



Top 10 attractions, by attendance

From Magic Waters in Cherry Valley to the Historic Auto Attractions in Roscoe, there is more to see and do in the Rock River Valley since 1980. In fact, two of the area's top three attractions opened in the early 1980s. The MetroCentre opened in 1981 and Sportscore One in 1983. While we've gained attractions, we've lost a couple of sites and seen the attendance drop at several others. Below are the top 10 attractions in Winnebago County, based on attendance numbers reported to the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. Numbers date back to 1985 or the year the attraction opened.



Sportscore One and Two

2007 ATTENDANCE

2,272,576

2000 915,000 ▲ Up 148.4 percent

Sportscore One opened in 1983 and made the area a soccer and softball tournament draw. Sportscore Two opened in 2002 and the Park District absorbed the Indoor Sports Center, making the combination a year-round attraction. Attendance will be down about 25 percent in 2008 because of flooding.



Rock Cut State Park

2007 ATTENDANCE

1,118,918

1985 1,138,405 ▼ Down 1.7 percent

This 162-acre state park in Loves Park has been one of the top two local attractions throughout its history. It brings swimmers, boaters, bikers and campers into the area in the summer months and hunters and skiers in the fall and winter. Attendance peaked in 2003 at 1.8 million visitors.



MetroCentre

2007 ATTENDANCE

320,445

1985 616,857 ▼ Down 48.1 percent

Downtown's anchor venue opened in 1981 as a popular spot for entertainers ranging from Johnny Cash to Ozzy Ozbourne. It's become more of a home for athletic events and trade shows. Its top attraction is the Rockford IceHogs hockey team. A long-needed renovation hurt its 2007 attendance figures.



Riverview and Carlson Ice facilities

2007 ATTENDANCE

260,174

1985 82,000 ▲ Up 217.3 percent

The Riverview Ice House opened in downtown Rockford in 1975 has long been home to recreational and youth hockey leagues and ice skating lessons. In 1997, the Rockford Park District opened the Carlson Arctic Ice Arena in Loves Park to open up more ice time for everyone.



Magic Waters

2007 ATTENDANCE

235,007

1985 175,000 ▲ Up 34.3 percent

The Midwest's second-largest publicly owned waterpark. Magic Waters, which opened in 1984, operates from late May to early September and draws people from the Chicago suburbs and southern Wisconsin. In 2009, the park is adding a new 65-foot tall ride tentatively called Tornado Alley.



Rockford golf courses

2007 ATTENDANCE

175,201

1985 250,835 ▼ Down 30.2 percent

In 1998, Golf Digest named Rockford the best medium-sized city in the United States for golf. The city's courses include Aldeen, one of the top layouts in the Midwest, and draws from a wide area. Increased competition from area courses though has driven down rounds for the past 10 years.



Rockford Riverhawks

2007 ATTENDANCE

155,763

2002 86,842 ▲ Up 79.4 percent

The Rockford RiverHawks of the independent Frontier League started playing at Marinelli Stadium in Rockford in 2002. In 2005, the team moved to a new stadium in Loves Park and has seen attendance soar because of better access to Interstate 90 and proximity to other attractions.



Discovery Center

2007 ATTENDANCE

143,507

1985 15,162 ▲ Up 846.5 percent

In 2002, Child Magazine named the Discovery Center one of the top five children's museum in the nation. Opened in 1981, studies showed about 60 percent of Discovery Center's visitors are out-of-towners. The museum is in a fundraising drive to expand its offerings.



Lockwood Park Trailside Center

2007 ATTENDANCE

140,520

1985 19,223 ▲ Up 631 percent

The Rockford Park District opened the trailside center in 1977 and this more than 90-acre park now features rinks and trails for horseback riding lessons, an observatory and petting zoo. Attendance peaked at the park in 2003 at more than 193,000.



Volcano Falls Adventure Park

2007 ATTENDANCE

130,000

2004 175,000 ▼ Down 25.7 percent

A joint venture at the start between developer Sunil Puri and trucking executive Ron Leek, this venue opened in 2003. It features two mini-putt courses, including one that winds around a miniature volcano, two go-kart tracks, batting cages, an indoor arcade and lazer tag room.

Other attractions that have grown, slowed or disappeared ...

Winnebago County's mix of attractions has grown in the past 15 years as area boosters invested more in tourism.

In the late 1990s, **Anderson Japanese Gardens** and **Klehm Arboretum** opened, drawing nature lovers from all over the Midwest. Theater buffs can enjoy the \$18.5 million renovation of the **Coronado Theatre** completed in 2001 and in 2003 Rock Valley College opened a redesigned **Bengt Sjostrom Starlight Theater**, featuring a hexagonal-dome, retractable canopy roof.

Burpee Museum transformed itself from a small venue of rocks and trinkets drawing fewer than 15,000 visitors in 1985 to a major archeological attraction thanks to

Jane, a juvenile T-rex discovered by Burpee researchers and centerpiece of a new exhibit in 2005. Burpee's attendance jumped to nearly 140,000 that year. In 2007, the Clocktower Resort & Conference center opened **CoCo Key**, the area's first indoor water park, and it drew nearly 75,000 people. Not all venues are showing growth though.

The **Rockford Speedway** in Loves Park drew as many as 203,000 in 2002. Attendance has plummeted since that year as NASCAR began running more races at night and on more nights of the week.

New American Theater in downtown Rockford drew nearly 66,000 visitors in 1989. In December 2006, though, because of mount-

ing debt the theater closed abruptly in the middle of its 35th season.

Local benefactor Richard Nordlof bought the theater, renamed it the "**118 Center**," and it is being used for special events.

At least those attractions survived. For years the Clocktower was home to the **Time Museum**, a collection of more than 1,600 clocks. The Time Museum drew as many as 52,800 in 1987. But by 1998 attendance had dwindled to around 25,000 and in 1999 the Atwood family, which owned the clocks, closed the museum when they sold the hotel and sold clocks for



nearly \$50 million.

Rockford also was home to the **Zitelman Scout Museum**, located at 708 Seminary St., which featured an eclectic collection of rare Boy Scout memorabilia. It drew as many 10,375 people in 1989. Zitelman was working on moving the museum to a larger spot on East Riverside Boulevard when he died in 1991 at the age of 65. The museum closed two years later.

— By Alex Gary

Note: The list of top 10 attractions does not include Forest Hills Diamonds because owners have only provided figures the past four years and the numbers appear to be estimates. Also, the Rockford IceHogs are listed as one of the top 10 attractions by the RACVB, but the IceHogs attendance is included in MetroCentre figures.