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## **Starved Rock Hosts State Tourism Office for 2012 Economic Impact Presentation**

### **Starved Rock Lodge Marketing Director Presented with Lincoln Award**

Utica, Illinois, July 11, 2013 – The head of the State's Tourism office visited Starved Rock Thursday afternoon to herald the news of the positive economic impact brought to Illinois and the region. Jen Hoelzle, Deputy Director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, was joined by Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau President, Bob Navarro, and members of their staffs, as well as LaSalle County Board member Jill Bernal and other special guests for the 2012 IOT Road Show.



During the event, Starved Rock Lodge Marketing Director, Kathy Casstevens-Jasiek was surprised with the receipt of the State of Illinois Lincoln Award for her regional tourism efforts. Starved Rock State Park, with 12 million visitors annually, is Illinois most visited State Park. Neighboring tourism partners from August Hill Winery, and Illinois Sparkling Company Winery and Tasting Room were also on hand to discuss the boost their business has received from visitors to the area.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, which compiled the figures on domestic travel from 2012, the state of tourism is strong. Numbers released this week across the State show travel expenditures up for the second consecutive year in Illinois, totaling an impressive \$30.9 billion. "All across the Illinois and Michigan National Heritage Corridor, the effect of travel is clear and it is powerful," said Navarro. The region benefitted from \$837.28 million in travel expenditures, and \$61.11 million in state and local tax receipts.

In addition, Corridor-wide, the tourism industry employs 7,900 persons representing a payroll of \$190.96 million. Overall, travel expenditures increased in each County, with Will County seeing a 4.5 percent boost, Grundy showing 4.3 percent increase. Both LaSalle and Putnam County showing 2.5 percent increases in 2012 compared to the previous year.

"We are thrilled with the figures and tourism's ability to attract visitors, support our towns, and bolster the success of local businesses," said Navarro. "Our partner members are definitely helping each other succeed, and making for a great visitor experience in which we can all take pride," he added, applauding the efforts of Casstevens-Jasiek and Starved Rock Lodge and State Park for being Illinois' most visited State Park. "Kathy has amazing energy and is always coming up with ways to bring more visitors to the Lodge, but also to other local attractions, as well," he continued. Navarro heads up the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau, which is responsible for marketing and promotion of all its partners across four counties within the 94-mile Corridor.

LaSalle County figures echo the State's increase in tourists, and are as follows: Travel expenditures were \$168.5 million, state and local tax receipts came in at \$12.65 million, with 1,280 persons employed and payroll at \$29.39 million. Assistant Deputy Director of the IOT, Jan Kemmerling, reported on 2012 County figures. She stated that, for its part, Grundy County benefitted from \$61.17 million in travel expenditures, bringing in \$5.5 million in tax receipts. Putnam County had \$5.4 in that category, with total state and local tax receipts at \$.71 million. The county that showed the strongest figures in the Corridor were seen in Will County, which moved into fourth place in Illinois, reflective of its population. Specific data for that region will be announced on Friday when the IOT Road Show completes its week-long trip at the Chicagoland Speedway.

Thursday's presentation was one three stops along the Corridor being made by the Illinois Office of Tourism to share the good news of this 2012 report. On Monday, Governor Quinn announced that the State hosted more than 99 million domestic visitors. International figures are due out at the end of the month, and preliminary estimates point to similar, impressive increases. The \$31 billion in revenue generated by tourism across the state from those domestic travelers is up 5 percent from last year's record-breaking high. According to Hoelzle, "The positive gains prove that Illinois' tourism industry is thriving, and continues to make vital contributions to the state's economic growth, job creation and tax revenue."

After Thursday's presentation, which included an announcement that Bill Kurtis will be "the Voice of Illinois," for an upcoming marketing and media campaign, the Deputy Director continued to discuss the travel effect. She added, "Record breaking numbers for the second consecutive year in a row show that tourism is clearly a key economic engine for the whole state." She explained that the Road Show, including stops at key attractions like Starved Rock State Park, are a great way to "celebrate the continued industry success by efforts that drive visitors to the people, the places and the experiences that make a trip to Illinois memorable."

For more information on Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau, trip and meeting planning, events, schedules and details on its partner members, go to [www.HeritageCorridorCVB.com](http://www.HeritageCorridorCVB.com), or call 800.926.CANAL (2262).

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