



## First Impressions Revisited\*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Community Visited: Crandon, Wisconsin

Date of Visits: September 20, 2004

Visits Completed by (community): Hurley, Wisconsin

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# **First Impressions Revisited: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement Final Report**

**Community You Visited: Crandon, Wisconsin**

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**Date of visit and time spent:** September 20, 2004, morning through lunch and into the early afternoon.

**Weather on dates of visit:** Weather was sunny with warm temperatures in the 70's.

## **Introduction**

The Hurley Chamber of Commerce was very interested in finding a partner to conduct a First Impressions exchange with. The community has a downtown development organization, but it has been relatively inactive in recent years. The Chamber looked at the opportunity to receive input from the outside as a potential catalyst to energize the community and downtown for new initiatives.

With the exception of the "Mining Kills Tourism" billboard on Highway 8 West of town, the first impression of Crandon was very positive. Some common themes were identified by several of the visitors. The common positive themes included the attractive downtown, the historic downtown buildings and the nearby lakes. The visitors were impressed with a number of ideas that they will be able to bring back to Hurley.

A few items that needed improvement were also noted. Most notably, the group felt the need for additional "Welcome to Crandon" signs (entering Crandon from the West on Highway 8), the removal of the anti-mining billboard and improved access to the Chamber web-site.

The following report follows the First Impressions template provided by the UW-Extension Center for Community Economic Development. Each section begins with a summary of the major themes coming from the visit, followed by the verbatim comments from each of the visitors.

## **Prior to Your Visit**

### ***How easy was it to get information on the community that you are visiting?***

A little over two weeks before the visit, a representative from the Hurley group called the Crandon Chamber and requested tourism-related information. The phone was answered by what seemed to be a volunteer that does not normally work in the office. He explained that they were working on a special event that day (September 3<sup>rd</sup>). He was very friendly and positive. However, none of the requested information arrived by the time of the visit or the time of this writing.

In conducting a web-search, it was difficult to find the Chamber's official web-site. Using the key words "Crandon, Wisconsin" on two separate search engines, the Chamber's official web-site did not show up on the first page of either search. In fact, one of the Hurley representatives, after attempting to find the site, gave up and simply concluded that there was no such site.

By using the key words "Crandon Chamber of Commerce" the search engines went directly to the site. However, not all prospective visitors will think to type in the "chamber of commerce" when searching for information about the area.

The Chamber's web-site was attractive and informative, with a listing of current events and attractions. It seemed to be a good site.

It was also noted that most of the area business web-sites did not link to the chamber web-site. It is recommended that the chamber request a direct link from all of the business' web-sites to help market the community to interested visitors.

## **Past Perceptions**

### ***What was your perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see? Please comment on your knowledge of this community:***

None of the visitors had been to Crandon prior to the exchange. A couple of the visitors had heard of Crandon prior to the visit due to the mining controversy.

## **The "Five Minute" Impression**

### ***After taking a five-minute drive through the community, without stopping, the following reactions were noted:***

In general, the visitors felt that the first five-minute impression was positive. They witnessed a clean, attractive community with a very attractive downtown, nice residential areas and new school. The group

felt that there should be a “Welcome to Crandon” sign on Highway 8 coming from the West and agreed that the “Mining Kills Tourism” sign was a very negative first impression for the community.

“Generally well-maintained homes, businesses and infrastructure. For the most part, the community seems to care about itself.”

“Lots of farm-land type property on the outskirts, a city surrounded by water, beautiful lakes.”

“Couldn’t find the Welcome signs coming in from the West.”

“The ‘Cyanide kills fish, etc... tourism’ sign was a big distraction. Not a nice welcome. Brought the phrase ‘billboards kill tourism’ to mind.”

“Weren’t sure which way to turn to go through downtown – turned the wrong way the first time.”

“Buildings reminded us of our own town, similar brick fronts, historic nature... nice lamp posts.”

“Noticed that just about every type of business a person could need was located right downtown – a big plus.”

“Spotted the school, sign to the medical clinic, chamber, courthouse, etc... very easy access to all, very good.”

“A clean community. Liked the benches, light posts, sidewalks in the downtown. Very nice.”

## **Community Entrances**

The following observations were noted when entering the community from the four major entrances:

The major entrances into the community were viewed generally positive. The group felt that there should be “Welcome to Crandon” signs on Highway 8 from the West and Highway 55 from the North. Again, the anti-mining sign on Highway 8 was viewed as a negative. As one visitor stated: “Generally, entrances were not bad for a first impression.”



***Approaching from the West on Hwy 8:***

“Saw the school – very nice facility.”

“Did not spot a “Welcome to Crandon” sign, missed the highway (population) sign, too – probably due to the distraction from the cyanide sign.”

“Noticed large off-road course.”

“Anti-mining sign – negative.”

“No ‘Welcome to Crandon’ sign.”

***Approaching from the North on 55:***

“Did not see a Welcome sign, but did see a highway sign with population.”

“Spotted new Fire Department building and sign to medical center.”

“No welcome sign.”

***Approaching from the East on Highway 8:***

“Saw a nice ‘Welcome to Crandon’ sign.

“Noticed shopping outside of the downtown.”

“Good road – re-paved.”

“‘Welcome to Crandon’ sign – not bad.”

“Nice highway department shop.”

***Approaching from the South on 55:***

“Noticed ‘Welcome to Crandon’ sign.”

“Nice entrance to town.”

“Curious about mining interpretive center.”

**Downtown Business Area**

***Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:***

The group spent the majority of their time in the downtown area. The visitors had very positive impressions of the downtown. The new streetscape project showed that the community cared about itself and projected a very positive image. A nice variety of businesses were noted. Positive comments were received regarding the fact that many of the buildings maintained their historic architecture and were maintained well.



***General Appearance of Buildings, Displays, Signage:***

“Historic buildings were very attractive.”

“It reminded us a lot of our hometown. Similar brick building structures, some well cared for, others not so much (just like Hurley). Some of the businesses obviously put a lot into the repainting their exteriors and signage, others had peeling paint and rusted signs.”

“Generally in nice shape. Some buildings well preserved with nice paint. Flower boxes well kept. Street lights are classy.”



***The Variety of Shopping:***

“Good to see a variety of shops centrally located in the downtown.”

“Shops were nice with a good mix of things.”

“Shopping was an eclectic variety. Don’t see a lot of Ecuadorian shops in my travels.”

“Gift/flower/trading post shops were cute – had nice items. Noticed that they are moving across the street – thought the buildings those businesses are currently housed in had a much more intriguing style than the

warehouse look of the facility they will be moving to, but I'm sure there are infrastructure problems that are not visible in the older buildings we visited. Wanted to go to the candy store, but it was closed."

"Merchandise was geared towards tourists."

***What kind of customer service did you receive when you entered the retail businesses?***

"Chamber staff was helpful, friendly and informative."

"Was going to make a purchase at the gift/flower shop, but the clerk was on the phone in the back and didn't come to the front before my patience ran out. Had indicated that I should 'just holler' when I was ready, but another customer who had come in after I did was waiting ahead of me and I didn't want to appear pushy and holler over the top of a phone conversation to a salesperson I couldn't even see so I just put the items back."

"For tourist businesses, they were not service oriented."

"Customer service was good, but not great."

***Were there any governmental or nonprofit organizational activities that might serve as a magnet for the shopping district?***

"The County Courthouse and grounds and the Chamber Information Center were excellent magnets for the downtown."



***Were there the following public amenities?***

***Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!):***

Did not see any downtown.

***Drinking fountains:***

Did not see any downtown.

***Benches:***

Nice benches located throughout the downtown.

***Public restrooms:***

Did not see any in the downtown or the Chamber building. But may have been available at the Court House, along with other amenities.

***Appealing landscaping:***

The landscaping in the downtown was positive. Attractive flower boxes found throughout the downtown. Additional landscaping throughout the community would help.

***Did you have any difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?***

Parking in the downtown was very good, with plenty of accessible parking spaces convenient to the entire downtown. Easy and convenient parking was noted as a very positive element of the downtown.

“Parking was not a problem and we were able to walk most of the downtown.”

## **Other Retail Shopping Areas (Big Box Retailers/Shopping Malls)**

“We did not see any big name retailers anywhere in the community, not even a grocery chain, but they did seem to have all necessary types of retail covered, except, most likely, basic clothing.”

“Buildings in the ‘strip’ section had a sprawling, lumber yard feel to them, and the layout was unusual, not necessarily conducive to a quality shopping environment, but still, most everything you needed was there.”

“Noticed a True Value store outside of the downtown in the ‘mall-like’ area.”

“Downtown shopping environment was the most attractive and interesting part of the community.”

“Shopping Plaza had a variety of shops. Interesting that the depot was centered in the Plaza.”

“There seemed to be a variety but most are small shops.”

“Some stores closed on Mondays.”

“Parking seemed to be good.”

## **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

The Industrial Park showed some success. Interesting to see a track-less trolley car manufacturing facility. The group felt that the industrial park could be better signed for access to the park and information within the park.

“Access to the park was difficult. Only one entrance, along a narrow road – not good.”

“It was not clear what type of industry was back there – no signage – except for a trackless trolley manufacturer and a timber industry.”

“There was room for expansion, but they need to better develop a road system before they expand – dangerous.”

“Appeared to be vacant land for expansion.”

”It was not well signed.”

## **Health Care Services**

There seemed to be a good level of medical services for a small community. This is a positive for the community.

“Noticed the sign to the Medical Clinic – drove past, small but available, with connections to a much larger system, so that’s good.”

“Saw a dentist’s office, a chiropractor, nursing home. Didn’t see an optometrist.”

“Clinic was small, the Rhinelander Medical Center is a half-hour away.”

## **Housing**

Comments regarding the existing housing-stock were mostly positive. Most of the residential neighborhoods were well-kept and attractive. The housing market appeared relatively strong, with few houses for sale and many well-maintained homes. Some residential areas of the community could be improved.

“Definitely a mixed housing stock. Some very nice houses and one section of town that was very run down – found that one while looking for the industrial park.”

“Didn’t see a lot of for sale signs, but we didn’t travel down every neighborhood, either.”

“Mix of homes and neighborhoods.”

“A few for-sale signs. No visible new homes sites.”

“There seemed to be old and new. Some were in need of fix-up.”

“Some homes in need of proper maintenance.”

“Some downtown apartments.”

“Lake homes looked nicer. Closer to town looks lower income.”

“The community generally looked nice and attractive. Most areas did not look depressed.”

## **Schools**

New school on West side of town presented a very positive first impression. Older vacant and abandoned school near the downtown was a negative.

“Noticed the school right away. Sign did not indicate, but appeared to be a K-12. Seemed like a fine structure, with very up to date sporting facilities.”

“Newer school outside of town. Looks combined elementary-high school. Looked good.”

“Also spotted an abandoned elementary school that is a definite eyesore – windowless and boards everywhere.”

## **Faith/Religion**

Seemed to be a good mix of religious institutions throughout the community.

“Saw every denomination but the Catholic Church, but saw that there is one according to the city map.”

“Churches looked very nice.”

“Noticed a memorial to the unborn. Did not appear to be on church grounds, but was probably sponsored by one of them. Did not investigate closely.”

“Seemed to be a good number of churches.”

“Physical appearance of churches was good. Some newer.”

## Civic

*Does it appear as though there are a variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community?*

“Noticed the typical circular signs listing the difference clubs posted on the welcome signs. Found a Lions International brochure at the chamber office.”

## Residents

We did not experience any negative feelings or comments from the residents of the community. There did not appear to be any segment of the population that would feel uncomfortable in Crandon.

“Did not see many people out on the street. Very quiet, especially for such a beautiful day, but the chamber folks were pleasant, as were the café personnel and the employee at the gift shop.”

“Also noticed that the chamber newsletter claimed to have a very friendly community.”

“Seemed to be a range of age groups.”

“Most people would feel comfortable here.”

## Public Infrastructure

The public infrastructure, especially the downtown streetscaping and courthouse grounds, gave a very positive first impression of the community.

*Streets, Street Signing and Lighting:*



“New lights, curbs and sidewalks.”

“It is a Mainstreet business district so the streets were very nice – too bad there weren’t more people on them.”

“Had easy access to all of the town facilities. Did not see public restrooms (as mentioned before).”

“Perhaps the best part of the community is the downtown street lights, benches, new sidewalks. Very nice.”

“Nice park in front of the courthouse, with tables, the tank, memorials, etc. Didn’t understand why the utility boxes were placed in such a prominent location. Very unattractive and dangerous – should have been placed in a more obscure location, not on the edge of a beautiful park facility.”

“Streets were OK. Some are newer.”

“Downtown lights are nice.”

***Land Use Planning:***

“Impressive what a small town was able to do with their downtown.”

“Mainstreet Program is good. How is it paid for?”

***Sidewalks:***

“Downtown sidewalks were nice and attractive.”

“Sidewalks in good condition.”

***Public Restrooms:***

Did not see any.

***City/Village/Town Hall:***

“Courthouse looked well kept.”

“Courthouse grounds very attractive.”

“Important to have County Courthouse located in the downtown.”



***Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities:***

“Fire hall is newer and looked to be a good size.”

“Highway department newer.”

“A lot of money invested in public facilities.”

***Public Parking:***

“Street parking seemed adequate.”

“Great parking in downtown. Seemed to be adequate parking in plaza area, too.”

***Library:***

Did not see a public library.

***Landscaping/Street Trees:***

“Flower boxes and garbage containers were nice.”

“Landscaping was fine, but could be improved.”

“Courthouse area very attractive.”

***Pay Phones, Drinking Fountains, Benches, Other Misc.:***

No pay phones or drinking fountains.

“Benches in the downtown were very nice.”

**Recreation/Tourism**

***Is the community well known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?***

“Tourism promotion needs work. They don’t seem to have one specific “claim to fame”. A JEM grant tied them in with other communities as a fall destination, but nothing except the raceway really stood out as an attraction. They do have quite a few events and activities on their calendar, many tied to the casinos and not specifically in Crandon, but it sounds like they have a few things “in the works” (e.g. the Jeep Jamboree).”

“Their web site really needs to be ‘googled’ so people can find it more easily and they need to be careful to follow up on requests for information.”

“Chamber was easy to find, but didn’t have any real info specific to Crandon except the newsletter and the city map. There was a Forest County brochure and the joint JEM piece, but the chamber needs its own pamphlet, at least, with a flyer listing chamber members, and area attractions if they want to truly attract visitors to their area.”

***Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?***

World Championship off-road race – impressive.

***Are there any significant natural features that have the potential of drawing people to the community?***

“The lakes surrounding the community are beautiful – the first impression is that the area is very pretty and a lot could be going on there.”

“Lakes, rivers, wooded areas.”

***Are there any significant man-made attractions?***

“Off-road race track.”

“Veteran’s Memorial.”

“Downtown street, buildings and shops.”

***Is there an obvious visitor's center, chamber of commerce office, Main Street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Please comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.***

Our group indicated mostly positive comments regarding the Chamber's visitor center. They noted its convenient location and its friendly staff. Very important to have chamber located in the heart of the downtown.



“Chamber had a nice and conveniently located building. Very visible from the highway and the downtown. Good parking.”

“The staff was nice, but there were cones blocking access to the info racks. The staff apologized for them, but did not move them out of our way – just commented that they were recouping from an event weekend and left it at that – not good, the cones should have been moved. They recommended a few places to eat and we checked out one of them. The food and service was ok, but nothing special. Very truck stop atmosphere, but nobody being rude – everyone seemed pleasant enough.”

“Chamber office on Main Street – important.”

“No specific print on Crandon. Should have Main Street literature.”

“Chamber building had a good variety of area brochures.”

“Staff was helpful and friendly.”

***Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?***

“Some specialty shops. Northwoods shop, candy shop, home-cooking.”

“As far as coming back to the area, it would be the lakes that would interest me.”

## Using your Senses

***What did the community taste like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant, or candy store that you will remember?***

“The streets did smell good around lunch-time. There was a bakery, as well as several restaurants, and the aforementioned candy/ice cream store.”

“There was no sound, really – it was a very, very quiet town (not at all like Hurley, in that respect).”

“Meal was home-cooked at café.”

“There were no offensive smells. The town smelled clean.”

“Other than traffic, the town was quiet.”

“The town felt like a friendly, small, Northern community.”

## Wrap-up

Each of the visitors to Crandon developed their own list of positive items about the community as well as obstacles to consider. However, there are several common threads among the three visitors.

### ***5 most positive things:***

1. Downtown beautification project.
  2. Well-maintained, historic buildings in the downtown.
  3. Court house lawn and park area in the downtown, along with location of Chamber building.
  4. Quiet, safe, friendly community.
  5. Close to lakes and the natural beauty of the area.
- 
1. Easy access to most necessary facilities (school, chamber, government offices, clinic, etc).
  2. Necessary shopping facilities to meet the needs of residents (not necessarily visitors, except for the one gift shop), with the possible exception of clothing.
  3. The lakes – beautiful!
  4. The courthouse park/yard.
  5. The nicely redone mainstreet – curbs, sidewalks, benches, garbage receptacles, flowers, light posts – all very attractive.
- 
1. Streetscaping downtown.
  2. Older downtown buildings fixed up.
  3. Park on Main Street next to Chamber.

4. Close to outdoor recreation.
5. Variety of shops downtown.

**5 biggest obstacles:**

1. Chamber web-site – somewhat hard to find.
  2. Some residential neighborhoods need improving.
  3. Customer service good, but could be better.
  4. Plaza area is unattractive.
  5. Improve signage (add “Welcome to Crandon” sign, remove anti-mining sign, improve industrial park signage).
- 
1. Industrial park – signage, road access, development.
  2. The “cyanide sign” was a real mood killer.
  3. Chamber follow-up/info needs to be developed.
  4. Web site needs to be developed and placed with appropriate search engines.
  5. Bring in a big name retailer – even a grocery chain could change the shopping atmosphere.
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1. Did not see major grocery.
  2. Medical clinic small – major medical a distance away.
  3. More lodging near town.
  4. Marketing industrial park.
  5. Closeness of shopping.

***What will you remember most about this community six months from now (positive or negative)?***

The most positive things identified by the group were:

“The beautiful downtown – nice shops, historic buildings, streetscape.”

“The beautiful lakes at every turn.”

“Downtown buildings that were fixed up with paint”

The most negative things identified include:

“The road leading to the industrial park.”

“The ‘cyanide’ sign”.

***Describe ONE idea that you will borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours!***

“Developing support for a downtown improvement effort, such as streetscaping or building improvements.”

“Our chamber is actually working on a city map for area visitors. It will list the trails and businesses in the downtown area and list other chamber members on the outskirts. I will now make sure that the map also lists churches and non-profit facilities that might be of interest to visitors – sometimes we forget that visitors are interested in those details, as well, and might like them on a map.”

“Promoting facelifts on downtown buildings.”