

# VISIT BELOIT CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

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Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News Around 100 business leaders, public officials and residents attended Visit Beloit's celebration of its 30th year serving the Stateline community.

BELOIT - Visit Beloit hosted an open house Tuesday to celebrate its 30 years of promoting attractions in the Greater Beloit area.

The travel and tourism organization unveiled a list of 30 activities it will put on throughout 2017 and into next year, with items already getting underway.

Around 100 business leaders, public officials and residents attended the open house, which was held in conjunction with National Travel and Tourism Week. More than 200 events were held across the country this week in conjunction with the tourism promotion and celebration.

Visit Beloit Executive Director Celestino Ruffini thanked all who attended, and pointed to the strong growth of businesses in the area, rather than the successes of the tourism organization.

"We're really seeing a strong base to promote Beloit and the Stateline Area going forward," Ruffini said. "We've had other tourism and convention bureaus contact us asking what we were doing down here in Rock County."

The revitalized push to promote the area did not come easily, with Visit Beloit increasing its overall marketing budget by \$30,000 to more than \$200,000 for 2017 to draw visitors on weekends and holidays.

The promotion comes amid record highs for Rock County in terms of tourism spending last year. Ruffini said the numbers were encouraging, and a signal of continued growth to Beloit, from job creation to overall tourism numbers.

Rock County's direct visitor spending in 2016 reached \$235.2 million, a more than a 6.6 percent increase over 2015. Total tourism business sales in the county reached \$384.3 million in 2016, supporting 4,053 jobs and \$28.4 million in state and local taxes.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism partners with Visit Beloit to operate the Travel Wisconsin Welcome Center along I-39/90 adjacent to Beloit. Of the eight Travel Wisconsin Welcome Centers, the Beloit center is the states busiest. The Beloit center served more than 125,000 visitors in 2016, providing travel information for the entire state and face-to-face customer service. Wisconsin's tourism economy topped \$20 billion in 2016, up \$700 million from \$19.3 billion in 2015. Since 2011, tourism activity in Wisconsin has increased more than \$5.2 billion, a 35 percent jump from \$14.8 billion in 2010.

All upcoming Visit Beloit events will be announced online, at [visitbeloit.org](http://visitbeloit.org). Dates and specific event info will be available closer to each promotion, officials said.

Upcoming events:

.May: Attend a Beloit Snappers baseball game; broadcast live from a local radio station and drive Visit Beloit's "Crewser" in a local parade.

.June: Teach and play Kubb as a Visit Beloit team; experience the city's edition of Diner's Drive-in's and Dives.

.July: Host a social media photo contest, install new signs at the Beloit Travel Wisconsin Welcome Center.

.August: Host a hotel and weekend getaway package giveaway; co-host an outdoor screening of a film with representatives from the Beloit International Film Festival; create a pop-up s'mores station at a local park; Renovate the Vision Beloit office and welcome new students to Beloit College.

.September: Deliver food to the Beloit police and fire departments; visit an area animal shelter and reward adopters; adopt a road; wash car windows at the travel center.

.October: Host sit-down breakfast with area hotel guests, kick off tree planting project.

.November: Start designs on a new exterior decal wrap for the Visit Beloit travel wagon.

.December: Collect donations for Operation Ooh-rah.

.January 2018 : Read books to local children at the Beloit Public Library and launch a new visitors guide.

.February 2018: Premiere Beloit episode of Discover Wisconsin.

.April 2018: Host trivia night and take out thank you ad in the Daily News