

GOROCKFORD
QUARTERLY REPORT

FY27, Q1
July - September, 2026

GOROCKFORD

The mission of GoRockford is to drive quality of life for residents and growth of the visitor economy through tourism marketing, sales, 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 at a rate greater than our competitive set.

ENHANCE TOURISM PRODUCT
The Rockford Region offers unique and marketable experiences and venues that meet or exceed visitor expectations and enhance the quality of life for residents.

ENGAGE CONSTITUENTS ON BEHALF OF TOURISM
GoRockford tourism marketing, sales, and destination development efforts have broad support among key stakeholders.

ELEVATE THE BRAND
The Rockford Region's brand is clearly defined and positively perceived, supporting the region's competitiveness as a destination and place to live.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO



As we begin a new fiscal year, the Rockford region continues to build momentum through partnerships and experiences that attract visitors while enhancing quality of life for residents. This quarter demonstrated the power of tourism through international sporting events, a new signature festival, national media attention and record visitor spending.

We debuted **RockYard Music Fest** at Davis Park, bringing thousands together and beginning a new summer tradition along our downtown riverfront.

Women's Baseball Week welcomed athletes and fans from around the world, with GoRockford serving as the U.S. presenting sponsor of the **WBSC Women's Baseball World Cup Group Stage**. The event helped celebrate our baseball heritage and set the stage for the **2027 World Cup Finals**.

In September, we announced a record **$549.6 million** in 2025 visitor spending, a **5% increase** that outpaced statewide growth. Our sales team secured **9,459 future hotel room nights**, representing **$6.1 million** in estimated economic impact.

National coverage in **NBC News, The New York Times** and **Travel + Leisure**, along with nearly **10 million social media views**, helped showcase Rockford nationwide.

Made for Rockford introduced prospective residents to the region, with more than **200 relocation kits** mailed since the redesigned website launched in June.

New **Forest City Beautiful** Rockford-themed banners and preparations for **Stroll on State** reflect our commitment to beautification and shared community experiences.

Thank you to our board, staff, volunteers, sponsors and community partners for making this momentum possible. Together, we are building a stronger future for the Rockford region.

Be well,

John Groh
GoRockford President/CEO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOROCKFORD NEWS

RockYard Music Fest....3
Women's Baseball Week....3
Tourism Spending Update....3

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

Sports Sales Highlights....4
Booking Highlights....4
Winnebago County Hotel Statistics....4

MARKETING

Media Mentions & Placements....5
Earned Media....5
Social Media Analytics....5
Social Media Promotions....6
Marketing Efforts....6
Website Statistics....6

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

New Rockford-Themed Banners....7
Santa's Workshop Opening....7
New Mini Mural....7
RockYard Sponsors....7

MADE FOR ROCKFORD

New of the Year Award....8
New Resident Mixer....8
Marketing Campaign....8
Speaking Engagements....8

GOROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

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

GoROCKFORD NEWS

ROCKYARD MUSIC FEST DEBUTS



RockYard Music Fest attendees marvel at Rockford-themed drone show on August 15.

GoRockford introduced the inaugural **RockYard Music Fest, August 14–15**, at Davis Park in downtown Rockford. Presented by Foresight Bank, the free, two-day festival featured live music, food and beverage vendors, art activities, family entertainment, field competitions, and yard games. Friday's festivities concluded with fireworks over the Rock River, while Saturday featured a Rockford-themed drone show as a cap off to Rockford 815 Day festivities.

Marketing Campaign

- **51,393** website page views
- **24,926** paid social media ad clicks
- **148,618** Connected TV impressions
- **2,630** household website visits from Connected TV advertising
- **8** influencer partnerships

Created as part of **Rockford's America 250** celebration and coinciding with **Rockford 815 Day**, the festival provided one of the first major opportunities for the public to experience a sneak peek of **Davis Park** ahead of its official reopening. The event brought together regional musicians, artists, businesses, sponsors and community organizations to celebrate Rockford's creative culture and activate the downtown riverfront.

RockYard represents GoRockford's continued commitment to the goals of **Thrive 2035**, creating new destination experiences, strengthening downtown activity and establishing signature events that encourage visitors to explore the region. The inaugural festival laid the groundwork for a new annual summer tradition.

GoRockford launched a comprehensive marketing campaign to introduce RockYard to audiences in northern Illinois and surrounding drive markets. The campaign included Connected TV, digital advertising, billboards, radio, social media and influencer partnerships, generating **51,393** website page views, nearly **25,000** paid social media clicks and **148,618** Connected TV impressions. Public relations efforts also resulted in **431 media mentions** with a potential reach of **427 million**, establishing strong awareness for the inaugural festival.

WOMEN'S BASEBALL WEEK MAKES 'HERSTORY'

Rockford welcomed athletes, families, fans and baseball legends from around the world for **Women's Baseball Week, July 19–26**. Three major events, the **WBSC Women's Baseball World Cup Group Stage, Baseball For All Nationals** and **All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Reunion**, estimated to have generated more than **$2.8 million in economic impact**, attract approximately **6,900 attendees** and filled more than **3,550 hotel room nights**.



A Team Canada player slides into a base at the WBSC Women's Baseball World Cup Group Stage in July.

The International Women's Baseball Center (IWBC) hosted the WBSC **Women's Baseball World Cup Group Stage, July 22–26,** in partnership with **World Baseball Softball Confederation WBSC** and GoRockford as the U.S. presenting sponsor. The games brought international athletes and visitors from around the world to the Rockford region, showcasing the world's top female baseball talent. The championship will return to Rockford **July 19–25, 2027**, for the **Women's Baseball World Cup Finals**.

The week celebrated Rockford's baseball heritage and the future of women's sports, including the reopening of historic **Beyer Stadium at Maybelle Blair Park**. The celebration also generated significant national media attention, with features on **NBC News** and in **The New York Times** highlighting the legacy of the Rockford Peaches and the next generation of female baseball players. Combined, the two stories generated a reported **192 million impressions** and **$7.1 million in estimated earned media value**, reinforcing Rockford's reputation as an international destination for women's baseball.

RECORD VISITOR SPENDING IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY

In September, GoRockford announced that visitor spending in Rockford and Winnebago County reached a record **$549.6 million** in 2025, an increase of **5% over** the previous year, outpacing **statewide tourism growth of 3.5%**. Tourism supported **4,774 direct jobs** and generated **$15.6 million in local tax revenue**, demonstrating the visitor economy's continued importance to the region.

The 2025 results represent a significant acceleration from the previous year. Visitor spending grew in 2024, from **$515.4 million** to **$523.4 million**. Since 2019, when visitors spent **$483.2 million** in Winnebago County, annual visitor spending has increased by **$66.4 million**, or **13.7%**. By comparison, statewide visitor spending grew about **10.3%** over the same period.

SALES EFFORTS & RESULTS

SPORTS AND MEETING SALES HIGHLIGHTS



The Georgia Peaches take a photo in front of the historic Beyer Stadium at Maybelle Blair Park at the Baseball for All parade of teams in July.

ROCKFORD SECURES 90TH ANNUAL NAACP STATE CONVENTION

In September, GoRockford announced that Rockford was selected to host the **90th Annual NAACP Illinois State Conference Convention**, taking place **September 24–26, 2027**, at **Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront**. Returning to Rockford for the first time in 15 years, the three-day convention is expected to **welcome 250 attendees** from across Illinois, marking a significant win for GoRockford's meetings and conventions sales efforts.

OPENING WEEKEND TOURNAMENT EXPANDS

The **National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) All In Volleyball Opening Weekend Tournament** returned to **Sports Factory August 20–23**, welcoming **89 teams** from **17 states**. The nation's largest two-year college women's volleyball tournament expanded to four days to accommodate growing participation and a wait list of additional teams. The tournament's estimated economic impact was **$1.2 million** in visitor spending and filled approximately **1,875 hotel rooms**, reinforcing Rockford's reputation as a leading sports tourism destination.

NEW HOCKEY TOURNAMENT DEBUTS IN ROCKFORD

The inaugural **Rocktown Showdown 3v3 Hockey Tournament** debuted **July 31–August 2** at **Riverview Ice House**. The first-year event welcomed approximately **50 youth hockey teams** and **300–400 players, coaches, families and spectators** from across the Midwest. The tournament projected **$100,000 in economic impact**, introducing a new sporting event with opportunities for future growth.

TRADE SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

On **September 29 - October 1**, GoRockford's sales team attended the **Sports Huddle FAM Tour and Rights Holder Summit** in **Buffalo, New York**. The team conducted **16 appointments** with sports rights holders and industry partners from across the country to promote Rockford's sports facilities and pursue opportunities to host future sporting events.

BOOKING HIGHLIGHTS

Midwest Women Riders- Get Your Groove On
June 10–12, 2027
Total room nights: 1,000
Estimated economic impact: $936,000

Fred VanVleet Classic
November 23-28, 2026
Estimated total room nights: 1,200
Estimated economic impact: $604,897

Made Hoops Chicago City
February 19-20, 2027
Estimated total room nights: 350
Estimated economic impact: $234,233

Special Olympics Illinois Fall Games
October 16-18, 2026
Estimated total room nights: 800
Estimated economic impact: $234,557

Illinois State NAACP Convention
September 24–26, 2027
Estimated total room nights: 200
Estimated economic impact: $113,344

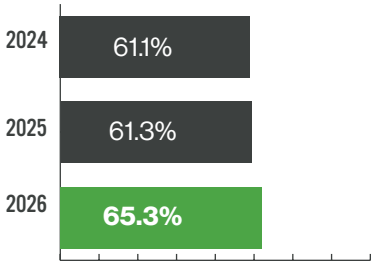
Future Hotel Room Nights Booked During the Quarter: 9,459 with an economic impact of $6.1 Million
Number of Bookings: 19



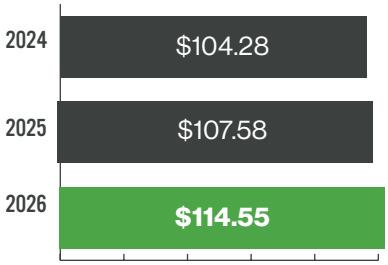
Attendees of Sports Huddle FAM Tour and Rights Holder Summit strike a pose in Buffalo, New York.

WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOTEL STATISTICS January - September, 2026

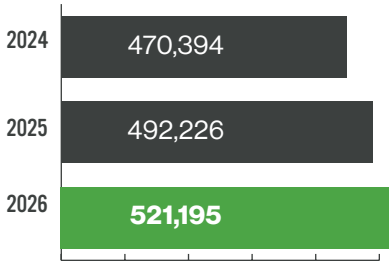
Year to Date Hotel Occupancy



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.



Travel + Leisure features Hidden Creek Estates' new unique stay: 5 wine barrel homes with access to a restaurant and wine bar.

NATIONAL MEDIA MENTIONS

NBC News: ***"A League of Their Own' legacy inspires new generation of female baseball players"*** (08/05/2026) 36,000,000 impressions and $1,332,000 Earned Media

Sound of Next America: ***"Is Rockford, Illinois the Midwest's Next Creative Capital?"*** (09/01/2026) 1,063,000 impressions and $39,331 Earned Media

Travel + Leisure: ***"You Can Spend the Night in a Wine Barrel–shaped Room at This Country Estate in Illinois"*** (09/01/2026) 9,600,000 impressions and $355,300 Earned Media

Realtor.com: ***"August 2026 Hottest Housing Markets"*** (09/08/2026) 42,100,000 impressions and $1,557,700 Earned Media

Forbes: ***"Box Office Magic: Preserving America's Century-Old Theaters"*** (09/09/2026) 30,200,000 impressions and $1,114,400 Earned Media

New York Times: ***"Women Sluggers Are No Longer in a League of Their Own"*** (09/27/2026)156,000,000 impressions and $5,779,400 Earned Media

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK
7 Million Views
69,930 Followers

INSTAGRAM
1.4 Million Views
28,100 Followers

LINKEDIN
3,324 Followers

TikTok
1.5 Million Views
21,313 Followers

Top Facebook Post

September 20, 2026 | Impressions 607,023





EARNED MEDIA (July - September, 2026)

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

$5,432,000
Ad equivalency

587,000,000
Total impressions

1,216
Number of mentions

MARKETING

SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTIONS

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

JULY

The main focus of July in 2026 was to promote America 250 Rockford, RockYard Music Fest as an inaugural festival, and the inaugural Women's Baseball Week. Also in July was promoting summer seasonal activities such as visiting Pearl Lake Beach. July's promotions resulted in **2.8 million views**, up from **1.1 million views** in 2025.





AUGUST

August's focus on social media was to promote the inaugural RockYard Music Fest, Rockford 815 Day, end of summer and early fall promotions. Another focus was the major cultural celebrations such as Polish Fest and Festa Italiana. Polish Fest's one reel received over **600,000 views**. August's promotions resulted in **2.7 million views**, up from **1.6 million** in 2025.

SEPTEMBER

September kicked off a fall marketing campaign that will conclude in October. To support the campaign, September's social media focus was to promote fall in Rockford, with places to go for fall fun, treats, fall foliage, and more. Marketing also highlighted the brand new barrel home stays at Hidden Creek Estates, resulting in **283,000 views.** The results of September had strong engagement with **2.6 million views**, up from **1.8 million** in 2025.



MARKETING EFFORTS

America 250 Campaign Launches Year-Long Campaign

America 250 Rockford kicked off a year-long signature events marketing campaign supported by a grant GoRockford received from the **Illinois Office of Tourism**. America 250 promotions included a logo, TV spots, radio advertising, dedicated website, event guide, blogs and media outreach. As part of the America 250 celebrations in Rockford, the City of Rockford helped fund the inaugural RockYard Music Fest as a capstone event to the year-long America 250 celebration.

RockYard Music Fest Influencers

GoRockford partnered with eight volunteer influencers to promote the inaugural RockYard Music Fest, **August 14–15**, reaching new audiences through Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. Influencers helped showcase the event through authentic, firsthand experiences. One Chicago-area influencer generated **56,000 views** on a single post. The collaborations helped build new relationships with regional content creators for future destination marketing efforts.

Summer Internship Program

GoRockford welcomed three summer interns who gained hands-on experience in marketing, sales, destination development, content creation and event promotions. The interns wrote blogs, worked with community partners, and produced and edited social media content. They also worked informational booths at **South Main Mercado, IRONMAN 70.3, Women's Baseball Week,** and **RockYard Music Fest**.

Rockford 815 Day Promotions

GoRockford celebrated **Rockford 815 Day** promoting local businesses, events and experiences throughout the region. This year the promotions extended into a weekend-long celebration due to 815 Day falling on a Saturday. A record 131 businesses submitted. Web pages for 815 Day generated over 20,000 views on the GoRockford website.

MOST SEARCHED TERMS

Things To Do in Rockford
Events in Rockford
RockYard Music Fest

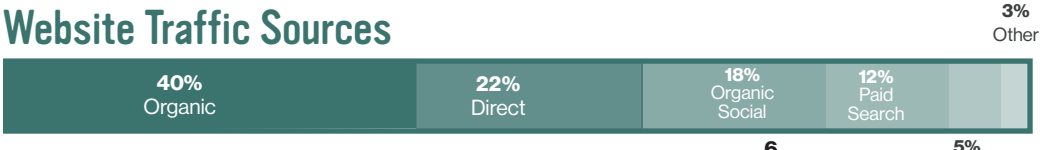
MOST SEARCHED EVENTS

RockYard Music Fest
Rockford 4th of July Celebration
Polish Fest

MOST SEARCHED LISTINGS

Anderson Japanese Gardens
Beyer Stadium at Maybelle Blair Park
Olson Lake Beach

Website Traffic Sources



145,550 total website users

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

NEW ROCKFORD BRANDED BANNERS



A new Rockford branded banner hangs in downtown Rockford.

GoRockford, in partnership with the City of Rockford, introduced new street banners as part of the **Forest City Beautiful initiative.** Featuring new Rockford branding, the banners create a more cohesive and welcoming appearance throughout the city while strengthening Rockford's identity as a destination for residents and visitors. The fresh look also highlights attractions and events throughout regions. Over **1,000 banners** will be installed gradually throughout Rockford. The project builds on Forest City Beautiful's continued investment in public spaces, streetscape improvements and placemaking initiatives that enhance community pride and create positive first impressions for visitors.

STROLL ON STATE WORKSHOP OPENS

GoRockford officially opened **Stroll on State's Santa's Workshop** on **September 12**, kicking off volunteer preparations for the **14th annual Stroll on State** on **November 28**. The workshop brings together community volunteers to create, repair and prepare the larger-than-life decorations, holiday displays and festive attractions that transform downtown Rockford each year. With on average **4,000 volunteer hours** needed to bring Stroll on State to life, the dedication of volunteers, local businesses and community partners helps keep the celebration free and creates a welcoming holiday experience for residents and visitors throughout the region. This year adds more decor and holiday magic to Davis Park, with volunteers integral to this expansion.

MURAL GETS FRESH LOOK

A mini mural in front of Luther Center at 111 W. State Street received a fresh look in September. The piece is called ***"Our Beautiful River"*** and is a homage to one of Rockford's greatest assets. The circular mural is a vibrant whimsical piece with fish and a hidden mermaid. Talented local muralist (and frequent GoRockford collaborator) Jenny Matthews.

The mini mural is part of the **CRE8IV: Transformational Art** initiative created by GoRockford in 2019. The mural program sunsetted in 2024 adding **57 murals** to the region. The sculpture component to the program is still going strong, adding over **30 leased and permanent sculptures** to the Rockford area.





From left to right: Volunteers pose at the Stroll on State Workshop. Fish and sea creatures adorn the whimsical new mural downtown.

ROCKYARD SPONSORS

Launching a new signature event requires strong community partnerships and a shared investment in Rockford's future. The inaugural RockYard Music Fest, brought thousands of residents and visitors to the newly renovated Davis Park for a free, two-day celebration of music, art, food and entertainment. The festival helped activate the downtown riverfront while establishing a new summer tradition for the Rockford region.

Community sponsorships played a critical role in bringing this first-year festival to life, helping GoRockford introduce a new destination experience with opportunities for continued growth. These investments support more than a single event, helping strengthen downtown Rockford, attract visitors and support local businesses.

GoRockford is grateful to presenting sponsor Foresight Bank and the generous community sponsors and partners who helped make the inaugural RockYard Music Fest possible, including:

Foresight Bank
City of Rockford
Winnebago County
America 250 Rockford
America 250 Winnebago County
Plumbers & Pipefitters Local Union 23
Brubaker Charitable Trust
Collins Aerospace
Dean Alan Olson Foundation
Hard Rock Casino Rockford
LaMonica Beverages
Illinois Arts Council
Trekk
Aetna Building Solutions
Murphy's Pub & Grill
Dairyhaus
Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront
Sustain Rkfd
Rockford Area Arts Council

MADE FOR ROCKFORD

NEW RESIDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD



New residents mingle at the spring Made for Rockford mixer in April.

In partnership with the Greater Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce, Made for Rockford recognized **Kate Ambrose** as its **New Resident of the Year** at the chamber's annual dinner in August. The award celebrates the impact newcomers can make on our community. The award honors individuals who do more than relocate to Rockford. They get involved, build connections and contribute to the region's future.

SUMMER NEW RESIDENT MIXER

A new resident mixer to **RockYard Music Fest** in August, giving newcomers VIP access to one of Rockford's new signature summer events. More than **100 people registered,** connecting new residents with each other, Go Team ambassadors and the community's growing entertainment scene. The event reflects a key part of the program's retention strategy: helping people build a social network and a sense of belonging after relocating.

MADE FOR ROCKFORD MARKETING CAMPAIGN

National marketing efforts for Made for Rockford this quarter included direct engagement with prospective residents. Targeted digital advertising connects job seekers with industry-specific landing pages highlighting career opportunities and life outside of work. Since launching the redesigned website in June, more than **200 relocation kits** have been mailed to people exploring a move to Rockford. These requests represent prospective residents taking the next step beyond simply seeing an advertisement.

NATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS

Public Relations efforts this quarter continued with national public relations partner Development Counsellors International (DCI) to put Rockford's livability story in front of audiences across the country. Outreach focused on the demand for downtown housing, affordability and the growing amenities attracting new residents.

Building on coverage in ***The Wall Street Journal, Forbes and Travel + Leisure***, the program also pursued new national media opportunities to position Rockford as a community people are choosing, not just a place to find a job.

SPEAKING AT DESTINATION INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONVENTION



GoRockford staff attends Destination International Annual Convention in Portland, Oregon in July 2026.

The Made for Rockford program took the national stage at the **Destinations International Annual Convention** in **Portland, Oregon**, speaking to destination marketing professionals about Rockford's approach to talent attraction and retention. The presentation highlighted how GoRockford is using its destination marketing expertise to help employers recruit talent, welcome new residents and support long-term population growth. The speaking opportunity positioned Rockford as a national example of how tourism organizations can expand their impact beyond visitor attraction.

HR FEST AND WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

Made for Rockford connected directly with regional human resources and recruitment leaders at **Rockford Area SHRM 2026 HR Festival 2.0**, held at **Hard Rock Casino Rockford** on **September 17**. Made For Rockford's program director served as emcee and moderated a panel of industry experts. The event created an opportunity to reinforce a critical message for employers: recruiting someone for a job is only half the challenge. Helping them choose the community, and ultimately stay, requires a different approach.

EMPLOYER RECRUITMENT AND COMMUNITY TOURS

Customized community tours from Made for Rockford continued to play a growing role in employer recruitment. More than **100 tours** have been conducted in 2026, Built around each candidate's interests, the tours introduce prospective residents to neighborhoods, schools, recreation and everyday life in Rockford, giving employers another tool to compete for talent beyond salary and benefits.

GoROCKFORD BOARD & STAFF

GoRockford Board of Directors

Geno Iafrate (Chair)
Hard Rock Rockford

Jennifer Furst (Vice Chair)
Furst Staffing

Chintan Thakkar (Treasurer)
Decorum Management Group

Dana Martin (Secretary)
Rosecrance Behavioral Health

Carol Schuster
University of Illinois
College of Medicine - Rockford

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

Shelton Kay
Rockford Regional Health Council

Kyle Schilling
First Midwest Group

Thomas Budd
UMB Bank

Mark Henderson
Village of Rockton

Angela Larson
Greater Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Richard Shuga
Painters District Council No. 30 Local 607

Todd Cagnoni
City of Rockford

Bobbie Holzwarth
HolmstromKennedy

Ricardo Montoya-Picazo
Office of State Representative Dave Vella

Patrick Thompson
Winnebago County

Ald. Kevin Frost
City of Rockford

Sonya Hoppes
City of South Beloit

Jay Sandine
Rockford Park District

Kirk Weitzel
Rock Hospitality

Duncan Geddes
Parks Chamber of Commerce

GoRockford Foundation Board of Directors

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

Geno Iafrate (Foundation Vice Chair)
Hard Rock Rockford

Marco Lenis (Foundation Treasurer)
Vocational Rehabilitation Management

Gina Caruana (Foundation Secretary)
Foresight Financial Group

David Anderson
Anderson Japanese Gardens

Theresa Kegley
Movement Fitness

Jim Pirages
AGHL Law

Alexis Wright-Conniff
Woodward

Rebecca Francis
Ignite Change Solutions LLC

Jeff Marrs
Morgan Stanley

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 & Administration



Amanda August
Social Media and Communications Specialist



Chenaire Barmore
Communications Manager



Kara Davis
Senior Sales Manager



Elizabeth Falls
Senior Marketing Manager



Julie Huber
Destination Development Operations Manager



Whitney Martin
Made for Rockford Program Director



Kyra Murray
Marketing & Customer Experience Coordinator



Emily Plumb
Sales & Servicing Manager



Leah Ticknor
Office Manager & Executive Assistant