



First Impressions Revisited*

A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

The Center For Community Economic Development

Community Visited: Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin

Date of Visit: January 28-29, 2003

Visit Completed by (community): Center for Community Economic Development



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Edited: 9-6-2002

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*A revised and updated version of the *First Impressions* program developed by Andrew Lewis and James Schneider, 1991

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

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Date of visit and time spent: We arrived on the afternoon of January 28 (Tuesday) and departed the morning of January 29, 2003.

Weather on date of visit: It was a bit gloomy and cold with very little snow on the ground. This clearly had an impact on our perceptions.

Introduction:

This "First Impressions" visit was a little out of the ordinary in that it did not include an exchange between two communities. Rather it was simply a review of the community by 3 University of Wisconsin Extension faculty members. We suspect that our review would be slightly different than one that you might get through a traditional First Impressions exchange. If any of the constructive feedback in this report is useful, we would highly recommend an exchange between the community of Lac du Flambeau and perhaps another Indian community with gaming facilities. In evaluations from previous participants using the First Impressions program, we know that participants learn a great deal from visits to other similar communities.

As we reviewed our comments, we were concerned that we might be a little harsh but wanted to share our true opinions. I think it would be important to note that this review was conducted by 3 middle-aged white males who are not intimately familiar with the inner-workings of the community. As I reflect back on our visit I am truly impressed with the many public investments and improvements that have been made in the community (school, family resource center, senior center, library, public information/planning office, community center, campground, fish hatchery, casino, etc.). For an unincorporated community of this size, we were very impressed.

We recognize that the needs of the residents need to come first and thus many of these investments were wise indeed. On the other hand, our reflections probably do mirror those of many visitors coming to Lac du Flambeau.

If the community feels that additional visitors, residents and business would benefit the community as a whole, there is much room for progress and we hope that some of our constructive criticism will help you contemplate strategies for improving the way your community might appear to an outsider. On the other hand, there may be higher priorities within the community than building the tourism industry within Lac du Flambeau.

On the other side of the spectrum of feedback, I would say that I don't know of another small unincorporated community in the state of Wisconsin that could boast that they have a library, family resource center, senior center, child care facilities, museum, G.I.S., school, planning, and census departments, computer lab, etc. Clearly... there have been some sound investments in this community. My assessment would be that the community may be on the verge of making some different kinds of investments and that the community is at a cross-roads in terms of determining its future. My assumption is that casino profits and community development grants have assisted with the development of public facilities. The needs of the residents should come first, but I think we all recognized that the community could take great strides on building the tourism industry within the community which would also yield community benefits. The question seems to be....is that what the community wants?

Our intent was to be helpful, not hurtful. If it would be useful, I believe one or more of us would be happy to present our findings to a core group interested in improving the community of Lac du Flambeau. We did enjoy our visit to Lac du Flambeau, and it was an exercise that the three of us can learn from.

1. Prior to Your Visit

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

We have to express our disappointment in the response pieces that you are currently using for visitors and would argue that this should be a **high priority** for the community.

I had no difficulty finding the chamber on the web and was generally impressed with the way it looked. (<http://www.lacduflambeauchamber.com>). There are however some problems with the web site that need to be remedied soon. First of all...I was very interested in the "helicopter tour" of Lac du Flambeau. However...it doesn't work. I waited for several minutes for the clip to load and have most of the video plug-ins that would be required for this type of streaming video.

More importantly, your request for information web form is not operational (www.lacduflambeauchamber.com/contact.htm). After completing the form on December 27'th, I received back a "returned mail" message with a subject line saying "Host unknown (Name server: ot.ose.o: host not found) I had my wife try the form from a different computer with the same results.

I later followed up with an e-mail request for more information with some specific information requests (from "Pam Lew"). The only response pieces that we received as a result of this e-mail request was three separate mailings from three businesses:



The first piece I received was on January 13'th from D-Bar-D Resort (A self-mailer on standard weight computer paper that was a bit worn by the time it arrived).

The second piece I received was from Fence Lake Lodge (A professional 4-color brochure mailed in a nice envelope). This brochure was very well done and included an intriguing "Winter Getaway Special" insert along with an insert with 2002 season rates (Why no 2003 rates?). If I had not already made reservations at the casino for a hotel room, I would have made a reservation here. I went to the web site mentioned in the brochure and was equally impressed with the professional presentation on the web. This is one of the few sites where I could find anything that I would possibly need.....everything from room rates and layouts to the menu's at the restaurants. It looked so attractive that we decided to meet for lunch at the Lakeshore restaurant to plan our visit. The only problem is that the restaurants were closed when we arrived (more on this later).

After I returned from our visit (January 28-29), I also received a brochure/self-mailer from Bystra's Bungalow (A private lake front cottage). There was no response piece for the community of Lac du Flambeau or County, no specific information on what might be going on during this time of year, or responses to the questions which were asked in the e-mail. Just when I was finishing up this report I received a brochure from Lake of the Torches (2-10-03.....more then 5 weeks after the initial request).

On 1-27-03, I called the Chamber number listed on the web site at 1:30 P.M. and said that I would be traveling through the area the next day and asked for a recommendation on where to stop for lunch. I was told that the Casino had a nice buffet lunch. When I asked about the hours for the local museum, she told me that she was not sure but did give me the phone number for the museum (The hours were listed on the Chamber Web site as Tuesday-Thursday 10-2).

I also tried some of the other contacts listed on the "contact us" web page (www.lacduflambeauchamber.com/contact.htm). Please note that there is a typo in "Please" on this page. The toll-free number for the chamber is a big PLUS. When I called the "Vilas County Snow Conditions" number, it was actually the State of Wisconsin Travel Center. It wasn't what I was expecting (a voice recorded message with snow conditions), but the person at the travel center was able to get me snow conditions from the www.travelwisconsin.com web site. When I contacted the "Lac du Flambeau Snow Conditions" number. I was greeted with "Hi", and again I was expecting this to be the beginning of a recorded snow condition message. When he repeated, "hello" I asked, "is this the Lac du Flambeau Snow Conditions line?" And he replied, "Yes, I give that out sometimes". After I talked with him further, he

was friendly and explained that I had reached a bar, and that the lakes were nice right now for snowmobiling and that it was currently snowing (about 3”).

About 2 weeks prior to my visit, I searched the web and found the LdF Chamber of Commerce web site. I completed the request form for information, but it failed to “send”. So, I called the LdF Chamber of Commerce (COC) and left a voice mail message stating that I would be in the area in two weeks and would like some information. I mentioned the fact that I understood that there is no snow for snowmobiling, and asked for suggestions that might interest my family and me.

I received nothing prior to my visit. About one week after my return, I received brochures from Dillman’s and Fence Lake Lodge (attached). The brochures were attractive and inviting. The Fence Lake Lodge brochure included a promotion piece that offered half price rates. During my visit, I stopped at the COC and found several good brochures in the brochure rack (attached).

Did it accurately reflect what you saw?

I was expecting some type of coordinated mailing with some general brochures on the area along with some brochures from resorts and campgrounds. I didn’t receive any of that kind of information (not even any information on the casino), so I really didn’t know what to expect. The one place that did accurately reflect what was mailed was the Fence Lake Lodge brochure...this is a Very nice facility. My only disappointment was that we picked this as a meeting place for lunch and discovered upon arrival that the facility was closed. I understand that business decision given the lack of snow, but something should go in the brochure and on the web site to indicate when the restaurants are open. We ended up getting a very nice tour of the facility, were treated very nicely, and they were able to recommend a place to eat..The Fireside restaurant. While we were disappointed with the closed restaurant, this was the **only** business where our expectations were exceeded in terms of the facility and customer service. We could have left upset but instead were left wondering when we might come back.



Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

2 of the 3 business brochures arrived before our departure for one of us. The second person who requested information received his brochures after the visit.

Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?

No...I found the Chamber site as well as several businesses fairly easily.

What was the quality of information obtained from regional/state agencies and organizations?

I was amazed with the quickness and quality of the information that I got from the “Travel Wisconsin” web site. I went to: <http://www.travelwisconsin.com/u/root/contactus.html> and made a general e-mail inquiry about things to do in the Lac du Flambeau area. Within hours, I received an e-mail with a customized trip with detailed information on: Lake of the Torches Casino, George W Brown, Jr Ojibwe Museum & Cultural Center, Lac du Flambeau Campground & Marina, Lac du Flambeau Fish Hatchery, Lake of the Torches Bingo, Soup & Ski at North Lakeland Discovery Center, Rocking W Stable, Rustic Road 60, Specialty Gift Shop, St. Germain Sport Marine, The Blueberry Patch, Three Lakes Winery, Trees for Tomorrow Natural Resource Education Center, Track Side, Up North Wisconsin, Vilas County Trails Information, Alpine Shop, The, Anvil National Recreation Trail, Barry Aviation, Artists Palette, Inc., Bits 'N Wheels Ranch, Chequamegon-Nicolet Nat'l Forest-Eagle River, Decker Sno-Venture Tours, Moose Creek Ironworks, North Country Sport Marine, Northwoods Children's Museum, Paul's Rent-All, Pepper's Place, and ATV trail information. The e-mail included days and hours of operation along with contact information and the URL if it was available.

Granted...not all of these attractions are in Lac du Flambeau, but this response was much more compelling than the three separate mailings that I received from the Chamber. I would strongly urge you to check out this state web site and provide updates and additions where necessary....its an outstanding resource that represented your region well! From a visitor's perspective....this is the kind of information that is needed to make travel plans. We would urge you to link to this site with instructions on the Lac du Flambeau web site.

2. 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:*

It had been close to 8 years since I had stopped at Lac du Flambeau. I remember being disappointed in the interpretation and display of materials at the museum. I really didn't remember much more than that. At the time, I had two small children and didn't stop at the bingo/casino facility. In general, I looked forward to visiting a typical Northwood's community with some updated casino facilities. I had a vague recollection of a very nice school facility.

My perception of the community was that there would be very little there except the casino, gas station(s), smoke shop(s) and some housing.

I have visited and driven through LdF several times in the past. I have stayed at a resort in the area, have shopped at the grocery store, and visited the casino.

I visited LdF prior to the opening of the first Bingo Hall. At that time, it was a small northern Wisconsin community with little to attract visitors or vacationers. I might stop for gas, but unless I had business in LdF, there seemed little reason to stay. The construction of the new casino changed that perception, but only slightly. I may stop at the casino, but there seemed little for visitors in LdF besides the Casino. In the last two years, I have vacationed in a nearby resort. During those visits, I shop for groceries in LdF,

discovered the park and campground, and the museum. I have noticed the changes in the community – new school, new public buildings, but still did not consider LdF as a tourist destination.

3. The “Five Minute” Impression

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

Coming from the south (Hwy 51 & then west on 47), there were many noticeable billboards for the Lake of the Torches Casino. Driving through town, it was actually a little difficult to spot the casino and the activity at this hub. While driving through town I really felt no “middle ground” on my propensity to stop. If I was a “drive through” traveler I would stop because I was interested in gambling....or I would have kept on driving. More importantly, it seemed to me that most travelers would have to make up their mind to come to Lac du Flambeau by the time they approached Minoqua/Woodruff as there is no real reason to take this westerly approach on hwy 47 (vs. 51). I was very impressed with the school on the left hand side on highway 47...it leaves a very positive feeling about how investments have been plowed back into the community. On the other hand, travelers with families (children) are not the kinds of travelers that would likely stop in Lac du Flambeau. I was also struck by the fact that there wasn't a lot of sign clutter. On the negative side, although it might be subtle, the power lines on both sides of the highway on 47 south of town, detract from the timber-lined entrance to the community. While I understand the difficulties of buried utilities, I was left wondering why there would be power/telephone lines on both sides of the highway.

While there were more businesses, services, buildings and housing than I expected, I felt that the community was disjointed. There was little or no connection between the highway/casino area and the downtown. The space in-between these two areas did not invite the traveler to seek out the downtown area. It was comprised of mundane housing with identical architecture, boarded-up windows and poorly maintained yards. You would need a strong reason to leave the highway and travel past this to the downtown area. I also noticed that there were no sidewalks along this area, again, not encouraging people to access the downtown or to walk safely.

I also noticed that there were ample natural resources that were not designed to be enjoyed by the public. Several beautiful lakes surrounded the community with very little public access. A campground and a couple of small parks were the only exceptions to this. Many communities would love the opportunity to create walkways, bike paths, viewing areas, benches, signage and a system of connected parks/attractions taking advantage of the lake resources. The privy at the wayside with the historical marker was closed and in very poor condition. We were left wondering if this was some type of historic outhouse ☺

As we approached town, we passed by the school while the children were playing at recess. A beautiful school that seemed alive with activity. The school provides an inviting entree to the community and sends a strong signal that this is a real community. Contrast that to the Dells or even Minoqua, where the message is “tourist country”.

As I entered town, I saw a mixture of sights. New houses with fresh landscaping, old boarded up houses, a new casino, there were people on the streets -- unlike some communities that appear like ghost towns.

LdF looks like a community in transition from an older, poorer community dominated by “government” housing and not ready for visitors and to a community that is growing and developing; a better place to live and visit.

However, the transition is far from over. The stark contrast is obvious as soon as you enter LdF. The contrast between houses with boarded windows and refrigerators sitting in the front yard and the beautiful new casino, new housing, and new public facilities.

4. Community Entrances

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

Entrances to the community were generally good, they could be better with a few changes, and they still suffer from the dichotomy between the fresh new and inviting and the old and uninviting.

The entrance along the lake provides an attractive preview of the potential recreation opportunities and tells the visitor that FdL is more than just a Casino.

The entrance by the school is tree lined and very inviting. Unfortunately, a few garish signs spoil the view. Again, there are excellent examples in LdF of how to make signs that are inviting and reflect the heritage of the people of LdF and the beauty of Northern Wisconsin.

There are several entrances to LdF. While this makes access easier, it can make it confusing for the visitor. Signs help. There were many signs directing me to the museum. There were signs outside of town pointing towards the Casino in LdF, but once in town I saw no signs directing me to the casino. It is a small town, but as we drove through town, one of our party asked, “Is THAT the casino?”

The community is fortunate to have a few other “avenues” to the community...snowmobile trails and boats. It was difficult to tell in the winter, but be sure to have some type of welcoming information at the campground near the lake and at points where people might be entering the community via boats.

Snowmobile trails (although not heavily used this year...they officially opened up the afternoon that we arrived) appeared to be well signed and maintained. We noticed that at least two private businesses (Legends Bar and Fence Lake) had also done an excellent job in terms of directing snowmobiles to that particular business (Although some of the “banners” at Legends were in poor repair).

We were struck by the fact that one really has to go “out of there way” to get to Lac du Flambeau. In other words, if a visitor is traveling north through Minoqua/Woodruff, there has to be a reason to take the westerly route through Lac du Flambeau. Signage and relationships with the merchants and tourism groups in this area would seem to be critical. For example, would it make sense to distribute casino coupons or free chips at the gas stations and restaurants in this region?



(One of the nicest snowmobile business signs I have seen)

Approached from South, Highway D: Nice lake front homes away from the community, but condition/appearance of homes and neighborhoods worsened as we approached the town. No “welcome/entrance” signage.

We noticed a lot of propane tanks and then realized that the community was probably not served by natural gas. The old mobil oil sign at the Fire Department was less than attractive. Very nice views of the lake on the left-hand side.



South, Highway 47: Nice new school and playground. Again, not much signage announcing entrance to community. No informal welcome sign other than the standard Green Highway sign with the community name.



Approached from Highway “D” from the North – Nice wooded area, beautiful tree-lined “North Country” entrance. “Casino” sign in disrepair. Again, no signage. This entrance was in stark contrast to another entrance which had been clear cut right next to the road (We don’t recall which one....picture appears below)





Approaching from Little Pines Road from the North – We were impressed by the huge investment in the new street, lighting, curb & gutter, and wide sidewalk. At the same time, we were wondering why there would be this kind of investment that served only a few houses, while large sections of the “downtown” area seemed to be lacking the same amenities. We were later informed that this area was slated for development and will likely attract some interest with its proximity and view of the lake.

Approached from Highway 47, from the North – Beautiful views of the lake, but little public access. Public access site/signage/rest rooms poorly maintained. Several vacant/dilapidated buildings, scattered blight (i.e. the recently boarded up old school house).

We were interested in the history of Old Abe, the community, and the N.W. Fur Trading company that was told on the State historical marker. This monument and the restroom facility are in need of some major attention.

We liked the appearance and “readability of the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc sign, but were not clear if there would be anything here of interest to a visitor.



Very little directional signage. Much of what was there was in poor condition.



There was some very nice identification signage, especially for new, public buildings. But there was also some identification signage that was also in poor condition and should be removed or improved.

Billboards & Advertising:

Again, very little promotion of the community itself. Several efforts at marketing private establishments, but the community as a whole was not promoted. There were not a lot of obtrusive billboards and the Casino seems to have made good use of signage on the highways.



5. Downtown Business Area

Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:

Again, would need to have a reason to go downtown, not a warm, welcoming approach. Good to see new public investments in buildings, such as bank building, museum, public services, etc.

Streetscape could use some improvements with sidewalks, lighting, benches, landscaping, etc.

Business mix **very** limited. Maybe some opportunities for expanded retail/service activities.

The lakefront seems to be ignored. This could be a big selling point for the downtown and may be a good opportunity for new businesses.

While there is a semblance of a downtown, I was disappointed in what was available. The downtown consists basically of a restaurant, a bead store, bank, a trading post/bait store (closed), a smoke shop, a Laundry mat that was in poor condition, and a grocery store on the edge. The grocery store and bank appeared to be very nice for a community of this size. I very much liked the new signing for the Thunderbird Park and new planning & information building. The logo on the planning and information building could be easily incorporated into community welcome signs, road signs etc.



Casino area/highway area looks like any other casino/highway in the state. Besides the lake frontage, there was no effort made to appear different than the rest. A “north-woods” look or other community

design theme would help to set the community apart. A simple landscaping and signage plan would be a big help (or perhaps architectural design elements for new structures and commercial signage.)

The street system was cumbersome, with streets merging at strange angles and one street running through the parking lot of the grocery store (I wouldn't have realized that it was a street, but I watched a county plow remove the snow down the strip of the parking lot.)

Little effort was made to join the highway and downtown.

Downtown is obviously the center of the community – public buildings, the bank, the grocery store. However, there is not much downtown for visitors. We did visit the museum, ate lunch in the restaurant, and visited the retail stores that were open. However, downtown looks more like it is designed to serve the local residents than tourists. That is fine. It appears to serve the residents well. However, if one goal is to increase tourism downtown, there is still work to do.

General Appearance of buildings, displays, signage:

Other than the Fireside restaurant and Chain Three Beads & Gifts, there was really nothing that attracted my interest. I was most concerned about the Coin-Op Laundry which appeared to be in poor shape with no windows. This is clearly a service that would be of interest to travelers, but I suspect few would feel safe in this building. It doesn't matter how safe the community is...many travelers come from unsafe environments and wouldn't feel safe going into an unfamiliar, rundown laundromat without windows. I am not a smoker but the Smoke shop also did not appear to be all that inviting (notice the placement of the dumpster in front of the building).



In general, I felt that many buildings should be demolished and cleaned up, there was too much blight in certain areas and that more attention should be given to maintaining existing structures/signage. Several businesses had ugly barbed wire, that detracted from the entire community.

The physical appearance of the businesses was good. They generally looked well maintained and attractive.

The variety of shopping:

Very little in the way of shopping. We did stop by the bead store which seemed to have a great supply of bead supplies, but little in the way of high end crafts. There were actually some nice gifts in the museum, but I never had an employee come up to assist or to provide help (I was impressed with a 4' birch bark canoe for less than \$100....it wouldn't have taken much to sell it to me....a little information on the process, the artist, etc.). There were also some nice fish decoys but almost all of them had the prices turned down....and again no assistance. After about 15 minutes of looking around, I did poke my head into the office and ask someone about the three different spellings for Ojibwe. I received a very friendly explanation, but that could have easily be converted into an introduction into some of the books and crafts in the gift store...didn't happen.

Once inside the grocery store, shoppers have access to a good selection of products, displayed nicely and easy to get. Outside is another matter. From the outside, the grocery is not inviting. If you know the store, that is not a big problem. However, if you are visiting and unfamiliar with the store, there is little outside that would tempt you to enter. Some windows would help.

The directional sign for the "Ojibwa Mall" was also not in good shape (we are assuming that this was a directional sign for the grocery store, but the store itself is truly not a mall, nor signed as such).



In summary, the center of Downtown is comprised of the public services that serve the residents. That is great for the residents. Many downtowns would love to have services concentrated in downtown. It gets local residents into downtown. That is good. Shopping was located around the edge of downtown. Visitors must travel past several public buildings to get stores. If stores and restaurants are not obvious to visitors, they will not stop. It is difficult to get shoppers to walk even a block.

No real physical connection between the casino and downtown.

The bank has real "bankers hours". How do people who work go to the bank? It is closed.

We felt that the community was probably fortunate to have a bank but the hours were very limited and there did not appear to be an automated teller (more on this when we get to the casino....a \$4 transaction fee!).



How would you rate the variety and quality of the merchandise?

The variety and quality of merchandise was limited at the few locations where anything was available on Main Street. The Museum offered the best potential for purchases that would be of interest to visitors (See “Tourism section” for more comments on the museum.

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

The only business people that exceeded my expectations were the two women at the Fence Lake Lodge.

We also visited a gift shop near the restaurant. The owner/manager returned my greeting and was pleasant, but she was too busy chatting on the phone to wait on us. She did explain that all the items for sale were made by local residents, but that’s it. Local arts and crafts can be big sellers. As we looked around for 10 minutes, she continued to talk on the phone. Finally, I handed her a few items, I paid, and she thanked me, and returned to the phone. There were some nice items displayed in the store. A sales pitch (not a bad thing) probably would have sold me something more.

The food in the restaurant was good. The waitress was reasonably attentive. The restaurant was clean and inviting, the menu offered many standard items and a few that reflect the local culture. Good food. We sat by a window overlooking the lake. A nice view, but somewhat obstructed by the dumpster.

When we asked the waitress at the restaurant about the hours of the museum next door, she was kind enough to ask a few people at the counter, but nobody knew. When I asked the waitress what they prepared “better than anyone else”, she recommended the Indian Taco which was quite good (You’d be amazed by the responses that you sometimes get to this kind of question!).

As mentioned earlier, our expectations were exceeded at Fence Lake Lodge...we got a full tour of the facility after learning that the facility was closed for lunch. The two staff that were there were very nice, helpful, and informative (they recommended the Fireside restaurant downtown).

When I called Lake of the Torches Casino to make lodging reservations (1-7-03, at 2:00 P.M.) I was helped by a very friendly and informed staff person. She asked me if I had seen the Cabin Fever advertisement that was running in the Madison papers and informed me that we could receive that special rate of \$59.95 (rather than the standard rate of \$84). This package also included some complimentary items (I did not see the advertisement but one of the people in our party did). When we first tried to enter the casino, we accidentally tried to enter the gaming section and were greeted by a doorman. He was friendly and provided directions to the hotel entrance (if we wanted to go through the casino, we would have had to have our bags checked). I'm not sure how we missed the directional sign to the hotel...it was there.

When we checked in and when we checked out from the hotel (We stayed the night of 1-28-03) we had some delays that seemed strange given the lack of customers. On both occasions, there was only one staff person (Marge) behind the desk and she was trying to problem solve on the phone and the computer. We never received a "hello...I will be right with you" greeting. Instead, I found myself waiting for the staff person to get off the phone. While it was only minutes before we were served, our greeting could have been handled differently.....this was our "First Impression" of the casino.

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

The community center & library; and the new building that now houses UWEX, Planning functions, GIS, Census, Chamber and the bank. This new building and its sign were very nice. I was pleased that this was located in the Main Street area. I was surprised that the senior Center was not located here. I also liked the signs that had the Indian word included.

It was difficult to tell which facilities were public and which might have been managed as public facilities. The Family Resource Center for example is a very nice facility (also nicely signed!) that we assumed was managed as a not-for-profit organization. This facility is bound to attract some traffic for the downtown area. The same could be said for the library as well as the senior center and child-care facilities (although these two were located on the other side of the casino).



While this may sound naïve, there are many visitors that would not be clear about whether these public facilities are open and available to non-Indian residents. We suspect that many visitors would not be clear

about what would be considered public? That also applies to the natural resources (which resources are on tribal lands and regulated by the Lac du Flambeau?)

Were there the following public amenities?

I noticed very few amenities such as pay phones, benches, public restrooms or appealing landscaping.....although it was winter time and some of these things may have been less obvious. I did like the Thunderbird park just off of the Main Street (and the sign for the park).

Benches:

Didn't notice any

Public restrooms:

They were available in the new information/planning/Extension building, but I don't think they were signed as such.

Appealing landscaping:

Difficult to tell but there did not appear to be any great examples. We were a little puzzled by the green "cattle grates" surrounding the Casino. Our theory was that these were for snowmobile parking, or to keep snowmobile out of the parking lot but it was difficult to tell. Aesthetically, they were ugly.

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

No difficulty with parking on Main street or at the casino.

6. Other Retail Shopping Areas (Big Box Retailers/Shopping Malls)

We did not see any additional shopping areas other than what was available on the Main Street area with the exception of the Mini-Mart Cash Box which did not seem very inviting.



7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

Only witnessed one industry – besides the casino

We drove by the meter factory. It looked like a factory. We did see some old dilapidated signs for businesses that appear to be gone. Tear the signs down.

We were intrigued by the building with the high fence, three strands of barbed wire, and chain link gate. I presumed it was the jail and was surprised when we drove in and the sign said “chiropractor”. What is the story here?

Barbed wire and abandoned buildings do not relay a feeling of safety to visitors. The school relays a message that this is a town that cares about its kids and is a good place to live. The mixed messages confuse visitors and cause them to go elsewhere.

When you combine the barbed wire fences, bars on windows at some businesses, and boarded up windows on some of the residential properties, one had to wonder about the crime level in this small community.



I only noticed the plastics plant which we were later told had been bought by the community some time ago.

8. Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services:

Public services such as senior services, community center, judicial system and others were nice looking, newer buildings. This gave me the impression that the social values of the community were strong.

Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physician, dental, optometrist, and other medical care:

Other than the Chiropractor, we didn't see these. However, we suspect that the community is well served by the hospital and medical services in nearby Minoqua.



What long-term care, assisted living, or nursing home facilities exist in the community?

We didn't see these types of facilities but suspect that they are provided by neighboring communities.

9. Housing

How would you evaluate the existing mix of housing stock?

The condition of the housing was the poorest within the community and the best along the lakes. In other areas there was a mix of nice, well-kept homes and those needing considerable work and regular attention. Blighted yards were a common feature, but not as bad as many communities.

Although it is common in many communities where there are not readily available car parts, many lawns had numerous cars "on blocks". I couldn't help but wonder if a screened "community junk yard" might be a partial answer (a place where salvage vehicles and parts could be stored)?



Nice new homes along “Little Pines” Road. Many would look better with landscaping. Most were kept up nicely, but a few eye-sores could detract from the entire area. Made me wonder about zoning/blight ordinances and enforcement.



There seemed to be a high end and low end of housing and very little in between.

I was a bit puzzled by the whole “Little Pines” road development. I understand the potential for development in this area given the proximity of the lake, but it seemed strange to be looking at this long strip of pavement (about 1.5 miles long) with curb, gutters, and a sidewalk.

Again, a mixed bag. A lot of new and rehabbed housing tells me that good things are happening here. 3 boarded up houses and houses with junk in the front yard tell me something else. This may seem harsh, but there are plenty of casinos to visit and plenty of places to recreate. Visitors need to feel welcome and safe.

Were there any indications that the housing market was depressed?

Actually, I don't recall seeing a single "for sale" sign.

Were there any signs that it would be difficult to find acceptable housing?

We couldn't tell and there did not appear to be a real estate agent in town.

10. Schools

Do the schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of "temporary class rooms"? Are they well maintained? Please comment on the following:

Outstanding school facilities. Are there sidewalks going from town to school? The plastic sign for the school did not seem to match the quality of the school facility but did seem to perform a practical function (Reminding the community of parent-teacher conferences this week).



Public school looked very nice from the highway. New school with nice playground. Questioned location of school away from the community and wondered why it wasn't placed within walking distance.

A++ A clear sign that this is a good place, a community, and a town with a commitment to its future.

Higher Education (Community College, Technical College, University):

It wasn't obvious if the technical college was offering courses within the community...i.e. at the school. However, we were impressed with the new facilities for the County UWEX office which included a nice classroom area and a computer lab.

Were you able to find print information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?

We did not see any, but I suspect we might have been able to pick some up at the Census office. Brian provided us with a copy of the community profile which was very well done.

11. Faith/Religion

Churches of several denominations are located in LdF. They look well established. The churches are attractive.

There were two very nice churches north of town on the lake (Presbyterian and Catholic). Both churches were in a nice location and were in very nice shape. The Presbyterian church had a Missionary grave marker near the parking lot that probably could have used some written interpretation.



12. Civic

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

I did not notice any – other than the museum. Honestly, I was not looking. Sorry.

13. Residents

In what ways did you find (or not find) people helpful?

While I only visited a few businesses (bead shop, restaurant and gas station), my impression was that customer service was not a priority. Given a community apparently facing a difficult snow year, customer service should be the priority. Nobody was rude, but they were also not overly helpful or friendly.

We had two experiences that left a very positive impression with us that would likely seem trivial to the residents. On one occasion two of us were stopped on the side of the road taking pictures of the snowmobile trail system into town. Someone stopped thinking that we were stranded and asked if we needed help. On a second occasion, one of us was waiting in a car along the road, while the other vehicle

went back to take pictures of the school. Again, someone stopped to ask if the stopped vehicle needed help! This simply doesn't happen in many larger communities.

The residents I encountered were pleasant and helpful. When I asked where to eat and asked for directions, they were helpful. No one seriously disappointed me. However, only two exceeded my expectations. 1) The women at the Fence Lake Lodge, and the GIS specialist for the tribe. While I was standing in front of the brochure rack at the COC, the GIS specialist approached me and asked if she could help me (not her job). I asked where to eat and she was very helpful.

Were community members knowledgeable about their community or able to refer you to people who were?

Yes, the few people that we talked with seemed to know the location of the tourism office, museum, etc....

Did residents reflect the diversity that is represented in the rest of the country? Are there some segments of the population that would not feel comfortable in this community?

Unlike most of the rest of Wisconsin, LdF is an Indian community. This is an asset as there are many people that are interested in learning more about the Lac du Flambeau Indian culture and history. Everyone that we met within the community was friendly, but we have already indicated where a little improvement in customer service would have gone a long way.

14. Public Infrastructure

Streets, street signing and lighting:

Street signs seemed fine. You might consider putting community logo on new street signs to reinforce community pride.

Traffic patterns were basically linear, with few "blocks" to build a community around. New housing followed the linear path of the street system, again, not encouraging a sense of neighborhood or community pride and obviously a costly way to develop.

See comments under "other business area" regarding comments on highway traffic patterns.

Hard to tell street conditions in snow.

Not enough. No attempt to show internal pride of community in welcome signs. What is the community proud of? This story should be told. A common theme/logo could be shown on the welcome signs and throughout the community (banners, street signs, identification signs, direction signs etc).

Land Use Planning:

As I stated earlier, lots of nice public buildings. Attractive and inviting. There does not appear to be any plan for their placement. The businesses district and public buildings are scattered around the central

district. I am not sure how foot traffic or auto traffic flows between the public buildings and/or retail and service businesses downtown. An eclectic mixture of uses. It may work well for residents. Somewhat confusing for visitors.

Some very nice signage in LdF. It looks like a work in progress. Keep up the good work. Again, tear down the old rusty out-of-date sign. We did see one sign for the casino that was hanging upside down by a wire. Installing nice signs is important. Maintaining them is just as important.

Sidewalks:

Beautiful sidewalks in the area of new homes and to-be-developed homes (but strange to see a 1.5 mile sidewalk with few homes when many parts of town do not have similar improvements). Downtown needs some work. In addition, access from the casino on foot is not ideal. Of course it WAS winter.



Public Parks:

School playground looked nice. Few other parks for kids that I could see, especially within walking distance of the population. Thunderbird park appeared to be very nice but better suited to summer use. There seemed to be an opportunity for a public skating rink but we didn't see one.

The amphitheater and park looked nice (again, it was winter).



Public Restrooms:

I did not notice any public restrooms.

I believe there was a public restroom in the new planning/information building.

City/Village/Town Hall:

We should have stopped, but we didn't stop at the town hall south of town. With its physical separation from the community of Lac du Flambeau, I suspect few people would stop here and that there would be very little information for visitors. If that's not the case, there needs to be some kind of sign. The building did look like one of the more interesting historic buildings in the area.

Police/Fire Protection/Emergency Medical Services Facilities:

For a small community, it is fortunate to be served by a fire department and ambulance service right in town. We did not notice a police department.



Public Parking:

Parking was not a problem, but it was the middle of a snowless winter and a weekday. It looked like parking during busy times may be a problem.

Library:

Again....it was nice to see a public investment in a library on Main Street.



Landscaping/street trees:

Some nice landscaping in newer residential areas. I did not notice much in downtown. Again, an ugly cloudy winter day so, I may have missed it. Although some houses had some nice landscaping, many were simply on barren lots.

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, other misc.:

This is an area which could be improved.

Youth Centers/Recreational facilities (including pools, athletic fields, skating rinks, etc.):

We did notice child care facilities at the community center but it seemed like there were not a lot of recreational opportunities for youth other than the nice playground facility at the school and in Thunderbird park. There may have been facilities behind the school that we could not see.

Senior Citizen Centers/Meal sites:

There was a very nice Senior Center facility.



15. Recreation/Tourism

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

The casino is THE draw for tourists and visitors. However, driving around the area revealed beautiful lakes, woods, and vistas. We saw large signs for the casino all the way from Madison.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations:

Lodging at the casino was very nice. I did not see any other lodging options, except the campground in town.

Although there are several area resorts that we could have considered we stayed at the casino hotel. This facility had nice accommodations including a swimming pool (See comments in customer service section above).

We did not check out the campground. Not much to see in the winter.

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

There were several recognizable entertainers that were scheduled for the casino. When we asked a few of the area business people if they thought they benefited from tourism traffic to the casino, these businesses emphasized that they got “overflow” from some of the entertainment events at the casino. We didn’t see promotion for any smaller community events like the ice fishing contest in Minocqua.



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

The community not does appear to be taking full advantage of its close proximity to the lake. While the campground provides access, there are other opportunities for bike and walking trails. Also, there are few businesses that are located in a manner that takes full advantage of the lake views (the restaurant appears to be the exception).

Are there any significant man-made attractions?

The museum is very nice and well advertised.

I particularly like the hands-on items in the museum that allow people to touch and see how a piece of wood is split to make strips to weave a basket.

There were 3 people staffing the museum when we visited. No other visitors were present. Near the end of our visit, we asked a few questions. One of the staff provided us with good informative answers. She was very pleasant. She responded to our inquiries very well, but in the 10 minutes we spent in the museum and the gift shop, no one approached us, provided any information about the exhibits, or asked if we needed help in the gift shop.

I stood and gazed at the fish decoys in the gift shop for 10 minutes. My colleague admired a 4’ birch bark canoe that was for sale. If anyone would have opened the glass case of decoys or provided information about the canoe, we probably would have spent \$150 in the gift shop. However, we spent nothing.

The merchandise in the gift store was good (better than anything available on Main Street).

The fish hatchery was intriguing but did not appear to be open for tours in the winter. We suspect that this site would be capable of drawing visitors during the summer months.

The amphitheater and park looked nice (again, it was winter)...but we were unclear about how the amphitheater was used in the summer.

THE CASINO – Nice facility – typical of “new” Casinos in Wisconsin. I will bet it is nice in the summer. In the winter, it is pretty much a parking lot and big building.

We parked in the lot and walked into the casino entrance with our bags. A very nice man told us that the lodging entrance was around the corner. At the front desk, the check-in person was very pleasant. However, every time I went to the desk with a question, I had to wait while the clerk finished whatever she was doing on the computer or on the phone. I only had to wait a minute or two, but that is TOO long. Again, once the clerks acknowledged me, they were very pleasant.

Contrast this to the Fence Lake Lodge, where the clerk and hostess acted like they were actually glad to see us.

The TYME machine charge was \$4.00. I have never seen a charge greater than \$1.50. Any charge in the Casino is pushing a bit. A \$4.00 is outrageous and insulting. This is a casino!!!

We ate dinner and breakfast in the Casino restaurant. The hostess seated us immediately, the waitress was attentive, the food was good and inexpensive, but again at checkout time we had to wait for someone to take our money. In the casino, things were pleasant and clean. The Blackjack dealers were friendly and helpful. The woman who helped us fill out our players cards was very friendly and helpful.

Playing slots is an isolated experience. I played for a few hours. No one from the casino asked me anything while I was playing. Once, while wandering through the casino, one man said, “good evening”. I finally found the complimentary soda machine. I heard someone announcing, “drinks” but, saw no cart.

I saw several employees chatting with what appeared to be “regulars”. I lost about \$50, less than I expected to lose.

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.

Yes, and the Staff was very helpful and friendly.

Decent selection of brochures.... Looked about right.

Chamber office has limited hours, not real visible or easy to find.

We walked into the COC for info. The brochure racks were full of good info. The COC door was locked. It was 3 PM on a Wed in the middle of winter so, that’s understandable. Other staff (GIS and UWEX) provided good information. The COC director later joined us and answered a number of questions.

We found the COC, but had to ask for directions. Nice brochure rack. Initially there was nobody in the office....but there was someone moving boxes who eventually helped us.

I liked the information sign in front of the building. The new building that housed the chamber is quite nice and we found the staff to be helpful and informative. The brochure rack had a number of brochures and newspapers, but I can’t say that I found one general publication that represented Lac du Flambeau as a whole.

One suggestion I would have for the Chamber would be to create a short “answer book” that would list various attractions and their hours along with answers to questions that visitors might ask (For example, what are the hours of the museum, where could I wash clothes? Restaurant choices with menu’s). These books could be placed at the various businesses and public offices in the community.

Some of us wondered why the Chamber would not be located at the Casino as it would help get people in, and give them a reason to stay.



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

The museum has the capacity to attract return visitors if the exhibits were rotated and the interpretation improved. I was very impressed with the fish decoy exhibit that was being worked on and this is an exhibit that could also lead to gift store sales. I would say that the casino was “average” and given its location would not be the basis for a return trip. As I mentioned before, I was impressed with the tour that we received at Fence Lake Lodge and will likely schedule a follow-up business or pleasure meeting there.

Community Brochures

O.K. – Not great, but better than many

16. Using your Senses

About what I expected. I have been to LdF several times before. There are not many picturesque northern Wisconsin communities. LdF was no better or worse than the typical very small Northern Wisconsin community. The school was very nice (as it is in many N Wisconsin communities). Housing was better than in many, although there are some very prominent bad examples.

The Casino does not dominate the town. It is not the center of the community. That is very good for residents. However, visitors are more likely to go straight to the casino and then, leave without visiting LdF. That is fine and understandable if the goal is to insulate the community from the casino. If the goal is to gain some spillover economic benefit from Casino visitors, there is still some work to do.

Nothing I encountered in LdF was bad. No one was rude, I felt safe, I had no problems, the room and food was good. However, nothing exceeded my expectations either. No one went out of their way to make me feel welcome. I was left with no compelling reason to come back to LdF or the Casino.

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

Food at the fireside and casino was good and quite reasonable, but nothing memorable that would make me come back. I was intrigued by the menu at the Fence Lake Lodge.

What did the community smell like?

It was winter. The air was crisp and smelled like northern Wisconsin was an overcast day, but it still felt like N Wisc.

What sounds did you hear?

The town was very quiet. That happens in the winter in N Wisc. No snow, so no snowmobiles. I imagine it is much less quiet when there is snow on the ground.

The sounds of slot machines!

Did you have any experiences that impacted the way the community feels?

The community felt like it was dripping with unrealized potential.

LdF was busy during the day. It seemed to be a busy little community where people know each other.

While there was never a reason to worry about safety, we were puzzled by the barbed wire fence, bars on some windows, and boarded up windows. If the boarded up windows and doors was for energy conservation, there might be potential for some public energy conservation programs and audits?



16. Wrap-up

What are the 5 most positive things that you observed about the community?

1. Water resources
 2. Nestled in North Woods
 3. New Schools/playground
 4. Investment in Social Services
 5. New investment in public buildings and homes
-
1. Large investments in public infrastructure....school, community center, library, public buildings, etc.
 2. “New” Casino
 3. Area lakes and resorts (Fence Lake Lodge in particular!)
 4. Museum
 5. Some of the new signs

What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

1. Attracting businesses to the Main Street area that would serve both visitors and residents
2. Addressing blight....boarded up windows, barb wire fences, cars on lawns
3. Improving the aesthetics and visibility of the casino area.
4. Improving customer service/community awareness
5. Improving the system currently used for responding to visitor requests along with the development of a fulfillment piece that promotes the entire community.

Because of the many positive attributes that the community already has (lakes, tribal revenue, casino revenue, northwoods location), I have to believe that the major obstacles facing the community are more attitudinal in nature. While there is evidence of some positive improvements (new housing and sidewalks, for example), the overall condition of the community makes me wonder if the following are some of the community's biggest challenges:

1. Incentive - is there a need (incentive) for economic and community development in addition to the casino?
2. Reference Point - How many of the residents have lived there all or most of their lives and do not feel the need to change their surroundings, because that's all they know?
3. Motivation - Is there peer pressure, ordinances, ordinance enforcement and grants/loans to encourage people to maintain their homes, yards and businesses?
4. Leadership - Does the community have the leadership that can take advantage of federal community development and housing programs and offer these to their residents? (we met their tribal planner and Brian, of course, which both seemed very progressive and capable, but what kind of support do they receive from the top? Also, its possible that they do have these programs in place, but that it will take years before the whole community is completed)

5. Organization - Does the community have in place a grass-roots organizational structure to encourage improvements (e.g. chamber of commerce working committees, planning commissions, downtown development groups, economic development groups)?

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

Untapped potential. How many communities would die for the trifecta of water, casinos and federal funding for reservations? This could be a “jewel” in the Northwoods with well-designed public improvements and marketing. I could go on and on here, but I think you get the idea from the above comments.

I will remember how much development has occurred since my last visit. Otherwise, Not much, and that is the problem for LdF if their goal is to increase visitors. The casino, certainly. The fish decoys. The school. The new houses and the boarded up houses. The \$4.00 TYME machine.

I will remember the impressive public investments in the community as well as the casino. I will also remember what I perceive to be a lack of capitalization on the community’s history. While I enjoyed the museum, I think the interpretation and visibility of the museum could be improved. Both the museum and the casino could greatly improve the availability of books, crafts, and other items that tell the story of the Lake of the Torches community.

Other comments (that just didn't seem to fit anywhere else!)

The community seemed to have very strong elements and very weak elements and not much that was average. For example, most public buildings were in good condition and attractive, whereas many of the private homes were in disrepair. Maintaining the positive features of the community while improving the negative would make a great improvement.

Enjoyed speaking with the Extension Agent and Tribal Planner. I was happy to learn that sidewalk improvements in the downtown and bike paths were on the community’s “to do” list.

This was clearly the wrong time to be visiting Lac du Flambeau and it likely influenced our view of the community. I am confident that the community looks quite different in the summer (or even in a normal winter with snow!).

None of us are casino experts and much of the feedback we have shared relates to customer service. While reflecting on this visit, I read an article in Fast Company magazine that was based on an interview of Gary Loveman, CEO, Harrah’s Entertainment Inc. (See: <http://www.fastcompany.com/online/67/inthehotseat.html>). When asked, “**What business are you in: retail or gaming?**”, he replied: “I think of Harrah's as a large-scale consumer business that happens to be in the gaming business. But that certainly is not its ancestry. Five years ago, it would have been very much a gambling company. Now, we still make all of our money from gambling. But the way that we think about our challenges is consistent with the broader approach to consumer retail”

If First Impressions seems like an academic exercise, we would argue that non-expert opinions from outside the gaming industry can be quite valuable. Interestingly, Gary Loveman used to be a tenured professor at Harvard, and when asked, “**What do you value more, Cambridge classroom smarts or**

Vegas street smarts?" he replied, "The sophistication of concepts that were developed in other industries had never been applied in gaming. But people like me, who came from outside the industry, applied those concepts to gaming and have had remarkable results. We went out and spent 7 million bucks to develop one of the world's only hotel yield-management systems -- like the systems that the airlines have -- which allows a telephone reservationist to decide what to charge each customer for a room at any of our 26 hotels on any given day in such a way as to optimize profitability. By introducing that system, we've increased our gaming win per room by 15%. That's a huge number."

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!

The new signs are very nice and the progress LdF has made in making their community more inviting to visitors. Certainly, there is work yet to do, but it has come a long way, in a relatively short time. And, the progress is more than just the Casino. The entire community looks more inviting.

After visiting the State's web site I was reminded of how well this system works and how important it is for communities to review what the state is sending out (and to contribute ideas and updates!).

I am constantly reminded of how good customer service and salesmanship can yield both increased profits and customer satisfaction. Our experience in the gift shop was a good example of that. If someone would have come out and told me a little bit about the 4' birch bark canoe (the person who made it, the time that went into it, why it was significant...etc.), it would have returned with me to Madison. Two of us were also interested in the fish decoys and it wouldn't have taken a lot of sales work to sell us a few of those. I would highly recommend that the museum look at some of the books on fetishes as a means of how these kinds of items might be promoted. People who purchase fetishes like to know about the artists, and the material used in the craft. The same would be true for items like the fish decoys.