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### **Apple plans long-term Rockford relationship**

*Alex Gary ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR*

*Rockford Register Star*

ROCKFORD — Bookings for **Apple Vacations'** 2007 flights out of Rockford are ahead of last year, and the nation's largest tourist charter airline to Mexico has no plans of pulling out of Chicago/Rockford International Airport, an executive said Monday.

Earlier this month, **Apple** canceled four of its five flights to Cancun in November and December because of low sales. But Mark Noennig, vice president and general manager of the Chicago-based company, said its bookings are nearing 50 percent already for the 16 trips it has scheduled from January through April 7.

**Apple** launched flights to Cancun in February and ended them in March. They had 2,132 passengers on the flights, which were 92 percent full. Noennig said company officials considered it such a strong start they decided to try to book Cancun flights in November and December.

"They were under 20 percent on some of the dates. You put things in the market and look at the demand, and it just wasn't there for November and December," Noennig said.

Still, the strong bookings for January through April in 2007 shows Noennig that **Apple** will be in Rockford long-term. The airport has two airlines flying year-round: Allegiant Air flies to Sanford, Fla., near Orlando, Las Vegas and, beginning in January, Clearwater/St. Petersburg, Fla.; and United Airlines has two flights a day to Denver.

"We're very positive on the market overall," he said. "We were disappointed the (November-December flights) didn't do better, but the market changes each year. The economy with the gas prices was pretty hard on people, but already consumer confidence is coming back and we're seeing that in our 2007 bookings."

A local travel agency owner was upset because some of the travelers she signed weren't able to get seats on **Apple** flights out of Milwaukee and Chicago.

Noennig said the company offered \$100 off the trips and \$100 in parking money to make up for the inconvenience, and he believes 80 percent of the Rockford travelers ending up taking the offer on other flights.

"There were some dates that filled up and they could have flown the same weekend but a different day."

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