



America Turns 250, Celebrate this Summer Across the Stateline

By John Groh, President/CEO, GoRockford

This summer, communities across the Stateline will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence with festivals, concerts, fireworks, performances, and family-friendly events.

The local America 250 effort is being guided by the Rockford Region 250 Committee, a community-led group convened by Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara and Winnebago County Board Chairman Joe Chiarelli. The committee includes leaders from tourism, education, arts, history, veterans' organizations, local government, and community groups working together to create a coordinated regional celebration that reflects the people and communities of the Stateline.

Mayor McNamara recently described the anniversary as "a powerful moment for Rockford" and an opportunity to "showcase the strength and spirit of our community," while Chairman Chiarelli emphasized that the commemoration is about bringing people together through service projects, festivals, educational programming, and community gatherings throughout Winnebago County.

Organizers hope the summer's events will not only celebrate American history, but also highlight the culture, creativity, and hometown pride that define the Stateline region today.

Beginning in June, residents and visitors can also participate in the new **Small Museums Summer Pass**, which encourages families to visit local museums and historical attractions throughout the region. Information about participating museums and pass details can be found at www.rockfordregion250.com.

Another featured attraction this summer is "**Freedom: A History of US**," a special America 250 exhibit hosted at Midway Village Museum in Rockford. The exhibit explores the people, events, and moments that shaped America's story through interactive displays and educational programming.

Summer celebrations continue June 18-21 with **Old Settlers Days** in Rockton, one of the Stateline's biggest annual festivals. Held at Settlers Park, the four-day event features carnival rides, food vendors, family activities, and live music performances from nationally known artists, including Chris Janson, Ashley McBryde, Lauren Alaina, and Josh Ross.

Music and entertainment will also play a major role in this summer's festivities. On Thursday, July 2, Rock Valley College's Starlight Theatre will present the Tony Award-winning musical "1776" at the Bengt Sjostrom Theatre

(please turn to page 2)



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(continued from page 1)

America Turns 250

on the RVC campus. The performance begins at 7:30 p.m. and tells the story of America's founding through music, humor, and history as the Continental Congress debates independence.

As Independence Day approaches, patriotic celebrations and fireworks displays will light up communities across the Stateline. Rockford's annual Fourth of July celebration returns Friday, July 4, with a downtown patriotic parade beginning at 5 p.m., live music and food vendors at City Market, and a fireworks spectacular launching from the Jefferson Street Bridge at approximately 9:30 p.m.

Additional fireworks celebrations are planned throughout the region, including community festivities in Cherry Valley, Durand, Winnebago, and surrounding Stateline communities during the July 3-4 holiday weekend.

On Saturday, July 4, Midway Village Museum will also host its Semiquincentennial: 250th Anniversary of Independence celebration from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., featuring historical demonstrations, family activities, and educational programming tied to America's founding.

The summer celebrations conclude August 14-15 with the debut of RockYard Music Fest at Davis Park in downtown Rockford. The free two-day festival will feature live music, food vendors, family activities, fireworks on Friday night, and a downtown drone show on Saturday evening as part of the region's America 250 celebrations.

Throughout the summer, residents and visitors can enjoy popular weekly community events across the Stateline, including Rockford City Market on Friday nights downtown, the North End City Market on Saturday mornings in Rockford, and the Rockton River Market on Wednesday evenings in downtown Rockton. These markets feature live music, local food vendors, artisan booths, family activities, and opportunities to support local businesses. Additional farmers' markets, concerts in the park, and seasonal community events also take place throughout the region all summer long.

Whether it's fireworks over the Rock River, a hometown parade, a concert in the park, or a family outing to a museum or festival, there are countless ways to celebrate together this summer.

For a full calendar of America 250 events happening throughout the region, visit rockfordregion250.com.

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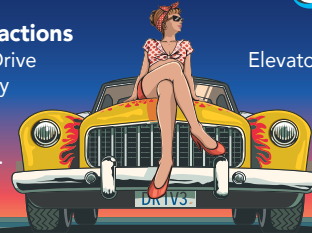
ROSCOE Cruise Nights

Historic Attractions
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2nd Wednesday

Roscoe Center
Elevator Rd. & Clayton Cir.
2nd Thursday

Sophia's
5467 Bridge St.
1st Thursday

Mary's Market
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4th Tuesday



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Born in San Diego and now rooted in downtown Rockton, Craft + Foster is a female veteran-founded and family-owned candle studio by Melissa and Chad Burgess. What began as a creative outlet has grown into an internationally recognized brand known for clean, layered fragrance blends, thoughtful design, and quality craftsmanship.

Over the years, Craft + Foster products have been featured through media, retail partnerships, collaborations, and gifting experiences such as the Golden Globes, Better Homes & Gardens, GQ, Neiman Marcus, FabFitFun, and many others. The company also creates custom fragrance collections for various brands, hospitality groups, and private label clients around the world. Despite that growth, Craft + Foster has stayed true to the same hands-on, family-run approach it was built on from the beginning.

The new Rockton flagship reflects that same spirit — relaxed, welcoming, and intentional. Part retail space and part working studio, the shop offers guests a closer look into the creative process while providing a curated mix of home fragrance, self-care, gifts, essentials, and lifestyle goods for all ages. The space was designed to feel warm, easy to shop, and constantly evolving, with new products, seasonal collections, and unique finds throughout the year.



Melissa and Chad, along with their four children — Zuri, Izzy, Ezra, and Cruz — are thrilled to be a part of downtown Rockton and look forward to welcoming both new and familiar faces into the shop. Visit them in person and follow along on social media for exclusive releases, special events, candle-making workshops, discounts, and more.

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SPOTLIGHT ON NEW ROSCOE BUSINESS



At Bridge St Pizza & Chicken, we're more than just pizza — we're a local family-owned restaurant built on fresh ingredients, bold flavor, and strong community support. Located in Roscoe, Illinois, our goal has always been simple: serve

high-quality comfort food people crave while creating a local spot that feels welcoming, real, and full of flavor.

Our specialty is New York-style pizza — handcrafted pies with a crispy crust, rich sauce, quality cheese, and fresh toppings baked to perfection. From classic pepperoni to customer favorites like our Bridge St Mac & Cheese Pizza, BBQ Chicken Pizza, Chicken Bacon Ranch, and specialty creations.

But we're more than pizza. Our menu features jumbo

chicken tenders, loaded mac bowls, spaghetti & meatballs, crispy chicken sandwiches, smash burgers, meatball sandwiches, and Philly steak sandwiches piled high with fresh grilled peppers, onions, and melted cheese.

Our wings have quickly become a local favorite with a large variety of flavors from the traditional Buffalo to our popular Gochujang Korean Pepper sauce. Whether you like sweet, spicy, smoky, or classic, there's a flavor for everyone.



Bridge St Pizza & Chicken focuses heavily on carryout and convenience. Customers can order for carryout or delivery through DoorDash and Slice.

We're located in the same parking lot as Sophia's Family Restaurant. We're proud to be family-owned and truly thankful for the amazing support from Roscoe, Rockton, Machesney Park, Rockford, and surrounding communities. Every order helps support local, and we appreciate every customer who chooses us.

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Helping Future Homebuyers Become Mortgage-Ready

Submitted by NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region

For more than 47 years, NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region has helped individuals and families across the Stateline region build stronger futures through housing education, counseling, and supportive services. As today's housing market becomes increasingly challenging to navigate, access to trusted information and local guidance is more important than ever.

For many individuals and families, homeownership can feel out of reach. Rising housing costs, credit concerns, down payment requirements, and conflicting information online often leave potential buyers unsure where to start — or whether owning a home is even possible.

That's where NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region can help. NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region offers free HUD-certified homebuyer workshops and one-on-one support designed to help individuals become mortgage-ready. Through credit and budget coaching, down payment assistance guidance, and personalized counseling, participants gain practical tools, explore available resources, and build confidence in the homebuying process.

Many people are surprised to learn they may be closer to homeownership than they think. Working with a HUD-certified housing counselor can help potential buyers better understand their options and take meaningful steps toward long-term financial stability.

Beyond homebuyer education, NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region also provides financial coaching, foreclosure prevention support, reverse mortgage counseling, and assistance connecting individuals with available housing resources. The organization also operates Brittan House, a supportive housing program serving single men experiencing homelessness.

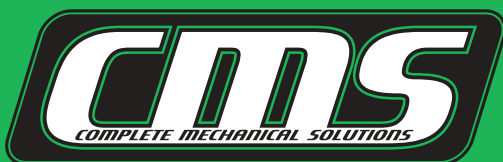
Whether someone is preparing to purchase a first home or simply exploring available resources, NeighborWorks Blackhawk Region encourages community members to reach out early and learn more about the services available.

Learn more at: nwblackhawkregion.org

Contact: homebuying@nwbr.org | 608-313-7809

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A Coach's Heart – Retirement of Chief Matt Hollinger

by Monique Weaver

When you talk with Chief Matt Hollinger about his time as an officer, he describes his role as that of a coach. This 31-year veteran has taken the time to work within our community for its improvement.

Starting his career in 1995 as a full-time officer, Chief Hollinger recognized that he could help his fellow officers as a coach and often refers to them as his team.

Hollinger went on to become Chief of Police in 2022. His career would continue to flourish and he notes that the department has done a wonderful job of enforcement, education, and building relationships. He further used that coaching spirit and concludes that his officers are exceptional at showing their personal side to the community.



Chief Matt Hollinger

has become a police officer and takes pride in his ethic for the community he serves.

You will likely find Chief Hollinger on a golf course or doing home projects over the next few months. But don't count him out! The coach wants to come back to support his team as needed. His final day will be June 10th, 2026.

Among his key accomplishments is his task of recruiting. Over the past six years, nearly all the sergeants and first-line investigators retired. He was able to promote four existing officers to sergeant and recruited others while keeping a culture of support within the department.

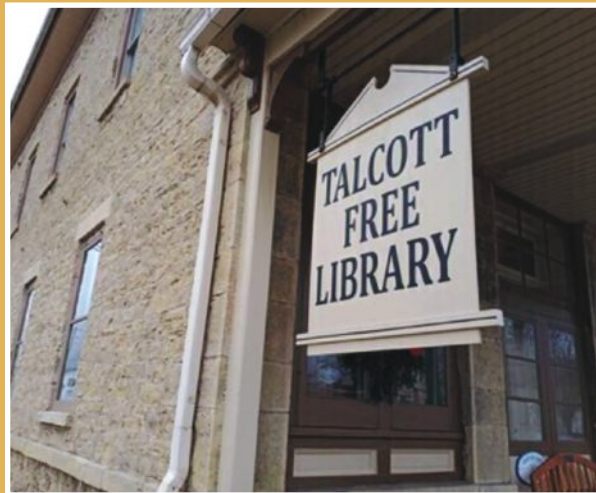
Chief Hollinger says he would absolutely be an officer all over again. He also notes that his son

Why would anyone want to be on a library board if they hate the library and all it stands for? That's the question worth asking about the Talcott Public Library's board, which has been both aiding and abetting insults and crude accusations about the library's staff for several years. What's happening in Talcott mirrors what's happening on the national level from a small group of people who wish that public libraries, which serve the whole range of people within a community, wouldn't exist at all.

Library users and Rockton community members may not know the cruel things that folks attending monthly board meetings are calling the staff members of your library. The director has been accused of "grooming" young people. Why? For providing access to LGBTQ+ books. Talcott's collection contains less than 1% of titles that'd fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella—this, despite the openly LGBTQ+ population of the United States being close to 10%.

Your Community Deserves Better

by Kelly Jensen



The board has told the director and staff they can't and won't do anything about public comments that bully and name-call staff. Public records show that at least one board member has been party to coordinating these accusations.

This is the antithesis of what a library board does. It's the antithesis of what a library board should do. These are unpaid but crucial roles in the wheels of democracy and yet, several members of the Talcott board would rather bend these institutions to their will, ignoring the needs of the broader community who entrusts them to do better.

Who elected them to serve at the behest of the whole community, not just the part that looks or sounds like them.

If you care about public libraries and if you care about ensuring that your public library remains a place where all people are welcome, where all people can find themselves, and where all people can learn about the beautifully diverse world around them, then it's



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important to know what's happening right here, in your home town. Your library needs you to speak up for it and to counter those accusations being lodged against the people you grocery shop with, whose kids attend the schools your kids attend, who attend your church services, and who love their town. Your fellow community members working at the library are still showing up every day, doing their best to serve Rockton, despite the targets on them and despite the people who swore to support them choosing to shoot the first arrows.

There are four library board seats up for election next year. Consider whether or not you can run. Even if you can't, consider showing up to a board meeting and/or writing a letter in support of what Talcott Public Library is: a place where anyone and everyone can and should feel comfortable, seen, and supported.

Your community deserves better.

Bio of Author: Kelly Jensen is a Senior Editor at Book Riot, the largest independent book website in North America. Prior to her work at Book Riot, she was a public librarian for children, teens, and adults in several libraries in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin.

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Dr. Ehren Jarrett

Hononegah Has A New Superintendent

Dr. Ehren Jarrett will begin his tenure as superintendent of the Hononegah Community High School District #207 on July 1, 2026. Jarrett will succeed Superintendent Michael Dugan who will retire on June 30, 2026.

Jarrett began his 25-year career in public education at Hononegah Community High School as a social studies teacher and assistant basketball coach from 2001-2004. After serving as an assistant principal at Rockford East High School, Jarrett returned to Hononegah as the associate principal from 2005-2007 and as the building principal from 2007-2011 during which time Hononegah had improved ACT scores and made significant gains in Advanced Placement participation and success rates.

Dr. Jarrett returns to Hononegah after 13 years as the Superintendent of Rockford Public Schools. During

his tenure in RPS, he oversaw nearly \$700 million in facility investments across the district. In addition, RPS 205 saw sustained gains in literacy (grades 3–8), and a consistent increase in graduation rates.

In 2024, he received the Charles Bowser Leadership Award for making RPS 205's High School Academies a national model. Jarrett was named the Kishwaukee region 2025 Superintendent of Distinction from the Illinois Association of School Administrators. Jarrett currently serves at the president of the Kishwaukee region of the Illinois Association of Superintendents and as past-president of the Large Unit District Association. He holds a doctorate in Educational Leadership from Northern Illinois University, where he was named College of Education Alumni of the Year in 2014.

On his return to Hononegah Jarrett plans to immediately start his 90-day onboarding plan which will include significant listening sessions with students, staff, and community members culminating with a presentation of findings at the October Board meeting.



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OLD SETTLERS DAYS



JUNE 18-21, 2026



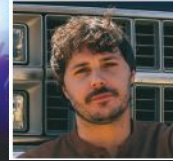
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JUNE 20:
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JUNE 21:
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VOICES OF FREEDOM

Collected Stories from Our Community

A project by the American Legion Post 332.

WATCH FOR INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE.



BAND SCHEDULE
 2026

Join us in Settlers Park
 Wednesdays throughout the summer
 from 5pm - 8pm

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Music starts at 6pm

May 20th	Piper Kei
May 27th*	Tony Rocker
June 3rd	The Stevee Nix
June 10th	The Sensations
June 24th*	Hanks Neighbors
July 1st	That Gurl
July 8th	STEREOtype
July 15th	3 Good Men
July 22nd	Rollin' Whiskey
July 29th*	Some Friends of Mine
August 5th	Nauti Nauti
August 12th	Bootleg Soul
August 19th	Big Stuff
August 26th*	Random AF

***NEW in 2026** — Support our local farmer's market the last Wednesday of each month!



ROCKTON

Rockton River Market – see add for info.

Summerpalooza – A Rockton Gathering Event
 Jun 14, 2-7pm, Jul 11, 4-9pm, Aug 15, 4-9pm.

Old Settlers Days – Jun 18-21, Settlers Park

IRONMAN – Jun 14, Approx. 8am-12pm

Rockton route: Blackhawk Blvd., west on Main St. along Race St. to Union going west out of town. Parking at high school and side streets.

National Night Out – Aug 4, 5-7pm,
 Village Green Park, see add for info.

Macktown Living History

Pet Parade – with North Suburban Library, Jun 9, 10am-2pm
Sense, Sensibility and Scones – Jun 14, 11am
Indigenous Echoes – Jul 11, 12:30-3:30pm
www.macktownlivinghistory.org



Roscoe Cruise Nights – see add for info.

Food Truck Fridays – 11am – 2:30pm,
 Roscoe Public Works, 5402 Swanson Rd

Northpointe Triathlon and Fit N Fun Fair
 Jun 13, 8am, 5605 E. Rockton Rd.

Harlem Roscoe Fire Annual Golf Play Day
 Jul 3, see FB for more info.

National Night Out – Aug 4, 6-8pm, Main Street



SOUTH BELOIT

SouthBeloit.org

Nature at the Confluence

Little Science Storytime – Jun 12, 10am
 and Wildlife Drawing 11:15am

Summer Solstice Community

Fire and Drum Circle – Jun 18, 6-8pm

We the Native People lecture – Jun 26, 6pm

Bird Club – Jul 10, 7:30am \$

Community Fire & Drum Circle – Jul 16, 6-8pm

Turtle Creek Duck Race Fundraiser & Fire and Drum Circle – Aug 13, 6-8pm

National Night Out

Aug 4, 5-7:30pm, American Legion

EVENT