

Windows Resort on Rend Lake, AGAIN?

Rend Lake Historic Windows Resort to Reopen

From Our Partners and Staff

An update from the CVB

Darby Beasley

Executive Director, Rend Lake Area CVB

Dear neighbors and friends,

If you grew up here, you remember the feeling: stepping into the Resort at Wayne Fitzgerald and seeing the lake turn to copper through that wall of windows. Weddings, banquets, reunions, meetings—it was our living room on the water. When the resort closed in 2016, the lights dimmed on more than a building. It touched our memories, our Main Streets, and the pride we take in welcoming people to Franklin County.

Today, the lights are coming back—one verified step at a time. The State's investment is restoring lakeside dining ("Windows on the Lake"), modern meeting and event space, and upgraded cabins and boatels so the resort can serve families and groups year-round again. While the State delivers construction, your Rend Lake Area CVB is doing what we do best: saying yes to our towns, yes to our partners, and yes to visitors who want to make Rend Lake a tradition.

What we're rebuilding—and who we're rebuilding with

- A remarkable setting. Rend Lake offers 19,000 acres of water wrapped by more than 20,000 acres of public land. It's award-winning fishing, mapped kayak trails, five public campgrounds, and miles of shoreline path.
- Steadfast partners. We work shoulder-to-shoulder with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—faithful stewards of the lake and surrounding lands—and the Rend Lake Conservancy District, which operates the Rend Lake Golf Complex, Seasons Lodge & Restaurants, and Buck & Bass Cabins. Collaboration like this is how a community gets revitalized and stays that way.



Lennie Shelton,
Executive Director, Benton/West
City Chamber of Commerce:

"As a one-person chamber leading multiple large-scale community events—often on a shoestring—the CVB's support has been transformative. Their funding and guidance let us uphold the high standards our residents expect, while easing the strain on staff, boards, and volunteers. It feels like having an experienced partner at the table."



Steve Vercellino,

Finance Director, RLACVB

"We match state dollars with local know-how. If a town can make the case that funding will bring visitors or extend their stay, we find a way to help—and we document it well.

Stewardship is the point: more weekends booked, more storefronts busy, more confidence to plan the next big thing."



How the CVB Funds Our Community

There's no contest, no blind bid, and no hoops for the sake of hoops. We work hand-in-hand with chambers and municipal leaders and do our best to meet every reasonable request. With State support in place, we're thrilled to say yes more than ever.

- Simple requests, fast help. Tell us what you're planning; we roll up our sleeves and figure out how to help—whether it's marketing, visitor services, or program add-ons that make a big difference.
- Lodging partner reinvestment. We return a percentage of funds to every lodging partner and work with them to deploy that money into advertising they find most valuable (think: shoulder-season packages, event tie-ins, drive-market ads).

The goal is simple: fill rooms, extend stays, and keep guests coming back.

What's Next for the CVB?

What “yes” looks like from the CVB?

1. Traditions first. Our towns already host beloved festivals that pull from the tri-state region—great music, street vendors, homemade goods and crafts, and those can't-miss food trucks. We back those anchors so they can grow without losing their hometown heart.
2. New draws that become new weekends.
 - Crappie Masters National Qualifier (4 days): Anglers from 13+ states filled campgrounds, cabins, and rooms around the lake.
 - Rend Lake RC Nationals (during Benton Water Festival): an emerging, family-friendly sport that sold out Motel Benton for three nights.
 - Scholastic 3D Archery Eastern Nationals at Marcum Ranges: a week-long championship that fills campsites and gives teams time to explore our towns.
 - April 2024 Solar Eclipse: we layered entertainment, learning, and wayfinding so visitors came early, stayed longer, and left eager to return.



We also invest in where travelers actually plan—aligning with the Illinois Office of Tourism’s seasonal pushes and placing nationwide ads (including Tripadvisor in October) when people are actively choosing where to go.

The resort’s next chapter—and ours!

The resort’s return isn’t just a ribbon cutting. It’s year-round capacity for meetings, reunions, tournaments, and weddings—the kind of business that steadies restaurants, shops, guides, and venues across Franklin County. When those windows glow over the water again, we’ll remember why the work mattered: because it was never only about a building. It was about neighbors, small businesses, and a place that welcomes the world while staying Franklin County.

In the meantime, everything that makes us special is open now: sunrise paddles on mapped water trails, steady crappie and catfish, paved shoreline rides, five public campgrounds and plenty of private stays, and lodging partners who go the extra mile—Motel Benton, SureStay Whittington, Cabins in the Woods, Eagles Nest at the Lake, and Seasons Lodge & Condos with the 27-hole Rend Lake Golf Complex.

To every city clerk, police chief, parks crew, street-closure volunteer, librarian, pastor, teacher, coach, veteran, bait-shop owner, server, housekeeper, and front-desk hero—thank you. To every visitor picking a place that still feels like a place—we’d be honored to host you.

With appreciation,
Darby Beasley

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Darby Beasley.

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