

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



RACVB & Rep. Maurice West Announce Restaurant Relief Grant Program for Rockford, Winnebago County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 26, 2024

ROCKFORD, IL — Illinois State Rep. Maurice West, D-Rockford and the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (RACVB) announced the launch of a \$1.5 million state-funded grant program. The funding will provide vital relief to restaurants in Rockford and Winnebago County that suffered skyrocketing unemployment insurance rates resulting from state-mandated closures. RACVB will serve as the grant administrator, overseeing the application and distribution of funds to eligible restaurants in Winnebago County.

“Rockford and Winnebago County restaurants were hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic and unfortunately the impact of the pandemic has continued to follow them because they followed the rules. With this grant program, we’re taking meaningful steps to support those who diligently followed closure mandates in 2021, remain operational to this day, and have continued to face increased unemployment insurance rates,” **Rep. Maurice West** said. “This assistance will help ensure the resilience and vitality of our restaurant industry, a cornerstone of our community’s culture and economy.”

Key Details of the Restaurant Relief Grant Program:

Eligibility: To qualify to apply, an authorized representative of a restaurant will need to certify that:

1. The restaurant’s principal place of business is located within the geographical boundaries of Winnebago County, Illinois.
2. The restaurant complied with the indoor dining closure mandates enacted by the State of Illinois during the first quarter of 2021 via Executive Orders 2021-01, 2021-02, 2021-03, 2021-04, and 2021-05.
3. In complying with indoor dining closure mandates in Q1 of 2021 the restaurant laid off staff and, as a result, has experienced an increase in state unemployment insurance charges.
4. The restaurant incurred and/or will incur a higher rate of state unemployment benefit charges in 2022, 2023 and 2024, because of the higher unemployment benefit charges in Q1 of 2021.
5. The restaurant remains operational today.

Additionally, restaurants must also fall under one of the following two North American Industry Classification System Codes: 722511 (Full-Service Restaurants) and 722513 (Limited-Service Restaurants).

Application Window: The application window opens today, February 26, 2024, and will remain open for 30 days, closing at 5 p.m. on March 28, 2024. Interested applicants can submit their applications and required documents through the online portal available at GoRockford.com/Restaurant-Grant. The application takes less than an hour to complete and relies on payroll forms and related documents. If funds remain available after the first round of grants are awarded, additional application periods may be announced.

Review Panel: Grant recipients and the amounts awarded will be determined by RACVB and a professional review panel. The panel will review application materials and recommended award amounts, working to ensure fairness across the board to eligible applicants. The review panel was chosen based on employee tax and staffing knowledge and consists of Bridget Coleman, CPA, Coleman CPA & Accounting; Jennifer Furst, President, Furst Staffing; Carrie Hagerty, Finance Director, City of Rockford; John J. Morrissey, President/CEO, Staff Management; and John Schuster, Retired CFO, Rosecrance Health Network.

Help Sessions: To assist applicants with the submission process and address any questions or concerns, the RACVB will host online help sessions on March 4 from 9 to 10 a.m. and March 8 from 2 to 3 p.m. These sessions will provide valuable guidance and insights into the application process. To register for a session, visit GoRockford.com/Restaurant-Grant. Additionally, the sessions will be recorded and made available for viewing later, ensuring accessibility for all applicants.

"We are thrilled to launch this much-needed grant program to support our local restaurants in Winnebago County," said **John Groh, RACVB President/CEO**. "Through the funding secured by Representative West from the State of Illinois, we aim to provide meaningful assistance to our restaurants as they navigate the still-existing challenges posed by the pandemic and its aftermath. We encourage all eligible restaurants to take advantage of this opportunity and submit their applications."

Required application documents include:

- W-9 for Restaurant
- 2021 Restaurant Tax Return
- IL Dept. of Employment Security form BEN-118 – Statement of Benefit Charges for Q1 2021
- IL Dept. of Employment Security Rate Determination letter for 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024
- State Unemployment Tax Reports for 2022, 2023 and 2024
- Proof of payment of State Unemployment Taxes for 2022, 2023 and 2024

The **maximum award** a restaurant may receive, as set by the State of Illinois, is \$100,000.

For additional information about the Restaurant Relief Grant Program and to access the online application portal, please visit GoRockford.com/Restaurant-Grant.

The RACVB reserves the right, in its sole judgement, to reject any application. It will consider applications and make awards in keeping with agreements made by and between the RACVB and the State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for the use of funds for their intended purposes. Information provided in this news release and via other means is intended to be informational and may not include all grant requirements or parameters under consideration.

Questions about the program should be directed to RestaurantGrant@GoRockford.com.

About:

The Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is the official destination marketing and management organization for Rockford and Winnebago County and is responsible for promoting the Rockford region as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the impact of travel, RACVB strengthens the economic position of the region and provides opportunities for people in our communities. www.gorockford.com

State Representative Maurice West is serving his third term representing the 67th House District in the Rockford region. A Rockford native, Rep. West serves as Assistant Floor Whip in the 103rd General Assembly.

FOR MORE INFORMATION & MEDIA INQUIRIES:

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