

First Impressions

of

Antigo, WI
by Merrill, WI
Visit Conducted 7/1/93

A program for community improvement

Developed by:

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Report on First Impressions During Visitation to Antigo

To Whom It May Concern:

The Merrill Visitation Team was very pleased to participate in a "First Impressions Exchange" with Antigo. The Merrill Team was comprised of: **A relative newcomer to the Merrill community who serves as a public relations specialist, female. **A man involved in community development initiatives with the City of Merrill. **Merrill business owner that is unfamiliar with Antigo, but serves in a variety of Merrill community organizations. **A man who has been involved in real estate appraisals for several years.

These individuals were asked to serve on the team because of their unfamiliarity with Antigo and because of the unique perspectives that would be brought into the process because of their varied backgrounds.

The Merrill team visited Antigo on Thursday, July 1, a mild summer day. The afternoon was warm and sunny. The Merrill team arrived in Antigo at 9:15 a.m. and continued their visit until 1:30 p.m. All commented that the visitation was a good experience for them as they learned to pay attention to detail.

The Merrill area thanks Antigo for doing an exchange. It is our sincere hope that the information gathered from the First Impressions Program will assist us in working toward improvements in our community. If you have any further information, the contact person for the Merrill First Impressions Exchange is Delores E. Olsen, Executive Vice President, Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce, 720 East Second Street, Merrill, WI 54452. Olsen's phone number is (715) 536-9474.

Report prepared by:

Delores E. Olsen
Executive Vice President

I. What was my perception before visiting the community: What did I expect, etc.?

I have never been to Antigo before and have heard very little about this town. The only expectations I have of Antigo are derived from brochures mailed by their Chamber. After glancing through the brochures it seems Antigo prides itself on its naturalistic scenery; the Wolff River, wooded areas, camping sites, and lakes. Hunting and fishing seem to be a favorite past time for Antigo people. Antigo appears to be an outdoorsmen's paradise. I have some reservations about Antigo after reading the brochures. Coming from a big city, I do not have much experience with the outdoors; will there be things for me to do also, will I be able to hold a good conversation with residents, if I don't know about fishing, hunting, and wildlife. It's my expectation the people of Antigo are close-knit and proud of their community. I also have the impression that people are family oriented.

I have been to the city several times but not in the last 2 1/2 years. I expected the community along Hwy. 45 to be heavily commercialized to support Northern Wisconsin tourists; some manufacturing operations; and thriving potato fields.

I expected the community to be somewhat depressed due to my contacts in the past few years.

I really had no particular perception of Antigo beforehand, I mostly had just driven through many years ago and I recall stopping to tour the Mepps Company. At that time we had young boys in our family and were mostly interested in fishing.

II. Five Minute Impression

The drive through from south to north on Hwy. 45 is a nice four-lane road all the way through. South entrance has many large business billboards, one of these is a "welcome sign" (combination county and city). Busy and clean appearance (well-kept homes and businesses in general). Directional signs to local places very noticeable and numerous. Good size fairgrounds, well-kept, many buildings and concrete grandstand.

Typical Central Wisconsin small town.

I was surprised by increase in new service businesses, fairground improvements, and apparent new industry in the northwest industrial area visible from Hwy. 45.

Approaching Antigo from the south I saw signs for McDonald's, Hoffman House, K-Mart, Pizza Hut, and other national stores and restaurants. Perhaps this isn't the extreme rural atmosphere I pictured from the brochures. The community seemed active with people walking and repairing things and Antigo seemed very relaxed. I see lots of pickup trucks and older cars leaving the

impression Antigo is predominantly a blue collar town. The homes are older and a few are larger Victorian style homes with well-kept lawns. Housing appears to need greater care, paint jobs, etc.

A. As you "drive" around town

No response.

III. Driving ... evaluate EACH entrance

A. Entrance Hwy. 45 South

Wayside--good feature. Most businesses neat and clean. Noted some welcome signs; farm market nice looking building; motels appear to be well-maintained; blue directional signs further into the city are a nice feature. Did not like all the billboards. The bargain bin building is unsightly and makes the area look rundown. Also the Quansut Hut further into town on the south side of Hwy. 45 makes that area cheap and rundown. The vacant gas stations are a detraction but probably a result of the underground gas tank problems that caused their failing. I felt Cousineau's has done a good job in disguising what could be a very negative appearance.

Has a nice welcome billboard sign. However, there is an over abundance of other larger billboards that are not attractive at this entrance.

Both the north and south Hwy. 45 entrances have been extensively reconstructed to move traffic at a steady flow, The center turn lanes should have been extended further north and south to accommodate future growth.

B. Entrance Hwy. 45 North

Did not notice any welcome sign on northern entrance, but was greeted with good size shopping mall.

Hwy. 45, North, marked similar to that of the south entrance, but with fewer billboards. The new commercial developments, such as Fleet Farm, restaurants, motels, etc., are very impressive. "Fill Copps store as soon as possible".

C. Entrance Hwy. 64 East

It has open country and the airport; it's clean and neat.

It has very little traffic; there's not much need to be impressive; the airport is a nice feature, but the used tractor place is unattractive.

D. Entrance Hwy. 64 West

Mostly farmland and residential.

Narrow two-lane is okay since this highway handles limited traffic. The "Welcome to Antigo" sign is good, but sports titles are too small to read.

IV. A. Driving, Downtown Business Area

Storefronts have been well-maintained, street parking is limited by recent street renovation, by adding trees, etc. Some business signs are obscured by trees.

Appearance in general was good; most business buildings were well kept and attractive. There are some empty buildings that are in very bad shape and are a distraction.

The new depot is a nice addition; liked the trees downtown; parking arrangements are blue direction signs are nice. Unfortunately, trees obscure the blue signs so they can't be read. Street walks and curb are in good condition. Nice, neat, compact retail shopping area. Vacant downtown stores never a good feature, noted two or three. Nice job at the Hoffman House. The hotel south of the depot is an eyesore.

B. Driving, Other Business Areas

New shopping area on northeast entrance appears to be growing.

Shopping areas provide a wide variety of shopping choice from independent hometown stores to numerous chain stores. Attractive, neat, and busy.

Hwy. 45 North and South is pretty much a continuous business area. The weeds south of Bolen? Realty should be mowed. Nice restoration at old shoe factory. The Hwy. 45 South business area is starting to show age and deterioration.

V. Driving ...comments on residential

Found some nice, new residential areas to the west and likewise good older homes along and off Hwy. 52 to the east. Much of the remainder of housing area had many homes in need of repair, maintenance, and rehabilitation. "Keep after block grant funds!" Note: The poor state of these homes, grass growing through the sidewalks, unmowed lawns, etc., was a real contrast to the thriving commercial image presented along Hwy. 64. "Economically depressed" or "no pride" is what is conveyed to me.

The southwest side newer subdivisions have very nice homes. The near northwest side has some very large, older homes that are well maintained.

VI. *Driving...comments on*

A. Street Signs

Seemed fairly new and easily noticeable throughout the city.

B. Traffic patterns/street conditions

The general traffic flow is good. Some of the side streets are in poor condition and Hwy. 64, West is in poor condition.

The traffic pattern is simple, logical, and hard to get lost in. Streets in residential locations are extremely rough and in need of resurfacing.

Overall, the main streets are basically in good shape. Other streets are in fair condition with patches on them; patches resulting in bumpy roads. Some streets are still gravel.

C. Welcome signs (at entrances)

Limited signing. Only noticed one on Hwy. 45, South. It was a billboard style sign amongst many other business billboards.

D. Direction signs to parks, schools, hospitals/clinics, attractions, services (i.e. police), etc.

Visitation team felt the directional signs were good except for the hidden signs in the downtown area obscured by trees.

They are placed in the middle of the block and headed with the name of the upcoming cross street. They then list items with direction arrows. I found them well done and helpful.

VII. *Driving...comments on industrial park/area*

No sign off Hwy. 45 to the industrial park area, only a sign for the armory. I was impressed with the amount of new industry, although many are poorly identified. The sawmill operation (Devino's) to the south of Amron is a real detraction with its huge pile of sawdust. Brunswick must be doing great; looked like 1.5 million board foot of inventory, The new pallet operation to north and west of Hwy. 64 was a surprise. Nice operation but not identified. Do you have excess industrial land? If not, I would question wisdom of having a chiropractic office, humane shelter, daycare center, etc., in the industrial park. Who do you inquire with about locating a new industry in town? Bolm looks prosperous. Mow the weeds in the industrial park. Professional restorations, near the pallet mill, is an embarrassment.

Industrial park is not well defined by signs. Access off Hwy. 45 North is good. Businesses need more identification.

VIII. *Driving...comments of schools*

Schools were typical. The new high school is under construction.

The old high school should be saved or restored as it is not a bad looking building.

The high school is surrounded by homes and didn't appear to have space for outside activities. Noted temporary classroom buildings were being used.

IX. *Driving...comments on parks, playgrounds, athletic facilities, etc.*

City park is well maintained, while the residents in the general area of the park are fair, those surrounding the park are well maintained.

Parks appear to be well maintained. Liked the gazebo. Swimming pool by the hospital is quite nice. The Jaycee Park looked a little run down, as did the adjacent tennis courts which had weeds.

Visitation group saw Riverside Park, Jaycee Park, and Central Park. It was noted they liked the large older trees in Central Park. It was also noted there isn't much of any signage at the parks.

Out of the main street of traffic there are plenty of fields for kids to play in. Ballparks, tennis courts. Some sheds are run down warehouses that need to be fixed. Antigo needs more grassy areas, swings, and parks. Not much development; old and stagnant. City park has nice picnic areas and plenty of benches. City park would be nicer with a pond or river so the kids could feed ducks, etc. Homes around the park start to look nicer.

X. *Driving.. .comments on other:*

A. Hospitals/clinics

Hospital has activity, recent addition indicates use.

Nice hospital for a community with 8,700 population.

The hospital has plenty of parking. Direction of traffic is not clear and it may need more signs.

B. Billboards/advertising

Hwy. 45 South has overabundance of advertising billboards and appears very cluttered.

XI. Walking around...comments on businesses (physical)

Store identification signs were not observed as been obstructed. Visited downtown furniture store, had wide selection of goods, well-displayed appearance, clean and neat. Staff was very helpful, but not pushy. Visited downtown general store and it had everything. "I would hate to have to find a particular item in it."

Visited H & R Furniture, very nice with large selection. Well kept and clean. Salesman was very friendly. Told us to make ourselves right at home. Smiled and offered assistance. Peaceful Valley General Store is a second-hand store. Greeted warmly. As others walked in, they were greeted by name. Store was messy, things on the floor, unorganized; but for the bargain hunter/antique shopper it was a paradise,

Stopped by Auto Stop and asked what is going on for the Fourth of July Weekend, The lady told me there is going to be a parade in the morning and Funfest. I asked what is Funfest? She said "not much". Just some hayrides and a band. I asked her if she would recommend going, she said "I'm not going". She was helpful but negative, She said she is going to Neva for "Neva Days". Apparently there is more to do and see there. After shopping, I was looking for a place to sit; I found some benches and flowers at "The Robin's Roost". They also had a water fountain. I also stopped at the 76 Station and asked for directions to the Chamber of Commerce. They gave very good directions.

XII. Walking around...comments on people

People in general were friendly and helpful. Asked about weekend activities and a self-service station person at the check out didn't really know much about them and steered us to another community, Asked about eating places at the drug store and the lady suggested two different restaurants.

The Pump House directed me to the DNR for a county map. People were very friendly at both locations and wanted to help.

XIII. community Information

Everything is in place. If anything is wrong, it too much information. Professional printing and color could enhance the impression of brochures, but what small Chamber is that rich?

We received adequate information from the Chamber to help us in evaluating the community. The map is well done for a black and white map. They used key symbols to locate various items and I think this is very good. The library is a beautiful old building, quite a treat! The library needs more space for people to sit and read. Perhaps a few comfortable chairs in a corner out of the way from main stream traffic, The art gallery is cute on the second floor, tastefully decorated in the lobby. I really

like the "story room". Kids must really have a good time here.

The Chamber of Commerce was very helpful and told us about the activities going on this summer. They handed us some brochures and answered all of our questions. Antigo is much larger than I pictured it to be; it is spread out over a large geographic area. I found it strange that businesses do not have paved driveways.

The former shoe factory, now used by the City as a business/industry incubator is good.

What happened to the courthouse? At first glance I thought it was an old building, but there is this tinted glass addition that does not fit with the rest of the building and it appears awkward.

The Parkview Manor is a good looking nursing home. It looks professional and well maintained. Its nice and close to the Main Street and downtown.

Congratulations to Antigo on having a new hockey facility available for recreation in your community.

XVI. City Hall

Old historic building, fire department on first floor, had to climb a winding staircase to the second floor city clerk and treasurer's office. I am sure this is a chore for older people. The City Hall was easy to locate. The old building is nice and could stand an exterior restoration. The staff was very helpful at City Hall. It took three to four ladies to get us tax information on a specific piece of property.

XV. Chamber of Commerce

Received good directions to the Chamber of Commerce from the Shell Station. The office itself is set back perhaps too far from the highway. Which one is the information office?

They had a large rack along one wall with a wide variety of brochures. Asked for reference to a realtor for retirement property and she handed me two packets from two different realtors. Asked about activities for the Fourth of July weekend and she explained what was planned and where. She gave us information on eating places and the brochure listing them. Felt the building was set back from the roadway; perhaps a sign identifying the Chamber should be closer to the highway.

I noticed when the Chamber provided us with a list of dining facilities, it might have been helpful to briefly describe the restaurants so that we better understood how appropriate each one might be to meet our needs. The Health Mart clerk recommended Cheers. It was a cute, family-style restaurant with friendly waitresses. The food was good and business seemed steady.

XVI. *Other Stuff*

A. *Public Restrooms*

Public restroom locked in fairgrounds. Restroom at 76 Station on Hwy. 45 was fairly clean. Restroom at Cheers very clean.

B. *Payphones*

At fairgrounds we saw three payphones, two of which the phones were missing.

C. *Parking*

Parking seemed adequate. Large downtown public parking lot. Liked "no pay" parking in downtown.

D. *Water fountains, benches, etc.*

Small park downtown, Robin's Roost, has water bubbler and benches; nice touch. There was a need for some repair on flower planter at the entrance.

E. *Miscellaneous*

The new hockey building grandstand at the fairgrounds is impressive; nice library, but needs gutters and paint; the courthouse is a nice building, but in poor repair and the glass elevator addition destroys the appearance.

WRAP UP

A. *Using your "senses"*

In general the people were very friendly and helpful. Their appearance, however, was casual and unprofessional.

The community felt very warm with a hometown atmosphere. The shopping strip looked very solid with a nice variety of stores.

The food at Cheers was good. Antigo has lots of fast food joints and other nice restaurants.

None of the team members noticed any unfamiliar or adverse smells.

Antigo is inviting to the casual observer and traveler. Once off the beaten track it is evident that infrastructure needs improvement and government owned buildings need repair. Housing is in the lower value category.

B. *Five most positive things observed about the community.*

1. The directional location signs were great.

2. Plenty of recreational activities; swimming, fishing, hockey, baseball.
3. A nice shopping area with a wide variety of stores, restaurants, specialty stores with a wide variety of choices.

D. What will you remember about community in six months?

The city appears to be growing and showing positive economic signs.

E. Other comments

One team member found more negative factors than he anticipated when he started looking at the city closely. Superficially, a drive through seems to show few deficiencies.

It was noted there seems to be cooperation between the city and county on a number of projects in the area.