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## Grants to help Lombard, Schaumburg convention centers pursue shows



**The Schaumburg Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center is one of eight mid-size convention centers in the state expected to benefit from a new Illinois tourism promotion fund.**

*George LeClaire | Staff Photographer, 2014*



**Eric Peterson**



**Mike Riopell**

A tourism promotion bill signed into law by Gov. Bruce Rauner Thursday is expected to result in grants to mid-size convention centers such as the Schaumburg Convention Center and Westin Lombard Yorktown Center to pursue events and trade shows currently held out of state.

The grant money to be awarded by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity would basically be a refund of up to 80 percent of the hotel tax money qualifying facilities have already paid the state.

Another limitation is that the annual grants cannot exceed \$200,000. Schaumburg Village Manager Brian Townsend said his village would expect to see an amount between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per year at the start of the five-year pilot program.

If it's successful in boosting tourism, the value of the 20 percent the state keeps in hotel taxes from these convention centers will go up.

"The state of Illinois really can't lose on this bill," Townsend said. "We were very happy when the governor signed the bill."

He explained that the money can be used in a variety of ways to try to bring conventions and conferences from elsewhere in the Midwest to Illinois. Examples range from the ability to lower group rates on hotel rooms to offering transportation incentives.

Qualifying facilities must be publicly owned and include a hotel and 30,000 to 125,000 square feet of exhibition space.

Eight centers in the state meet these parameters, of which Schaumburg's, Lombard's and the Tinley Park Convention Center are the only suburban examples.

Larger facilities like the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont and Chicago's McCormick Place already receive state funding from other sources that brings them millions of dollars, Townsend said.

He credited Democratic state Sen. Dan Kotowski of Park Ridge and Democratic state Rep. Fred Crespo of Hoffman Estates with the initial sponsorship of the ultimately bipartisan bill.

Crespo said he thought it important both that the incentives be created as well as that the money not come from the state's general checkbook.

"Just about every other state offers incentives for these kinds of things," Crespo said.

Officials from the village of Lombard and the Westin Lombard Yorktown Center Hotel could not be reached for comment on the bill Friday.