

First Impressions Visit

Benton, WI and Fulton, IL

Benton's Visit to Fulton Date:
October 6, 2004

Team Members

- Steve Malone, President and CEO of Benton State Bank, President of Benton Community Development Corporation
- Kay Brink, Vice President of Benton State Bank, Vice-President of Benton Community Development Corporation
- Ron Fladseth, Minister, Primitive Methodist Church, Secretary for Benton Community Development Corporation
- Rose Walton, Member of Benton Village Board, and Board Member of Benton Community Development Corporation
- Sherri Timmerman, Library Media Specialist, Member Benton Community Development Corporation
- Lance Brower, University of Wisconsin Extension

As You Approach The Community...

I. What Was My Perception Before Visiting? What Did I Expect?

- *My expectations were to see a town very similar to Benton. Expected a small, sleepy town, with limited industry and strong community support. More of a bedroom community.*
- *A small town like Benton. A sleepy little town.*
- *I had no prior preconceptions of Fulton specifically; however, my perception of many Illinois riverfront towns is that they aren't always as well kept and inviting as they might be. I wondered if Fulton might be one of those towns.*



II. The "Five Minute" Impression:

Take one drive through the community without stopping. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence; don't talk with the others in your group for this part.

- *Very quiet community that does not appear to have many ordinances. While the homes on the main drag looked nice and well maintained, it was evident that commercial/industrial and residential were intermingled. I was very impressed with the location along the river, and immediately thought that there had to be much potential.*
- *Nice houses but not real fancy.*
- *As a person who loves history and architecture, I was impressed with the architecture of many of the buildings on Fulton's main street. A number of the buildings have been meticulously renovated, and many others have wonderful potential for future restoration. I was disappointed, however, to see that some of the old buildings have been remodeled—not renovated—with little concern for retaining the beauty and integrity of the old building.*
- *One thing that struck me immediately was the lack of curb and gutter on many streets. That's something that I've noticed in several other Illinois towns, however, so perhaps it's not that unusual in your state. Something else that caught my eye during the "five-minute impression," were the signs hanging from the light poles in the downtown area. To the out-of-town observer just passing through, they seemed odd and meaningless. Most towns have welcome banners hanging from their light poles, so these were somewhat curious to me. (When a local merchant later explained their origin, they made sense; however, not every passer-through would have the opportunity for a personal explanation.)*

As You "Drive" Around Town:

You now divide into your teams: one team will drive the town for about an hour while the other members will hoof it and start visiting businesses, city hall, etc. After lunch the teams will switch roles so everyone has a chance to drive the community and to personally walk into stores and visit with people.



III. Driving...Evaluate EACH Entrance.

Go About 1/2 - 1 Mile Out Each Road And Return. List Each Road (61 North, Etc.) And List Positive And Negatives For Each.

- *Traveling North through industrial park – Very nice walking trail – obvious business/industry that is dependent upon water (river access). Grain holding facilities, petroleum-holding facilities, boat repair facilities. While each entity could have been slightly more attractive, overall, the operations appeared clean and well maintained.*
- *Driving in from the South on Highway 84 – Very nice walking trail, nice view of industrial park. However, as you get closer to the 4-way stop, J.T. Cullen has a mess, which cannot be missed. Much old scrap iron, rusting. Not a good sight entering the town. (see picture)*
- *South on Highway 84 – very nice country setting. Nice strip malls and open area at 4-way stop.*
- *Headed east across bridge on Highway 136 from Clinton, IA, - appears to be a nice community located along the edge of the river. Can see the windmill and very nice walking path.*

IV. Driving...Evaluate The Downtown Business Area: (Signs, Appearance, Size, Etc.)

- *Not much signage. Only sign is quite small at 4-way stop (corner of 84 & 136). Big beautiful open area at the 4-way stop, however sign is easily missed. Should be bigger and set back to welcome people to the town. Quite hard to find things. Nice old downtown area that has great buildings with great architecture that could be brought back to life with some TLC! No signs noted to tell how to get to new ball fields.*
- *Sign pointing you to downtown should be closer to the main entrances to town.*
- *The businesses are close together so walking between them is possible.*
- *The benches and over-sized flowerpots are a nice addition to the downtown area. Both are much nicer than those typically seen.*

V. Driving...Evaluate Other Business Area.

- *Newer business area located at the edge of town (corner of Highway 84 and 136). Some very good, clean businesses. Seems to be typical of a town that has two separate business districts (older main street, and newer strip malls).*
- *The business district has a lot of potential.*



VI. Driving...Comments On Residential:

- *Homes appear to be in good condition; however, older homes and businesses appear to be intermingled with commercial. Appears to lack any kind of ordinance to correct or prevent this. Curb and gutter on the main streets and newer residential areas only. No curb and gutter in the older residential areas.*
- *Housing quality entering from the South appears very low and mobile home park is in poor condition. However, the mobile home parks are set off of the road, and are not easily seen when entering the town. (see picture)*
- *Nice houses for the most part.*
- *Some people really take pride in decorating.*
- *While I'm sure they were begun with good intentions, the flowerbeds at a number of corners needed attention. The flowers appeared to have simply been stuck in the ground. The idea is a good one and the result could be very impressive in the community. What might considered are actual mulched beds on the intersections.*
- *The new condo construction is impressive.*

VII. Driving...Comments On:

a. Street Signs

- *Very hard to read white street signs along City's South entrance. However, it appeared that all streets were marked.*
- *Some are hard to read.*

b. Traffic Patterns/Street Conditions

- *Very sporadic curb and guttering. No rhyme or reason to which streets have curb and gutter. Many do not have it at all. Installation of curb and gutter adds a very positive aesthetic feature to each street.*
- *Good.*

Welcome Signs (At Entrances)

- *Sign at the corner of Highway 84 and 136 was not noticed until the third pass. Big open space – little sign. Would be a great place to put a sign with an LED message board. Message board could provide information on community events, business opportunities... May be able to get a bank to sponsor and pay for the sign. Did not notice signs coming in from other directions.*
- *Okay, but they do not make you say "wow."*
- *Other than the sign on the petroleum tank as you enter town from Clinton, Fulton's welcome signs aren't particularly welcoming. There is a wonderful opportunity— in terms of open ground—to have signs that announce your community with fanfare. Large colorful welcome signs with brickwork, trees, and flowers would go a long way to draw people in.*

d. Direction Signs To Parks, Schools, Hospitals/Clinics, Attractions, Services (I.E. Police), Etc.

- *Not visible—if there even were any. Didn't ever find one for the schools.*
- *Hard to see signs to these places.*

VII. Driving... Comments On Industrial Park/Area: Sign Well Defined...Busy...Growing...New...Etc.

- *South entrance along river – not overly busy but has a lot of potential. Happened to stumble on the actual industrial park which looks good, but needs much attention to signage. Looks like they have had good industry growth. Newer, clean industry. (see pictures)*
- *Noticed a smell. Do not believe that it was coming from the industrial park, but rather from Clinton. May want to investigate planting trees along the river walk that would bloom at different times of the spring, summer and fall, and provide an aroma to hide the odor from Clinton. This would also be very aesthetically appealing.*
- *Plenty of room to grow.*

VIII. Driving...comments on schools:

- *Need signage to direct you there.*
- *Schools looked nice from the outside.*
- *High school had some window screens that needed repair.*
- *School lawns and playing fields appeared to be well kept.*
- *Unfortunately, time did not permit us to visit each school in the Fulton District. We were able to visit the high school, however, and were pleased with what we saw. We were struck immediately with the cleanliness and neatness of the building—it's floors, walls, and lockers. Everything shined!*
- *The high school guidance counselor is a wonderful ambassador for his district. In speaking with him, it appears that the staff and the school board are forward thinking on a number of educational and programming issues. During our walk-through of the building, those students we encountered were polite and quite. Access to computer technology appeared to be very good in the high school LMC and a number of other areas and facilities were impressive. While it's difficult to get a true picture of a school simply by looking at bricks and mortar and speaking with district personnel, our initial, overall impression was quite positive.*



IX. Driving...Comments On Parks, Play Grounds, Athletic Facilities, etc.:

- *Very interesting and creative shuffleboard court on 14th St.! Nice park area at water and sewer facility. Nice new recreational area, but no signage. Great bike and walking trails. Surprised at the number of parks – lots!*
- *The walking path along the river is a wonderful asset to your community. It is well cared for and inviting.*

X. Driving...Comments On Other:

a. Hospitals/Clinics

- *Did not notice any hospitals (from memory). Very nice clinic facility located at intersection of 84 and 136. Very nice nursing home.*

b. Billboards/Advertising

- *None noted – all signs for businesses seemed appropriate.*

c. Other

- *Nice nursing home facility in quiet area of town. Entering from South (Hwy 84 – JT Cullen buildings) this is probably the area that is most in need of cleaning up. It's unfortunate that it sits on the main highway and is the entrance to your community. Ordinances are necessary on this one!*
- *It appears that there are not many places to eat in Fulton. The Italian restaurant at the edge of town isn't operational, and another restaurant coming into town is in need of repair work in their parking lot. The lot itself is not particularly welcoming. The blacktop needs to be sealed, and weeds are popping up through the surface.*

XI. Walking Around...Comments On Businesses (Physical Part): Appearance, Displays, Signs, etc.

- *Very nice community. No major concern with physical appearance. Was even noticed that the Waste Water Treatment Plant is located at the entrance to the downtown business district. Thought that the municipality did a VERY GOOD job of dressing it up, and appealing.*
- *Windows in almost every store were dirty and streaked. A window washing service in town could get plenty of business.*



XII. Walking Around...Comments On People: Were They Friendly, Did They Know Answers To Questions, Did They Try To Help, Appearance, etc.

- *Stopped at credit union – friendly and extremely helpful (Byron “Barney” Kasterke –Branch Supervisor). Gave us information on the local housing market, gave us a local newspaper to take home, and offered interest rate information.*
- *Stopped at stamping store on Main St – very friendly. They have a great thing going there! Actually made a purchase!*
- *Stopped at local realtor (River City Realty). Very friendly. Proud of the town! Explained that the real estate market in Fulton is stronger than the real estate market in Clinton. This is because of the tax structure on retirement benefits in Illinois vs. Iowa. Reasonable residential growth and appreciation in the area. Provided a listing of homes for sale in area.*
- *Stopped at local pub (Denny-O’s). Typical local establishment. Bartender was friendly. Nobody else said a word to us. Prices reasonable, beer was cold. (See picture)*
- *Heidi Kolk was very professional, knowledgeable and most of all, friendly.*
- *Shopkeepers were extremely congenial and made us feel welcome.*
- *Various community members we met on the street and on the walking path were very friendly.*

XIII. Community Information: Comments On...

a. Community Brochure (Tourist Type)

- *None found*

b. Businesses/Attractions Brochures Or Directory

- *None found*
- *I found some downtown in one of the businesses as well as at the Chamber of Commerce*

c. Community Profile (Demographic, Industrial Type Information For Prospective Business People, etc.

- *Asked about demographics at 1st Gateway Credit Union. Very helpful. Explained school system and older population due to tax structure on retirement benefits.*

d .Map

- *None found*

e. Other (i.e. Bulletin/Notice Tourism, Kiosks, Etc.)

- *Information center (windmill) only open weekends. This entire area is not being utilized to the full potential. Information center, at minimum, should at least be open daily for visitors to pick up brochures and/or maps of the area and regarding what is available.*

XIV. City Hall...Describe Your Visit:

a. Appearance Of Facility, Including Signing

- *Formerly a bank. Location was reasonable, near downtown business district. Did not see any signage to direct you to the facility. Did not go in building.*
- *Did not go in, but I walked by.*

b. Helpfulness Of Staff

- *Chamber Staff was gone. City Staff told me "Come back later."*
- *Unknown*

c. Other

- *Appeared to share facility with a local bank.*

XV. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit

a. Did People Know Where It Was (Or Who To Refer You To?)

- *No and while in discussion with people, nobody really offered it.*

b. Comment On Information Available

- *Mostly word of mouth from local merchants and businesspersons.*

c. Comment On Staff

- *N/A*
- *It would have been a little nicer to have the City Staff help when the Chamber Staff is out.*

d. Other (Hours, Appearance, Locations, etc.)

- *N/A*

XVI. Other stuff...

a. Public Restrooms (Available, Condition, etc.)

- *Nice public restroom facility by the windmill- and river walk.*
- *Several nice park facilities.*

b . Payphones (Working, Phonebook Intact, etc.)

- *One payphone noted by local restaurant. Did not look for phonebook.*
- *There was a couple that we saw.*

c. Parking

- *Very adequate*

d. Water Fountains, Benches, etc.

- *Flower pots very nice along Main St; however, they appear a little overbearing for the benches in between them.*
- *Nice benches in downtown area!!!*
- *I liked the oversized flowerpots in your downtown area. Some had flowers growing, and some didn't. Fall, obviously, is a difficult time of year for flowers. It might be nice to be consistent throughout the town, however. Perhaps on a certain date, all flowers could be removed and pumpkins, gourds, and miniature hay bales could be substituted. Those items could be changed out for the Christmas holiday season, and so on. The pots are beautiful, and I'm sure they were costly; make the best use of them aesthetically.*

e. Other

- *Golf course is private. 9-hole with waiting list to become a member. Membership costs appear very reasonable. A very nice public golf course overlooking the river, may also be something to investigate. Do not know what is available in Clinton or if the sport is well received in the area. A very nice course could lure people to the community daily for events and league play. May want to do a feasibility study.*
- *Also not adequately utilizing the access to the river. Need a pier and restaurant on the water (located near the windmill).*



WRAP UP

A. Using Your "Senses"...

1. What Does The Community TASTE Like? (Specialty Bakery/Restaurant, etc.)

- *Cold Beer*
- *Could use a snack shop/coffee shop in downtown.*

2. What Does The Community SMELL Like:

- *Like the Dubuque Packing House – not pleasant, but not overbearing either*
- *The smell was quite strong but found out it was coming from Clinton, Iowa rendering plant.*

3. What SOUNDS Did You Hear?

- *Nothing out of the ordinary*
- *Quite, very peaceful.*

4. What Did The Community Feel Like (Emotional Response, I.E. Cold/Warm, Crowded/Deserted, Inviting, Etc., Or Physical Response, I.E. Rough Streets, etc.)

- *Not much traffic, but very friendly*
- *All the people working the stores were helpful and nice.*
- *Warm, friendly community.*

B. List The 5 Most Positive Things You Observed About The Community:

(not necessarily in this order)

- *Location on the Mississippi*
- *Good clean industry*
- *Positive tax benefits for retired persons*
- *Clean*
- *Friendly*

(Town heritage and buildings' architecture are two additional positive things that should be noted.)



C. Describe ONE Idea That You Will Steal For Use In Your Own Business/Community And Describe How You Will Start To Implement It Within The Next 72 Hours:

- *Stamping business – consider other small businesses of this sort.*
- *Walking trail – though we don't have a river to construct the trail along, there are other places that a walking trail will work in our own community.*

D. What Will You Remember Most About The Community Six Months From Now:

- *Very spread out with a lot of potential*
- *The potential for a riverfront district. (We would love to have that in Benton..)*
- *I will remember the riverfront area, the walking path, the hometown feel, and the potential for a beautiful, architectural downtown.*

E. Other Comments (That Just Didn't Seem To Fit Anywhere Else!)

- *Fulton appears to have a severe lack of zoning ordinances.*
- *I had a wonderful visit! I will bring my family down for your festival next year.*

