

# City of Rock Falls

603 W. 10th Street  
Rock Falls, IL 61071-2854

## *Mayor*

David H. Blanton  
815-622-1110

*City Administrator*  
Robbin D. Blackert  
815-564-1366



*City Clerk*  
William B. Wescott  
815-622-1104

## 2011 Rock Falls State of the City

The Citizens of Rock Falls can be proud of the dedication to our great City shown by the Council, Clerk's Office, Treasurer, City Administrator, Department Heads, and all employees. They all work as a team to give the best reliability service to our customers.

The City also has a number of people that share that pride and dedication. Those who give of themselves to make Rock Falls the best it can be by serving on numerous appointed committees and commissions. If you look at our website [www.rockfalls61071.com](http://www.rockfalls61071.com) you will find them listed. The next time you see them - thank them for all they do.

The City has also unveiled a citywide newsletter in 2011 which will keep our customers well-informed as to the inner workings along with updates and progress of the City Departments.

In 2011 we welcomed a new City Administrator Mrs. Robbin Blackert, who brings with her, both the experience and skills needed for the position. She has come to us after serving the past 8 years as Legislative Assistant to State Representative Jerry Mitchell. Prior to that, she served 5 years as Legal Assistant to our long-term City Attorney, James Reese. Administrator Blackert has already proven to be a great asset to our city.

This has been a year of historical change for our great city. The East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street project was completed and this new street, which has been closed for decades, now opens to First Avenue. The engineering work for the RB&W Riverside Bike & Walk Trail Corridor for the riverfront has begun. This will open the river front for summer events with more to come.

The new Wastewater Treatment Facility went online July 29, 2011. This new facility will meet all of the city's wastewater needs well into the future. The New Raw Sewage Pump Station went online July 28<sup>th</sup> 2011 and the demolition of the old plant began in October 2011.

Once the demolition of the old wastewater treatment plant is completed, the county has agreed to purchase approximately three (3) acres of land at the old site and convert it into parking for the Health Department. This, in turn, will help reduce the parking problems on West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

The South 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue Electrical Substation had a 3.1 million dollar complete rebuild. We have replaced aging Switchgear, Circuit Breaker, and Wire. This will allow the Substation to run efficiently for many years to come. Also, moved the fiber from inside the switchgear to its own stand-alone building and added two more peakers back up diesel generators to help with reliability to the southern and western sides of town.

The City was awarded an energy grant from Blackhawk Hills RC&D. This grant replaced lights and windows in the community building, as well as, new lighting in City Hall, Police, Fire and Electric Departments. Also, new solar lighting at the Electric Department Garage.

The City's Housing Grant Programs continued in 2011. The Single Family Owner Occupied Rehabilitation (SFOOR), Small Rental Property Program (SRPP) and the Mobility and Accessibility Rehabilitation Services (MARS) are working well in helping many people in our community.

This year also marked a milestone for the housing grants. Since 2006 the City of Rock Falls has rehabbed a total of 48 homes spending \$1,543,489.00 from SRPP, SFOOR, and MARS grants. Five SFOOR homes and two SRPP homes were completed in 2011. We have been waiting for funding since the first of 2011 for the MARS grants; we are number two in line when the State releases the funds. The city is moving forward with the four homes we have ready. The SFOOR Grant application is due this February and we will be applying for 15 homes. The State has cut the grant by 38% but we feel very confident, with our past history, we will receive the grants.

### **Building Department**

In 2011 the Building Department still moved forward even with a downward economy. 755 permits were issued with a construction value of \$3,689,167.00 and \$44,873.00 in permit fees. With only two new residential homes being built and no new commercial buildings, this shows that the residents of Rock Falls take pride in their homes with an upswing in remodeling permits issued this year.

The Building Department now conducts all inspections for the Whiteside County Housing Authority. With the addition of Shelia Mortenson working 10 hours per week, we have inspected 163 homes with an income of \$6,500.00 from January through November. With Shelia on board in the Building Department, she was also able to inventory commercial business handicapped parking regulations and enforcing addresses on all buildings within the city.

The Administrative Hearing went very well with 129 violations written, 65 violations were abated before the court date and dismissed, with 64 violations fined a total of \$19,000.00.

### **Police Department**

The department staff of 32 had a very busy 2011. We responded to 16,573 "calls for service" of those, 299 were motor vehicle accidents. The department received a total of 3,763 "E911" calls.

In comparison to 2010 the department responded to 16,850 calls of those 329 were motor vehicle accidents and 3,471 "E911" calls.

The implementation of the Municipal Court System has proven to be a success. The system has reduced court time for the officer, increased compliance with violators in a fair and expedient manner. The occurrence of repeat offenders has decreased. This process has been a cost savings to the city.

With the assistance of the citizens, organizations, and businesses of Rock Falls and surrounding communities the department now has a certified Police K-9 Program again. A total of \$12,000.00 was raised in donations and in June of 2011 K-9 Nero joined the ranks of the department. Police K-9 Nero and Ofc. Jeremy Vondra attended the Illinois State Police K-9 Academy in August and graduated in November. Nero has been actively working the road and other searches since graduation.

The department has been brought to full staffing with the graduation of Ofc. Betony Wade in December of 2011 from the Police Academy and the return of Ofc. Jon Cater from military deployment. The Department, as a whole, completed 1,263 hours of training in 2011.

### **Fire Department**

The fire department staff of 14 full time and 8 paid on call responded to 881 calls during 2011. This number was 38 fewer than during 2010.

The department responded to 32 structure fires and 29 other types of fires including vehicle fires, brush and grass fires, and trash fires. There were 266 responses to medical emergencies and 74 various other rescue calls.

RFFD responded to Sterling incidents 222 times but our units were canceled 164 times prior to arrival at the scene. Rock Falls received aid 124 times. RFFD responded to 158 calls in the Rock Falls Rural Fire Protection District

Monetary loss totaled \$1,182,787.00 with an estimated property value of \$6,449,758.00. Three structure fires accounted for \$802,700.00 of the total losses, all of which occurred in single family dwellings. There were no losses attributed to fires in commercial structures. One firefighter sustained a minor injury during emergency operations and there were no injuries or deaths reported involving members of the public.

Department members conducted approximately 330 building inspections with a total of 285 violations cited.

Members participated in a total of approximately 1,500 man-hours of training which included sessions within the department and at other locations with instructors from the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute.

### **Water Reclamation Department**

Other than the completion of the new plant and upgrades some of the distribution accomplishments were: Six (6) of our ten (10) lift stations received upgrades consisting of stand-by generators, security fencing and new pump controllers. This upgrade will ensure reliability for the lift stations; The slip lining of the sanitary sewer lines that run under the Merrill and Rock Falls High schools, this process will insure the integrity of both lines well into the future.

The department responded to (147) service calls; Two (2) manholes repaired or replaced; (25) catch basins repaired; Five (5) catch basins replaced; (3,200') of sanitary sewer main located throughout the city was inspected with the camera and underwent cleaning and tree root removal; (10,000') of sewer main was cleaned and Root control was injected into (2,500') of sanitary sewer main.

A new Jeter truck was purchased this year to replace the existing (15) year old truck at a cost of approximately \$300,000.00.

### **Water Treatment Department**

Some of the projects were: Reliant looping project (510 feet) 10" water main installed; one (1) Hydrant installed; three (3) Insta-valve installation; (18 )main breaks repaired; existing service lines replaced to five (5) residential homes; ten (10) new long service lines were installed; (33) new short service lines were installed; (17) service box repairs; two (2) main valves repaired; six (6) backwash valves replaced by water department; Green water tower repaired and painted at a cost of \$125,000.00 and water meter radio installation project completed. All water samples were collected per the IEPA requirements with no discrepancies.

This was the first year for the Groundwater/Electric Scholarship Award. We have committed to a 2012 scholarship to the High School.

### **Street Department**

Some of the projects were 440' of sidewalk replaced; six (6) ADA ramps accessibility installations; 3,000' of rototilled roads; alley and parking lots with double and single seal oil and chip; East 2nd Street from 1<sup>st</sup> Ave to Ada St blacktopped; Crack sealing approx. 4,500'; the Emulsion machine purchased last year is working very well with rehabbing of city roads approx. 10,130'; patching over existing potholes low areas, and existing multiple cracks; and replace and upgraded numerous street signs as required by the state and federal regulations for higher visibility.

The City purchased snow blowing equipment to be attached to skid loader for more effective snow removal in the uptown area.

### **Electric Department**

The City of Rock Falls Electric Department has had another very successful year. We have completed many improvements.

The Electric Dept. took the lead in upgrading the emission on seven (7) diesel generators having maintained a high level of reliability while keeping costs low. We were one of the first to do so in the IMEA (IL Municipal Electric Agency). This was a cost of over \$350,000.00 upgrade which was mandated by the Federal Government. It was completed at the end of 2011.

At the Electric Department Building we have made many upgrades: Finishing the lighting grant on the inside of the building. Replacing a large portion of the roof that was damaged in a storm. We are adding a 75 KW backup generator; it will be able to handle the whole building and guarantee reliability for the computers and Scada systems throughout the city. Along with the backup generator, we are installing a new 400 AMP solar panel service onto the building which will begin construction January 2012.

The only new equipment purchased in the department was a vehicle for the Electrical Director. Director's existing vehicle was given to Greg Johnson, our new Operations Supervisor.

### **Broadband Department**

We have expanded our services to more businesses in Rock Falls and are in the process of finishing the addition of CGH Medical Center in Sterling and KSB Hospital in Dixon. In 2011 the Electric Department expanded new fiber approximately 5 miles. We will be working with BlackHawk Hills RCD., the IFiber, NIU, and IMBCA to expand our fiber network in the future. In 2012 we will run over 6 miles of fiber.

### **Electric Meter Department.**

We have only about 200 meters, of approximately 5,200 residential meters, left to install which will complete our upgrade in January. We will start to replace the meters on some of the three (3) phase customers in 2012.

The Electric Department is in the final stages of the East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street project. This will add more reliability to Feeder# 1 in being able to tie it to Feeder# 3 at Avenue A Substation. We also finished Prophet Road rebuild and replaced

aging underground wire. We are nearing the completion of over 300 pole replacements from the 2009 test results with only 5 poles left to replace. Old three (3) wire secondary is being replaced with new wire and at the same time, we are replacing any aging poles and updating primary wire.

### **GIS/IT Department 2011**

The Geographic Information Services (GIS) and Information Technology (IT) Department has had a busy and productive year. 2011 has brought an upgrade of new hardware and software throughout the city. A big change that has had a positive impact on the city was an upgrade to a faster internet connection which will make operations throughout the city more efficient. The GIS/IT Department has recently updated zoning maps and continues to build and maintain the utility databases for Water, Storm Sewer, Sanitary Sewer, broadband fiber and Electric departments. Without our dedicated EMPLOYEES this would have not been accomplished. Their goal to see Rock Falls maintain a high level of reliability while maintaining low cost service to our customers.

### **Rock Falls Community Development Corp (RFCDC)**

The Rock Falls Community Development Corporation has been diligently working this past year on several major projects, as well as, continuing their efforts for Business Retention and Expansion. They are continuously making sure that all our businesses are up to speed on any and all available state and federal programs, as well as, working with legislators on behalf of city and small business. The business of economic development is a hard one to quantify and the RFCDC continues to offer seamless service and information to existing business, as well as, acting as liaison for project development.

The RFCDC continues to work with BioPro Rock Falls on a daily basis. As has been reported, the major focus of the project is currently the sale of the power. This final step is necessary before they can move to ground breaking.

The preparation of the RB&W site for development has been the focus of the last several years for the RFCDC, and now that the site is shovel ready, the focus is now shifting into high gear for project development. Solicitation and marketing efforts for developers are now underway and the RFCDC will be diligent in ensuring that the public space is complimented and not compromised by private development.

The RFCDC is the first point of contact for all business and industry inquiries and they maintain an excellent database and web presence. They do a great job of telling our story, and why Rock Falls is the optimum location in which to do business. Check out their website at [www.rockfallsdevelopment.org](http://www.rockfallsdevelopment.org).

### **Rock Falls Tourism**

Rock Falls Tourism utilized a number of opportunities to promote the community and tourism activities through the use of various mediums.

Printed Media: Highlights include:

Sauk Valley News: Voyager and other smaller ads promoting stay and recreate locally during the holiday season.

Northwest Quarterly Magazine: Continued to run advertisement; worked with writers on three part series on the activities along the Rock River; continue to work with the editors of the magazine to develop stories that place Rock Falls and area activities in the public eye.

Blackhawk Waterways: Continued participation in the annual Visitor Guide; Trail of Terror and Holiday Happenings brochure

Lincoln Highway Collation: Continued participation in the annual Visitor Guide and placed additional advertisement outside of the certified community page.

Northern Illinois Tourism Office: participated in updating and promoting information through the annual visitor guide.

Rack Cards: Collaborated and developed a rack card for the Ronald Reagan Birthplace in Tampico which is distributed widely indicating the lodging opportunities in Rock Falls.

Reagan Passport: Distributed over 6000 copies of the Ronald Reagan Passport created for the Reagan Centennial. This will continue to be available after the centennial and places Rock Falls in the center of the Reagan sites in NW IL.

Oaklee Family Guide: Working with Chicago based family friendly online and print activity guide to include a Northwestern IL section that would allow area to advertise directly to the Chicago market.

Web-based Media

Social Media: Rock Falls Tourism maintains a Facebook and Flickr account. Statistics indicate that the reach of this medium is growing and will be utilized more efficiently in the coming year.

Rock Falls Tourism Website: The website is in the second full year of existence. It averages 700 hits per month. There is an increase in mobile application users and the tourism office is investigating the use of Quick Response Codes (QR Codes) as a means to reaching out to more potential members of the market segment.

### Broadcast Media

Radio: Rock Falls Tourism has investigated the costs and broadcast opportunities in Northwestern Illinois and the Chicago Area. These include WGN, WLS, WZOK and other smaller stations. Plans for the 2011/2012 fiscal year include expanding to the larger Chicago market directly, not through the Blackhawk Waterways CVB, the regional office.

Local Radio: Participated in Chamber Week on WSDR

Channel Five: Utilized the local cable station for event promotion throughout the year. This medium has been underutilized and plans to use it more in the future are underway.

### Collaboration

Rock Falls Tourism works with many partners and organizations to help create a positive tourism experience in Rock Falls and the area. These collaborative efforts also help to leverage the largest impact in the most cost effective manner.

### Collaborations/Groups

Rock Falls Chamber: RFT was recognized for their participation with the DC-3 event held in July 2010; participating in planning for Summer Cookout; collaborated Hometown Holiday Celebration promotion, etc. RFT is a member of the RFCC.

Rock Falls Community Development Corporation: Participating on the Riverfront Development Committee and other events. RFT is a donor to RFCDC.

Recreational Trail Committee: Participate as a member of the group and working with the organization to develop a Master Trail Plan for the community; worked with the Mayor to prepare documentation of the Hennepin Canal to work with IDNR to determine ways to make the Hennepin a stronger tourism anchor in the community.

Whiteside County Barn Tour Committee: Participant of the committee and volunteer.

Rock River Trail Initiative: Attended several meetings associated with the development of the Rock River Trail through WI and IL. Spent many hours working with local individuals and organizations identifying ways to better utilize and promote the Hennepin and Rock River.

Rock River Development Authority & Friends of the Hennepin Canal: RFT has participated with these organizations to assist them with their efforts to make the Canal and River more accessible and better utilized by the public. RFT are members of both organizations.

Ready for Reagan: worked with area tourism organizations to promote the Reagan Centennial Celebrations throughout the year. Asked to sit on committee in Dixon. Efforts were regional and collaboration was very good.

Warbirds over Whiteside: RFT Tourism worked closely with members of the former DC-3 event to help in preliminary planning and exploration of another airplane event at the Whiteside County airport. One has been scheduled for July 20-22, 2012. RFT will be assisting in the promotion and execution of the event again.

Other: RFT continues to work with individuals and groups to serve their needs for information on a daily basis, mailing out packets, providing information and answering questions or directing individuals to proper sources.

### TRAINING AND SEMINARS

Rock Falls Tourism Staff and Board of Directors work to understand the trends and new technologies that are available to promote tourism opportunities, as well as, working to find new and interesting ways to utilize existing resources to better promote the area.

- Attended the Governor's Conference on Tourism in Chicago
- Attended the Specialty Growers Conference on Ag Tourism in Springfield, IL
- Attended the IL Institute for Rural Affairs Conference in Peoria, IL
- Participated in several webinars and teleconferences with DCEO department of Tourism on various subjects pertaining to tourism in IL
- Attended Lincoln Highway Coalition Annual Meeting, DeKalb
- Attended Rock River Initiative 2<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting on the Rock
- Participated in seminar in Springfield: Tourism Boot Camp – Survival in today's economy
- Continue to research ways to market the community and seek new opportunities for the community

### SERVICES

Rock Falls Tourism works with organizations and events to assist individuals and communities in various ways. The role of the tourism office is to operate as a resource to other groups. This may in the form of funding, supplying information or training as needed.

- We have distributed \$13,000 to other organizations that met the Rock Falls Tourism mission in sponsorships, tourism asset building or reimbursable marketing funds during past calendar year, as well as, committing funds to assist in the execution of the Warbirds over Whiteside for contingencies.

- Gave several talks to local civic organizations regarding the operations of the tourism office, tourism opportunities or other information as requested.
- Distributed literature throughout the community and region.

## **ROCK FALLS CHAMBER**

Fulfilling their mission in 2011:

"To provide leadership and vision for business success resulting in civic well being."

Here are some of the highlights from 2011:

The Rock Falls Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors appoints Jordyn Vickers, a junior at Rock Falls High School, to its Board of Directors. Her two-year term on the Board was effective Nov. 15, 2011 and runs through February of 2013. She was among eight or nine candidates for the position.

Have you noticed banners that were placed along First Avenue in the city? The banners wrapped three principles into the project: to promote local businesses, encourage local shopping and help beautify the City of Rock Falls main roadways. The bald eagle was selected to draw attention to their beauty along the Rock River during the winter months. The project will continue in 2012.

The Board of Directors approved the Chamber's updated version of the Policy & Procedure Manual. The Policy & Procedure Manual basically outlines how the Chamber does business internally. The new Policy & Procedure Manual includes "company policy usage" regarding computer and email usage. Now it's the most important tool to keep records and communicating with their members and the public.

It was no secret how the Chamber felt about the new social media that has swept the country. That's why the Chamber sponsored a seminar on social media that was well attended in March. Customers are becoming more savvy to the ways of the internet and businesses need to be able to relate to them.

The Chamber's Summer Cookout continued to gain momentum as the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Cookout at Jeff Bright RV Center, E. Rt. 30, Rock Falls, on July 8-10 which added a beer garden and live music. These additions would not have been possible without the excellent support the Chamber received from the Rock Falls Optimist Club.

Rock Falls High School Senior Jessica Bouwens was the 2011 recipient of the Rock Falls Chamber Ambassador Club and Linda Thurm Scholarship. She will be attending Sauk Valley Community College to begin majoring in elementary education. The scholarship was awarded to her for her involvement in community activities, as was the namesake for which the scholarship was created, Linda Thurm, the former President/CEO of the Rock Falls Chamber for 22 years.

"Imagine" was the theme for the 2011 Hometown Holidays held Nov. 17-20 with many activities and events for everyone. This marked the 29<sup>th</sup> year for this great event. Dozens of volunteers stepped forward to help with the annual event, especially members of our Ambassador Club. The club also decided to forego their annual Christmas party and instead provide food and gifts for two families in Rock Falls that would not have had such a memorable holiday. Their action was exemplary and sets a higher bar of excellence for other clubs and organizations.

Jeff Bright RV Center and Professional Cleaners were honored by the Chamber with the Community Spirit Award for providing excellence examples of what volunteerism is all about and how it reflects on our communities.

Finally, approximately 300 members of the Chamber conducted 23 ribbon cuttings during 2011 to help introduce new businesses or existing businesses that made significant changes during the year.

**Once again I would like to thank the good people who work with me each and every day, and most of all, the people of Rock Falls for the faith and trust you bestow upon me by giving me the great honor to serve as your Mayor!**

Respectfully,



Mayor David H. Blanton