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## Event gives Rockford woman a chance to bloom

By Elizabeth Davies

**RRSTAR.COM**

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### ROCKFORD —

The planters were hanging, the weeds had been pulled and the flowers were planted.

That done, it was Theresa Sellers' job to roll out the red carpet.

Sellers was the hostess in charge of making sure everything ran smoothly when 350 people arrived in Rockford last fall for the 2007 America in Bloom conference. Leaders from around the country were spending three days in the Rock River Valley to discuss community beautification and to honor cities that did it well.

It seemed like a simple task, but keeping all 350 people happy meant setting aside hotel rooms, planning city tours and impressing visitors with Rockford's best. Sellers wrapped gifts and posted welcome signs around town. In all, she spent "hours and hours" over the course of two years helping to plan the event.

And in the end, her hard work paid off. The America in Bloom representative was so impressed by Sellers that she nominated her for the 2007 Customer Service Manager of the Year by the **Association for Convention Operations Management** and Successful Meetings Magazine.

"I was a go-between, helping them find suppliers, being their meeting planner's assistant in a city they don't know," said Sellers, a 26-year-old group sales manager at the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. "A lot of my role deals with making sure that events coming to town have everything they need."

Because Rockford wasn't just the host for America in Bloom — it also was a competitor — Sellers put extra effort into making sure that Rockford was perfectly showcased.

She coordinated tours of area gardens, set up a reception at the Coronado

Performing Arts Center and arranged seminars at the Clock Tower Resort and Conference Center.

“Our biggest challenge was making sure people got on the right bus and all the attendees had everything they needed to have a good time,” Sellers said. “It was one of the most prestigious events I’ve worked on.”

She also spent plenty of time hearing from America in Bloom participants, and learning about the organization’s push to increase civic pride by making their communities look better.

“It’s neat to see adults excited and passionate about beautifying their cities, and bragging about their hometowns,” Sellers said. “It was fun because, as a visitors bureau, we’re always bragging about Rockford.”

That’s also why this Rockford native is so passionate about getting the people of the Rock River Valley to enjoy their community just as much as out-of-towners do. She hopes people can get past the misconception that there’s nothing to do in Rockford.

“There’s so much to do,” she said. “People get in a rut of (going to) the same six places. They forget how to be a tourist in their own hometown.”

About Theresa Sellers

Age: 26

City: Rockford

What do you do in your spare time? I’m out with friends downtown. I spend a lot of time at events — there’s something going on in Rockford every week. If it isn’t something I planned, I’m going there to check it out.

Which local places do you recommend to visitors? Chocolat by Daniel, J.R. Kortman Center for Design and Carlyle Brewing Company.

Did your time with America in Bloom make you a better gardener? I have a black thumb. I could kill a cactus if you let me. So it’s completely ironic that it was America in Bloom that nominated me.

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