



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 9, 2005

CONTACT:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355 (office)
Gerardo Cardenas	312/814.3158 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.8193 (DCEO)

MORE THAN 200 BICYCLISTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY KICK OFF THE FIRST ILLINOIS GREAT RIVERS RIDE IN ROCKFORD

*Riders from as far away as Hawaii to participate
in 385-mile state-sponsored event*

CHICAGO – More than 200 bicyclists from 23 states will begin a seven-day ride on September 11 that will take them along the scenic shorelines of the state’s three great Rivers – the Rock, Mississippi and Illinois. The ride is a result of a unique partnership between Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich’s Opportunity Returns economic development program, the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Illinois Bureau of Tourism.

“We are pleased to welcome so many cyclists from all over the country for the inaugural Illinois Great Rivers Ride,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “The ride is a great example of what the power of partnership can do to showcase all Illinois has to offer its residents and visitors.”

As they gear up for the 7 a.m. start at the YMCA of Rock River Valley, participants will be welcomed by state and local representatives, including Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois Bureau of Tourism and John Groh, director of public affairs, Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. Once off, they will enjoy a spectacular journey through the state, stopping each day for activities, performances and more. Each night they’ll have the option to sleep beneath the stars in tents at state parks and campgrounds or in designated hotels or motels. The 385-mile ride concludes September 18 at Pere Marquette State Park in Grafton.

Highlights of the ride will include:

- A Mexican fiesta dinner with fun, food and dance, as well as night Frisbee in Sterling/Rock Falls
- Dinner and an opportunity to tour the John Deere Pavilion in Moline, as well as a

(more)

Governor Rod R. Blagojevich

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism

- chance to ride a Channel Cat water taxi along the Mississippi River
- Architectural tours of historic Quincy and evening entertainment at the Backwaters night club.

In addition, riders will have the chance to tour the state's oldest winery, Baxter's Vineyards, in Nauvoo; listen to bluegrass music under the stars at the Big River Forest Preserve in Henderson County; enjoy clay shooting and all-terrain vehicle riding at the Heartland Lodge in Nebo; as well as enjoy a variety of other activities, including horseback riding, bonfires and more. The final day takes riders on a ferry ride across the Illinois River and then into Pere Marquette State Park in Grafton for a Jimmy Buffet-themed dinner complete with entertainment and fireworks.

"This Great Rivers Ride is an unusual and exciting travel experience," said Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Jack Lavin. "It's also an innovative new vehicle created by Gov. Blagojevich to drive tourism and economic development in the areas along the three rivers."

The Illinois Great Rivers Ride is partly funded through a grant from *Opportunity Returns* and corporate sponsorships from WREX-TV Rockford, WGEM-TV Quincy and the *Quincy Herald-Whig* newspaper, all which are owned by Quincy Newspapers, Inc. "We believe the ride serves our audiences well by enriching their communities and helping them continue to thrive economically," said Tom Oakley, president and CEO, Quincy Newspapers, Inc.

For more information, visit www.illinoisgreatriversride.com or call 877-477-7007 (ext. 217).

Gov. Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development strategy is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – each with a regional team that is empowered and expected to rapidly respond to opportunities and challenges. *Opportunity Returns* is about tangible, specific actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to businesses. It is about upgrading the skills of the local workforce, increasing the access to capital, opening new markets, improving infrastructure, and creating and retaining jobs. *Opportunity Returns* is about successfully partnering with companies and communities, both large and small, to help all of Illinois reach its economic potential.

#####

EDITOR'S NOTE: Illinois images are available electronically or in slide format and may be obtained by contacting Julie Connolly at julie.connolly@edelman.com, 312-233-1246 or Katie Markese at katie.markese@edelman.com, 312-297-7561.