three years at large-scale holiday festivals in a drivable distance and market to those users. The results show **3.6 million impressions** and **38,391 website clicks** over the three month period.

BILLBOARDS

Billboards for Stroll on State, Holidays in Rockford and Restaurant Week were spread over the three month period to locations in the Chicago suburbs and Milwaukee. Total impressions is estimated at **5.9 million**.

GOROCKFORD.COM WEBSITE STATISTICS

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

- Restaurant Week
- Rockford Events
- Things To Do In Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

- Restaurant Week
- Impressionists Immersive Exhibition
- Rockford Home Show

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

- Anderson Japanese Gardens
- Oak and Embers Bistro
- 27 Aluna

Website Traffic Sources



127,518 total website visitors

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



The AHL All Star Classic logo is unveiled at a news conference at BMO Center on January 13, 2025.

AHL All-STAR CLASSIC

The first quarter of 2025 brought big wins for Rockford's sports scene. January kicked off with a major announcement from BMO Center and GoRockford—Rockford will host the **2026 AHL All-Star Classic** at the BMO Center on **February 10–11, 2026**, marking the first time the Midwest has hosted the event since 2004. This marquee event will bring in AHL's brightest stars to Rockford for an unforgettable experience. The prestigious event is set to bring **600 room nights** and an estimated economic impact of **\$150,000**.

HOME SCHOOL BASKETBALL

Rockford welcomed **Rockford F.I.R.E. Home School Basketball** to the **UW Health Sports Factory** for their first-ever event in the city—a great addition to the growing lineup of youth sports. The January tournament brought an estimated economic impact of **\$193,000** and tournament in February, which brought **\$108,000** to the region.

IHSA GIRL'S BOWLING

February kept the excitement going with the **IHSA Girls Bowling State Finals** at **Cherry Bowl**. The event has been held in Rockford for over **30 years** and continues to grow. **Twenty-four teams** visited the region, bringing in an estimated **\$184,000**.

ROCKIN' ROCKFORD

In March, the **AAU Rockin' Rockford Grand Prix 2025**, a girls volleyball tournament, brought the competition to both **UW Health Sports Factory** and **MercyHealth Sportscore Two** from **March 7–9**. The tournament had tremendous growth over 2024, with an additional **65 teams** competing, bringing the total teams to **340**. The large tournament brought **1,400 room nights**, **10,000 spectators and players** and an estimated economic impact of **\$812,000**.

NXT PRO GIRLS

The end of March brought another first-time event—the **NXT Pro Girls Basketball Tournament**, held at the **UW Health Sports Factory**. The tournament held at the end of March, had an estimated economic impact of **\$951,000** and with over **1,800 room nights**, **3,000 spectators** and players.

ANIMAL RESCUE EXPO

A debut charitable expo, held at the **UW Health Sports Factory** in March, aimed at raising money for a local non-profit pet food pantry brought in over **100 vendors**, **2,000 visitors** and an economic impact of **\$120,000**.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

Tough Mudder Chicago

August 23-24, 2025
500 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$861,000

Collegiate Club Bowling National Championships 2025

March 28-30, 2025
400 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$220,000

AHL All Star Classic

February 10-11, 2025
600 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$375,000

IHSA Boys Basketball Tournament

June 28-29, 2026
200 Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$150,000

Trek Bike WORS

July 19-20, 2025
100 Room Nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$129,000

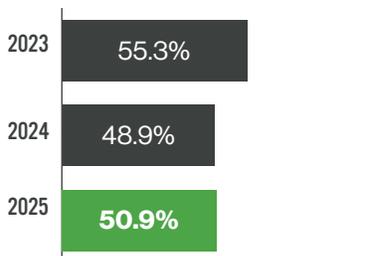
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 21,000 with an economic impact of \$5.1 Million
Number of Bookings: 24



Teams practice before a game during AAU Rockin' Rockford Grand Prix 2025.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS January - March, 2025

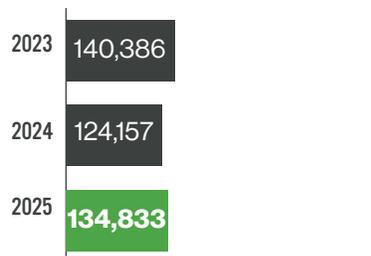
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



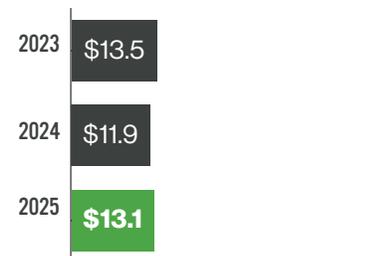
Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



MADE FOR ROCKFORD

WELCOMING NEW RESIDENTS



The Made for Rockford guide is a welcoming resource for new area residents.

This quarter, Made For Rockford proudly launched the **Made for Rockford New Resident Guide** in partnership with the **Greater Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce**. This compact booklet offers a friendly introduction to the region, highlighting local gems and resources, and includes a QR code linking directly to the Made for Rockford website. It's more than just a guide—it's a statement of welcome and a reflection of our shared mission to promote pride, connectivity, and a strong sense of place.

TOOLS FOR TALENT ATTRACTION

Set to launch next quarter, putting the finishing touches on a new Recruiter Portal, designed to support area employers with compelling visuals, fresh video content, and curated messaging about life in Rockford. This easy-to-use platform gives recruiters the tools they need to tell a richer, more authentic story about our community—one that helps job candidates picture their future here.

STRATEGIC OUTREACH

In partnership with Madden Media, the program launched a targeted digital campaign aimed at holiday visitors to Rockford. Using location data, ads were served to return-to-Rockford to mobile users who visited the area over Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's but then traveled elsewhere. The result? Over **34,000 views** to the Made for Rockford website in just one month. The site's traffic boost also coincided with

HOLIDAY SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN



Realtor.com naming Rockford the #1 hottest housing market in the country, showing that interest in our city is both real and rising.

MIXER MOMENTUM

The second Made for Rockford Mixer brought together more than **60 new residents** for an evening of fun, networking, and connection at the



A fun photobooth engages new residents at the second Made for Rockford mixer.

Embassy Suites rooftop. Mayor Tom McNamara offered a personal welcome, reinforcing the city's commitment to its newest community members. With team trivia and relaxed conversation, the event sparked new friendships and deepened ties to Rockford. Each gathering continues to grow in both size and impact—proof that people aren't just relocating, they're putting down roots.

GO TEAM TRAINING & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

This quarter, training began for the inaugural **Go Team**—a group of passionate local ambassadors ready to welcome and support new residents. Each team member is equipped with the tools, talking points, and local knowledge needed to serve as a "first friend" to someone new to Rockford. Whether it's leading neighborhood tours, answering questions, or simply grabbing coffee, the Go Team plays a vital role in helping newcomers feel seen, supported, and connected. Their energy and enthusiasm are already shaping a more welcoming community experience.

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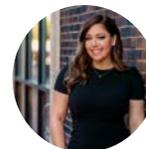
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