



GOROCKFORD QUARTERLY REPORT

FY26, Q2
October - December, 2025

GO2ROCKFORD
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



As we close the second quarter of FY26, and reflect on 2025, this period offered an important opportunity to reflect on how Rockford's story is being shared beyond our region, and how meaningful, community-driven moments can resonate on a national stage.

One of the most notable highlights of the quarter was Rockford's feature on **NBC Nightly News**, which showcased **Stroll on State's "Letters to Santa"** program.

The segment captured the heart of our community and the spirit of the season. That national exposure reinforced the value of authentic experiences and local storytelling in shaping how Rockford is perceived across the country.

We also welcomed a visiting journalist from **Matador Network**, who spent time exploring Rockford's art, architecture, attractions, and outdoor spaces. The resulting coverage introduced Rockford to a broad national audience.

Beyond media exposure, we continued to make progress on projects that will shape Rockford's future. Construction began on several significant attractions, including **Davis Park** and **Beyer Stadium**, while the redevelopment of the historic **Chick House Hotel** moved forward. These investments represent long-term commitments to downtown vitality, visitor experience, and quality of life for residents.

Our sales team focused on relationship-building through key industry tradeshows this quarter, including **TEAMS Conference & Expo** and **US Sports Congress**. These efforts are translating into results, with hotel revenue up more than **\$5 million** over 2024.

Marketing efforts this quarter included a winter campaign across digital and out-of-home channels, along with influencer partnerships that highlighted Rockford's dining, shopping, and seasonal experiences.

Thank our partners, sponsors, volunteers, and community leaders for their continued collaboration and support. We look forward to 2026 and the return of **IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford**, and the **WBSC Women's Baseball World Cup**.

Be well,

John Groh
GoRockford President/CEO

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13TH ANNUAL STROLL ON STATE



Balloon handlers walk with the Stroll on State ornament balloon during the Merry & Bright parade at the 13th annual Stroll on State.

The **2025 Stroll on State** on **November 29** marked the snowiest Stroll in the event's **13-year history**, coinciding with the season's first measurable snowfall. More than 10 inches of snow fell across the Rockford area, creating a picturesque holiday setting while also presenting significant operational challenges. Event organizers, volunteers, and the City of Rockford Public Works team worked quickly and corroboratively to maintain safe, accessible streets, sidewalks, and activities throughout the day. Despite the extreme winter conditions, an **estimated 15,000 attendees** came downtown to celebrate, shop, and enjoy the festivities. The strong turnout highlighted the resilience of Stroll on State and the enduring holiday spirit of the Rockford community, demonstrating that even severe weather could not diminish enthusiasm for this signature annual event. Additional event metrics can be found on page 7.

Stroll on State kicks off the holiday season in downtown Rockford and encourages local shopping during Small Business Saturday. Holiday decor, including a donated 40-foot tree, larger than life present boxes, holiday planters, two additional trees, over 30 wreaths on the bridge crossing the Rock River, over 100 string lit trees and more adorn the downtown, bringing holiday cheer and festive beauty for all to enjoy until early January.

"Stroll on State is truly made possible by the incredible support of our community; from the sponsors and partners who invest in the event to the volunteers who show up year after year," **said Kristen Paul, Executive Vice President of GoRockford.** "That collective commitment is what allows Stroll on State to continue growing and bringing people together each holiday season. As we look ahead to 2026's event, we invite additional businesses and partners to be part of creating a memorable and meaningful holiday experience in downtown Rockford."

DAVIS PARK RENOVATIONS UNDERWAY

Davis Park broke ground on major renovations in October. This milestone marked a major step in creating a vibrant community hub in the heart of downtown Rockford. Looking ahead, improvements include a universally accessible playground, skate park, performance stage, concessions and restroom building, new river walk, Rock River shoreline improvements and public art displays for all to enjoy.

"This project honors decades of community vision while creating a welcoming, dynamic space that energizes the entire downtown," said Mayor Tom McNamara. "We are excited to see Davis Park come to life as a destination where people can play, gather and enjoy all that Rockford has to offer." With construction underway, the goal is for Davis Park to be able to host IRONMAN 70.3 Rockford for the second time June 14, 2026.

HISTORIC PROPERTY SEES NEW LIFE

The historic Chick House Hotel is finally getting the restorative remodel it deserves. Originally opened in **1857**, the Chick House Hotel stands at the corner of South Main and Elm Street. The landmark is one of only three commercial buildings still standing in Rockford from the 1850's and early 1860's. In October, City leaders and Urban Equity Properties officially kicked off nearly a **\$14 million redevelopment**. The plan for Chick House is to convert the building into **18 luxury loft apartments** with three retail spaces on the ground floor and a future restaurant. The revitalization of this historical building will not only provide more housing and shopping for those living downtown but provide tens of thousands of people an amazing experience when visiting the BMO.

BEYER STADIUM BREAKS GROUND

The International Women's Baseball Center (IWBC) announced **\$2.35 million**

in new funding to accelerate construction of Beyer Stadium, including a \$2 million grant from the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation and \$350,000 from the Amazin' Mets Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the New York Mets.



Maybelle Blair, 98, announces the Beyer Stadium upgrades at the ground breaking ceremony in September 2025.

The park surrounding the historic stadium will be named Beyer Stadium at Maybelle Blair Park, honoring IWBC founding director emeritus and baseball pioneer Maybelle Blair, a former All-American Girls Professional Baseball League pitcher for the Peoria Redwings in 1948.

Phase one of the three-phase project is scheduled for completion in 2026, with full build out targeted for 2030. In October, there was a ground breaking ceremony to start renovations. Also in women's baseball news, GoRockford and Rockford Park District announced **Baseball for All Nationals** will come to the region **July 19-25, 2026** during the same week as the **WBSC Women's Baseball World Cup** group stage. Baseball For All is a national nonprofit providing opportunities for girls to play, coach, and lead in baseball. BFA Nationals is the largest girls' baseball tournament in the country.

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



Youth competitors face off during a Fuji BJJ match in December.

HEAD OF THE ROCK REGATTA ACTIVATES ROCK RIVER

Rockford Rowing Crew, with support from the **YMCA of Rock River Valley**, hosted the annual **Head of the Rock Regatta** on **October 12**. Recognized as one of the top fall regattas in the country, this signature event brought approximately **2,000 athletes** to Rockford from **15 states**, featuring 50 collegiate club crews competing along a 3.1-mile course on the Rock River. The regatta drew more than **7,500 spectators** and an estimated **\$925,000 in economic impact**.

TEAM ILLINOIS LACROSSE SHOWCASES YOUTH TALENT

Team Illinois Lacrosse hosted their **Fall Invitational & Showcase** on **October 26–27** at **MercyHealth Sportscore Two**, welcoming top Midwest lacrosse teams for an elite event that provides athletes the opportunity to showcase their talents in front of over 60 college coaches. The event generated an estimated **\$755,000 economic impact** and approximately **800 hotel room nights**.

LEATHERNECK CLASSIC STRIKES BACK

The **25th annual Leatherneck Classic Bowling Tournament**, hosted by **Western Illinois University**, returned to Rockford on **November 8–9**. The tournament is the largest non-major tournament in college bowling, bringing **112 teams** and approximately **1,500 bowlers** and fans to compete across four venues: Don Carter Lanes, The Cherry Bowl, Park Lanes, and Forest Hills Lanes. The tournament generated an estimated more than **500 hotel room nights** and an economic impact of **\$329,000**.

FUJI BJJ DEBUTS

A new martial arts event **Rockford FUJI BJJ Open**, debuted at the **UW Health Sports Factory** on **December 13**. Part of the national FUJI BJJ Tournament Series, a popular nationwide Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu competition circuit, the event welcomed **444 competitors**, with divisions starting as young as age 4.

TRADESHOW HIGHLIGHTS

GoRockford attended the **TEAMS Conference & Expo** in Columbus, Ohio, **October 13–15**. GoRockford's booth was activated by two costumed **Rockford Peaches** who drew significant attention and traffic to the booth. Throughout the event, the team connected with more than **40 tournament directors**.

GoRockford attended **US Sports Congress** in **Lexington, Kentucky (December 8–11, 2025)**. US Sports Congress is a premier industry conference that convenes senior-level sport rights holders, Olympic national governing bodies, destinations, and key suppliers. GoRockford conducted **20 rights-holder meetings** and sponsored an off-site activation attended by 40 people, including 20 rights holders from various sports.

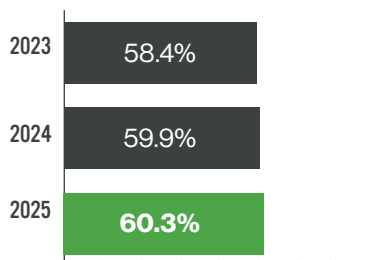
BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

- **WBSC Women's World Cup 2027 Group Stage**
July 23, 2027
2,200 Room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$2.1 Million
- **USA BMX Midwest Nationals**
June 19, 2026
800 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$1.4 Million
- **Winter Classic & Hoopfest**
January 16 & February 13, 2026
600 Room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$505,607
- **Team Illinois - Spring Lacrosse Invitational**
May 2, 2026
2,000 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$967,892
- **Trek Bike WORS - Border Battle**
August 15, 2026
400 room nights
Estimated Economic Impact \$222,957

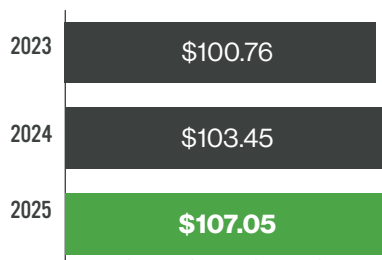
The GoRockford sales team poses with Rockford Peaches impersonators and Greg Mihalich of Sports Illinois and Illinois Office of Tourism.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS Jan - December, 2025

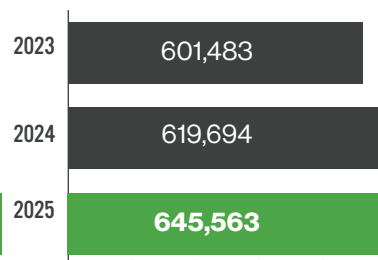
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



Year to Date Average Room Rate



Year to Date Room Demand (rooms sold)



Year to Date Revenue (in millions)



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

NBC Nightly News: *"Good News: 'Mrs. Claus' answers Santa letters from hundreds of kids"* (12/20/2025) 2,130,000 impressions and \$78,810 Earned Media

NBC 5 Chicago: *"Illinois City Named No.1 Housing Market in the US, according to Zillow"* (12/21/2025) 3,700,000 impressions and \$136,900 Earned Media

Islands.com: *"Illinois 'Crown Jewel' Is A Tranquil Garden Escape Where Japanese Artistry Meets Midwestern Charm"* (10/04/2025) 18,370,000 Impressions and \$679,690 Earned Media

TimeOut Magazine: *"These 3 Illinois state parks were just named among the best (and most affordable to visit) in the U.S."* (10/01/2025) 10,300,000 Impressions and \$381,100 Earned Media

Matador Network: *"Rockford, IL, Is More Than a Pit Stop. Here's Where to Play, Eat, and Stay"* (12/15/2025) 381,310 impressions and \$14,071 Earned Media

Rockford, IL, Is More Than a Pit Stop. Here's Where to Play, Eat, and Stay.



Matador Network profiles Rockford in a piece focusing on art, gardens, and history in December.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

8.7 Million Views
59,922 Followers



INSTAGRAM

1.4 Million Views
25,353 Followers



LINKEDIN

2,935 Followers

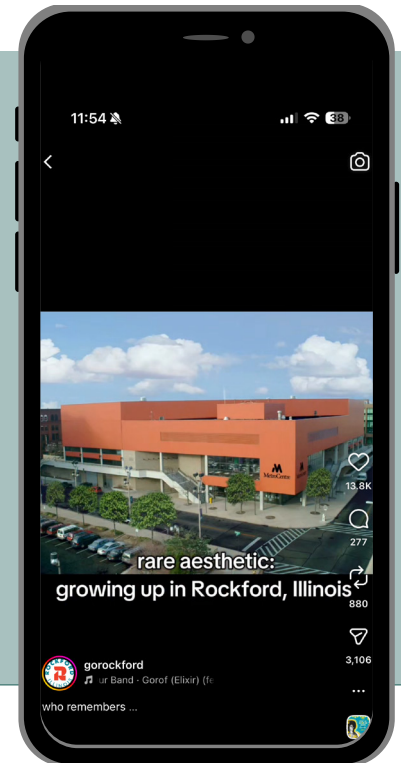
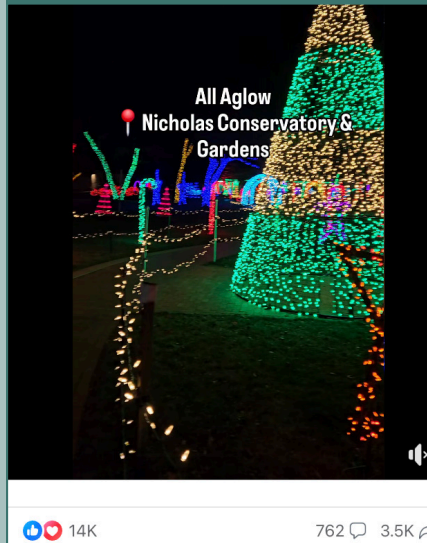


TikTok

1.8 Million Views
12,620 Followers

Top Facebook Post

November 18, 2025 | Impressions 1,682,107



EARNED MEDIA (October - December, 2025)

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



\$7,755,000
Ad equivalency



833,000,000
Total impressions



1,310
Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTIONS

Each month of the quarter had a different focus, leading to impressive engagement.

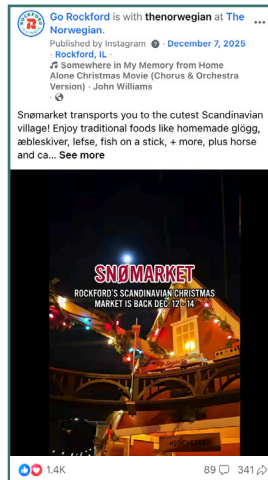
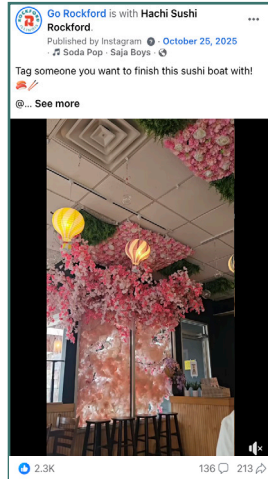
OCTOBER

October's promotions included fall activities, Halloween events including the return of Eerie Autumn Lights at Klehm Arboretum, Dia de Los Muertos and new business openings. Notably, a profile of Hachi Sushi collectively received 530,000 views between Meta and TikTok. Total views for October was over **2 million** with **49.2K** content interactions on Meta, a **230% increase** from October 2024.



NOVEMBER

November's social media channels saw incredible growth with over **6.5 million views** on the GoRockford and Stroll on State pages, up **2.3 million** in 2024. Promotions in November focused on Stroll on State, holiday activities and local shopping. GoRockford's most viral video happened in November with holiday light displays. It was the first video to receive over 1 million views, and received over 2.2 million combined views on Meta and Tiktok.



DECEMBER

December's focus was promoting local holiday shopping and holiday events. GoRockford partnered with Midland States Bank to offer a holiday shopping promotion basket with 6 local businesses. The post received 18,000 views with 713 interactions. The entire month received 2.8 million views between Facebook and Instagram, double the amount of views in 2024.

MARKETING EFFORTS

Holiday Marketing Campaign

GoRockford kicked off a 3-month campaign with Nextstar Media starting in November. The campaign included Stroll on State promotion, holiday travel and is ending with Rockford Restaurant Week promotion into February. The media mix included out of home billboards in Milwaukee and Chicago suburbs, Amazon CTV advertising, Google Display and Meta advertising. To date, the campaign has generated the following impressions: **1 million social media, 363,613 out-of-home, 144,199 Google display, and 131,700 Amazon CTV.**

Influencers

GoRockford worked with Lizanne Lately (71K+ followers) to create a reel and blog encouraging fall visitation to Rockford. Her reel generated **29,255 views** and **2,086 interactions**. During her fall visit, she visited coffee shops and had brunch at The Norwegian. She explored attractions such as Tinker Swiss Cottage and Anderson Gardens.

GoRockford had a call for influencers for Stroll on State 2025 and five local and regional influencers posted about their experience. Combined views was **104,744** across **8 posts**.

Community Outreach

In October, GoRockford provided an informational table and giveaways at the **Dia de Los Muertos** event at **UW**

Health Sports Factory.

This was the second of two informational booths (the first in August) to help reach Spanish speaking residents and visitors.



MOST SEARCHED TERMS

Rockford Events
Stroll on State
Restaurants in Rockford, IL

MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

Stroll on State
Festival of Lights
Festival of Frights

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Anderson Japanese Gardens
Coronado Theatre
Burpee Museum of Natural History

Website Traffic Sources



4.2% Paid Social
3% Other

127,490 total website visitors

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

GOROCKFORD & UMB ANNOUNCE NEW PARTNERSHIP



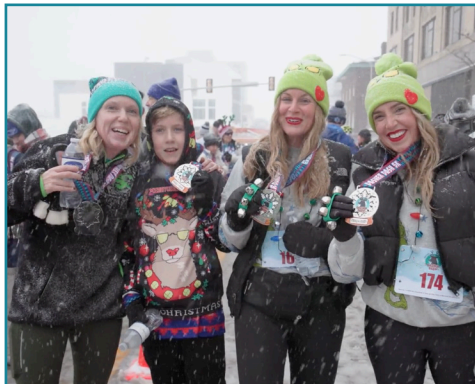
Attendees gather for the Stroll on State tree lighting.

GoRockford announced a new three-year presenting partnership with **UMB Bank** for Stroll on State, securing the future of the beloved holiday festival through 2026, 2027, and 2028. As the presenting sponsor, UMB Bank's support ensures the continued success and growth of Stroll on State, which is funded entirely through the generosity of community sponsors, volunteers, and partners.

In addition to driving downtown business activity, Stroll on State continued its long-standing tradition of giving back to the community. This year, GoRockford returned all vendor fees due to lower attendance, and proceeds from hot chocolate, bar, and s'mores station sales directly benefited local nonprofit organizations. This financial giveback

reinforces the event's commitment to supporting causes that make a positive impact across the Rockford region.

In 2025, the following organizations received financial contributions from GoRockford in recognition of their volunteer efforts: La Onda, NFP, Jack Baumann Memorial, Nikolas Rietschels Foundation, Wesley Willows Good Samaritan Fund, Auburn High School Key Club, Scouts of America Troops #32 and #432, Girl Scout Troop #3172 and Comprehensive Community Services. Stroll on State would not be possible without the support presenting sponsor UMB Bank, premiere sponsors The Power Connection IBEW/NECA, Hard Rockford Casino Rockford and Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 23. In addition to these, GoRockford is grateful to the nearly **100 community sponsors and partners**, as well as over **3,600 volunteer hours** each year. GoRockford extends its sincere thanks to the sponsors whose investment makes the event possible and to the volunteers who generously give their time and energy to bring the holiday tradition to life.



Top Left: Kids make snow angels during the festivities; top right: a child tees up to throw a snowball in front of a Fire & Ice display; bottom left: Dasher Dash runners begin their race; bottom right: Dasher Dash runners show off their finisher medals.

STROLL ON STATE BY THE NUMBERS

- 15,000 attendees
- 3,600+ volunteer hours logged, supported by dedicated paid staff
- 10 inches of snowfall
- 12 professional weather reports
- 56 brand-new snow shovels deployed
- 3 ride-on Snowrators used for snow removal
- 2,300 lbs. of salt used to keep streets and sidewalks safe
- 1,380 registered runners and walkers
- 110 string-lit trees throughout downtown
- 94 street pole snowflakes
- 202 red velvet and glitter bows
- 42 snow angels created during the event
- 35,000 multi color lights on 3 trees
- 72 ice blocks used to build ice towers
- 274 letters written to Santa
- 4 Two Men and A Truck trucks were utilized for event support
- 10,000 (unofficial estimate!) snowballs thrown by kids and adults alike
- 24 firepits with 4 truckloads of wood
- 2 live music stages
- 5.9 million views on social media pages in November
- Website 44,008 views
- 764 Media Mentions: 1.1 billion event exposures
- 532,214 billboard views

MADE FOR ROCKFORD

NATIONAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS ROCKFORD



In partnership with a nationally recognized public relations firm, Rockford received significant media attention this quarter across national and regional platforms. Highlights included a tourism feature by **Matador Network**, where a visiting journalist showcased Rockford-area attractions and local restaurants. Matador Network reaches more than 1 million followers on Facebook alone, expanding Rockford's visibility to a national audience. Additionally, **NBC Nightly News** aired a special feature highlighting **Stroll on State** and the Letters to Santa program, further elevating Rockford's community-driven initiatives.

Rockford was recognized by **Zillow** as the top housing market in the nation, a designation that was subsequently picked up by Chicago-area media outlets, amplifying regional awareness.

HOLIDAY BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN – “IT’S TIME TO MOVE HOME”



A holiday billboard campaign from Made for Rockford gives reasons to move back to Rockford for holiday visitors.

Made for Rockford launched a targeted holiday billboard campaign aimed at individuals returning home for the holidays. Titled **“It’s Time to Move Home,”** the campaign featured billboards in high-traffic areas and leveraged messaging focused on affordability, family connections, and quality of life. Creative concepts included relatable, emotionally driven lines such as, “You don’t need a nanny when you have Nana,” reinforcing the value of family support and community. The billboards ran intermittently from Thanksgiving through New Year’s and were seen more than **1.5 million** times, strategically timed to reach audiences considering relocation during the holiday season.

NEW RESIDENT MIXER BRINGS CONNECTIONS



A family poses with at the Made for Rockford photo opp during the New Resident Mixer in November at the Rockford Icehogs game.

Made for Rockford hosted its fourth **New Resident Mixer** in November, marking the largest turnout to date. More than **100 new community members** attended a **Rockford IceHogs** game, where they connected with Go Team ambassadors and fellow residents. The event fostered new friendships, encouraged community engagement, and introduced attendees to local activities and hobbies, strengthening their connection to the Rockford region.

MADE FOR ROCKFORD ATTENDS TALENT ATTRACTION CONFERENCE

Program Director Whitney Martin attended the **Young, Smart, and Local (YSL) Talent Attraction Conference** in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to strengthen Made for Rockford's talent attraction and retention strategies. YSL is a national network focused on best practices for engaging and retaining young professionals. The conference brought together leaders from economic development, higher education, business, government, and community organizations, providing valuable insight into successful programs being implemented nationwide. With more than 1,000 network members and over 250 professionals in attendance annually, the conference offered actionable ideas and peer connections that will directly inform Rockford's efforts to attract, welcome, and retain talent.

INVESTING IN ROCKFORD'S FUTURE

Program Director Whitney Martin connected with Rockford Promise students during a retreat at Rockford University, reinforcing the message that Rockford can be their future and that the community is invested in their success. The session emphasized local career opportunities, community support, and the importance of building professional networks. Students participated in structured networking activities designed to build confidence and strengthen their connection to Rockford as a place to live and work after graduation.

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