



Chamber of Commerce

November 23, 1993

Andy Lewis
Grant Co. UW Extension
Resource Agent
Bronson Blvd.
Fennimore, WI 53809

Dear Andy:

Thank you for the use of the "First Impressions" program, We visited Menomonie, WI on November 3 and enjoyed our day touring the city.

Our team included Kathleen Eickhoff, Rice Lake Main Street Association, Mgr.; Robert Heffner, recently retired from The Chronotype; Milton Jantzen, Chamber Tourism Committee Chairman, owner of Water's Edge Resort; Kathy Morse, Clerk/Treasurer, City of Rice Lake; Roger Morse, recently retired; and myself, Marlene Arnold, Executive Director, Rice Lake Area Chamber of Commerce.

Enclosed is a copy of our report for you. Again, thank you.

Sincerely,

RICE LAKE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Marlene Arnold".

Marlene Arnold
Executive Director

pc: James Schneider, Grant Co. Economic Dev.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A Report for
Menomonie, Wisconsin
From
Rice Lake, Wisconsin

November 1993

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Menomonie, Wisconsin
November 1993

1. What was my perception before visiting? What did I expect?

- Aware it is a college town.
- Had dinner there just once (October 93), didn't stop.
- No special expectations.
- I expected to find a larger downtown and a smaller industrial park.
- A nice community with a great deal of historic significance.
- I had thought of Menomonie as almost two communities: the north end and the south end. I thought it would be generally quiet and staid because of the old 2 year teachers college. I knew, because of the present campus, there would have to be some "energy" areas.
- I knew it had a large campus and expected alot of students. I didn't really know - because it had been a long time since I had been there. I knew the KOA was located on the Red Cedar River.

2. The "five minute" impression:

- Very spread out - north to south.
- Sidewalks and streets were clean, having so many students around
Congratulations! Quiet generally, Very old town - old homes
by campus.
- After our drive through the community I was very impressed with
the growth, neatness of the town, and yet its quiet atmosphere.
- Impressed with the diversity and use of land.
- Busy college community.
- The road system is confusing, but the new growth east of town
was positive.
- Downtown small, spread out. New Industrial Park well out of
city (very good location). Clean & neat. Houses nice, even in
older areas. Government must be doing well as have mainly new
buildings. University dominates N-S axis (Hwy. 25),

As you "drive" around town:

-I was the driver, so my concentration was focussed on driving more than signs, etc.

-94/25 is well developed with the 'right' retail/service businesses. Narrow residential streets east of Stout could be one-way? Riverside park was very attractive.

-Parks were neat and well kept up. Good signage. New housing seems to be happening off of Hwy. 29 going East. Seemed like we had to do alot of driving to find things. Never did see High School.

3. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.

-Hwy. 25 coming from north going south: Big welcome sign from a beer distributor - also same sign on Hwy. 29 coming from West going East. Mobile Home parks on north end of town. Hwy 29 coming from East going West - nice service club sign. Overall community looked neat.

-Hwy. 25 North entrance off Hwy. 94 is busy, neat well maintained: A nice commercial district for those living on the north side. Hwy. 29 East: Growth very visible, east side industrial park very impressive. Liked signs showing direction of each industry. Entrance into town was large, showing organizations. Hwy 29 West: Generally neat area, but does not give indication the vitality of the community as does the east entrance. Hwy 25 south: Definitely the older area south of college. Neat, but again does not give a hint about the City's history, growth, & college.

-25N: Good appearance. Lots of eateries and motel. Like the Freeway-exit. 25S: Rural, nice trailer court. Rolling, old homes. Nice. W: Wastewater treatment plant. Rural/farm. E: Industrial park- & hospital, Nice homes just north. Sense direction of development.

-25 North was well developed as was 29 East. 29 West and 25 South seem like the least used entrances and reflect development and attractive appearances.

-29 West: Wastewater treatment plant appearance good. 29 East: **Good** growth, narrow road to industrial park, signs good, lettering hard to read and arrows. 25 South: Seemed like the quiet/private way into town. 25 North: Service/retail businesses well planned in this area.

4 a. Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:

-Very active downtown.

-Congested, clean, available parking.

-Downtown seems very active during mid-week, benches would be a nice useful extra. Better/larger signage is needed for public library and Chamber of Commerce. Handicap stalls on Main Street need to be painted on asphalt and signage updated.

-One street, about 2 blocks long. One block taken mostly by nice old building.

-Streets narrow, but traffic not especially impeded. Very few vacant stores; age shows, but district again neat. Mable Tainter Theatre could use a bath outside (bricks could be cleaned).

-Clean, signs were good. Talked with 2 guys cleaning bricks on a building. They were interesting. No benches to sit on - Does downtown area only cover the area where the Main Street office was on? People friendly.

4 b. Driving... evaluate other business area:

-All appeared clean and busy. Hwy. 29 going East was very impressive. Growth seems to be going that way. Public Library could have a bigger (larger) sign, didn't appear to be safe to cross from the Chamber of Commerce to the Library and other buildings.

-As mentioned above, the north side business district seemed very vibrant and uncluttered. Newer business were naturally neat and clean.

-Generally neat/clean/tidy. Very spread out.

-Nice planned service development near WITC with access roads.

-Other business areas not easy to find.

5. Driving... comments on residential:

-Housing around downtown appears to be student housing? The new housing near the industrial park (Rassbach Realty) is a wonderful addition.

-Appears to be growing with some very nice additions.

-Very attractive residential areas growing north of hospital, but streets east of Stout are too narrow for 2 way traffic and parking.

-No trash. Homes looked interesting.

-I was impressed with almost every area of residential housing; particularly many large and old homes that people took considerable effort to make attractive. I assume some of those provide student housing. Yards were generally well kept. It

shows pride in the community.

-Older homes seem to be well kept up and used for student housing. One new addition with a "Rassbach Realty" sign on. Homes looked very nice.

6. Driving...comments on:

a) street signs:

-Some what hard to see in spots.

-Some hard to see, tucked behind poles.

-Good.

-Street signs were hard to locate and read in some isolated areas.

-Public signs were small and hard to read.

-Lack of signage to public offices (courthouse, city hall etc.).

b) traffic patterns/street conditions:

-Nice options for traveling around town (through downtown/around university).

-Traffic congested downtown and around college. Streets were average.

-Traffic congestion was noted downtown, with some very difficult intersections to pass through as a newcomer.

-Downtown has odd set-up with wedge-shaped street configuration.

-In downtown area, pattern was dictated by the original layout with the exception of that area, getting around was easy. For the most part streets were in good shape.

-Good, Appears to be sort of hard getting around in some places. Traffic moved well.

c) Welcome signs (at entrances):

-2 beer signs welcomed; service club sign was very neat and nice.

-Beer distributors apparently sponsored most of them.

-Beer company and service clubs only.

-The welcome sign noted was a beer advertisement, which may offend some people. Maybe a service club welcome sign would be better suited.

-Okay.

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

-Well signed.

-Signs were hard to find and read for a first timer, but it may be because there was so much town and little time,

-Good parking at boat launch/park for vehicles/trailers, but entrance lacks signage as a dead end road.

-Very good. Many parks well signed.

-Did not spot them first time through. I'm not sure I saw any directional signs to municipal building.

-Never did see High School with all our driving. Ran into police department. If in an emergency, being new to the area, it could be hard to find the hospital. Once there is was marked.

7. Driving...comments on industrial park/area:

-Appears to have recent growth. The signs listing industries are very good. Is it in the City limits or not?

-Liked signs listing industries in the park and direction to them.

-See 2.

-Industrial park signage could have a photo or brief description of project/service at each company's sign. Park seems well planned, but unsure if it is in city limits, didn't see city sign until closer to WITC.

-Clean, growing and perfect location.

-Excellent signage in industrial park, very helpful!

8. Driving...comments on schools:

-Average.

-Schools seem modern and up to date.

-Noted one very new school - nice.

-Did not go to High School.

-Saw only one - appeared new on Hwy, 29.

9. Driving...comments on parks, playgrounds. athletic facilities. etc:

-Nice parks - public boat landing. Well equipped playgrounds.

-Nice athletic facilities in conjunction with fairgrounds. Noticed playgrounds throughout city, even outside parks. The parks we saw were very nice and neat.

-Good neighborhood parks that seem planned and properly equipped.

-Many small parks in residential areas and showed signs of citizens use.

-Menomonie has many parks which is very important for a community. They were well signed and well kept.

10. Driving...comments on other:

a) Hospital/clinics:

-Well signed and very accessible.

-Hospital seemed to be easy to get at, not in a residential area.

-Hospital was located in a convenient location, not in a congested downtown area or quiet residential area.

-Easy access off Hwy. 29 to hospital.

-Easy to get to off of Hwy. 29 - once we saw it.

b) billboards/advertising:

-Didn't see alot.

-Did not notice a lot of billboards lining the highways into town.

-Didn't particularly notice.

-The welcome sign was discussed in a prior line item,

-The welcome signs with "Bud" advertising were noticeable, not good or bad.

11. Walking around...comments on businesses (physical part):

-Businesses appeared economically strong with attractive merchandising.

-The downtown businesses have nice window displays and keep the sidewalks tidy.

-Downtown merchants have made an effort to keep shops looking decent. Sidewalks were kept clean, signs on store fronts were informative, but not intrusive.

-Store fronts give a welcome feeling and people were very friendly in the stores. I went into several because of outside appearance. Sidewalks are clean.

12. Walking around...comments on people:

-Saw only the 2 guys working on the bricks - were very nice to talk with. Waitress didn't know direction to City Hall - she was a student maybe from out of town, but tried hard to find out.

-Pedestrian traffic was not very heavy. One woman gave a pleasant greeting. A shop employee smiled warmly when I looked inside while passing. A waitress did not know that City Hall was in the Courthouse, though she seemed to know where the courthouse was. She got directions, but they were not quite accurate. Stopped a mailman for direction - He said "Right over there," but was a block or so off. Two women in a downtown variety store knew exactly the street City Hall was on and that it was on the third floor of the courthouse.

-Very friendly.

-Some sales clerks were very helpful, some ignored customers other than myself, while they visited about personal items. The Army Surplus clerk gave a positive image of the community and showed pride in the cooperation with the college.

-City Hall custodian was very friendly and helpful.

-Were very friendly and willing to find answers to questions they personally couldn't answer.

13. Community information: comments on....
a) Community brochure (tourist type).

-Menomonie - Magical Weekends: Excellent! Community Visitors Guide: Information under the photos would help those unfamiliar with the area.

-Complete, well presented and easy to read,

-Good.

b) Business/attractions brochures or directory"

-Bed & Breakfasts and Resorts were the only things I asked about. Had nice brochures.

-The downtown shopping/entertainment guide - attractive, numbers on the map are difficult to read.

c) Community profile (demographic, industrial type information for prospective business people etc.):

-(No comments were made).

d) Map:

-Okay.

-Clear and easy to read. It is so helpful to pin point so many important parts of the community.

e) Other (i.e. bulletin/notice board, kiosks, etc.):

-(No comments were made).

14. City Hall...describe your visit:

a) Appearance of facility, including signing:

-Floor number and directory not listed on doors used by the stairs.

-Directional signage to city hall/courthouse was non-existent in the downtown area. Maybe a city map located on Main street corners would help visitors.

-Looking for city hall, I saw sign "Dunn County Courthouse" and I turned back because I thought I had gone too far. When I found it, I noted there was only one directory of offices in the entire building. There should be directories at each entrance and possibly on each floor. There is no indication at each floor what is beyond the doors.

b) Helpfulness of staff:

-Called at City Clerk's office (shared by Treasurer) was promptly waited on by the deputy treasurer. I wanted the building inspector and she promptly escorted me to that office. He was not in, nor was his assistant. She answered my questions regarding that department to the best of her ability. Very helpful.

-Deputy City Treasurer was very helpful, explaining mill rates,

property taxes and quick to offer a tax bill insert memo,

-Custodian helpful repeatedly. Clerks staff was polite and showed interest.

15. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit.

a) Did people know where it was (or who to refer you to?):

-(no comments were made).

b) Comment on information available.

-Several, reasonably well stocked. (Don't have many resorts or bed and breakfasts).

-Abundance of information available on a variety of activities/places,

c) Comment on staff.

-Very friendly and informed - a 'good community representative.

-Very friendly.

d) Other (Hours, appearance, locations, etc.)

-Size - small. Location - might be hard for newcomer to find the first time.

-Location visible, but odd for a chamber. They are usually in the central business district.

16. Other stuff...

a) Public restrooms (available, condition etc.).

-Didn't see any - only where we ate. They were okay, somewhat old.

-In a bar/restaurant, the restroom (there were more than one) was "very basic" - not a good lock on door.

-I did not locate any public restrooms in the downtown area, outside of the businesses.

b) Payphones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)

-(no comments were made).

c) Parking.

- Fine, I'm sure because of the parking meters.
- Seemed to be plentiful.
- Adequate for mid-day visit.
- Street - metered.
- There appeared to be adequate parking.

d) Water fountain, benches, etc.

- Benches would be a useful extra in the downtown.
- None located downtown in the area I visited.
- No benches in downtown business district.
- Didn't see any.

Wrap UP:

A. Using your "senses"...

1. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/restaurant etc.)

- Food was good at the restaurant downtown. Went to buy pastry - to late in the day and very smokey.
- The Buck, our lunch spot, had a good variety and nice specials.
- Lunch was good. Bakery was SMOKEY. Donut was fair at best.

2. What does the community SMELL like?

- Clean.
- There were no strong, unpleasant odors noted.

3. What SOUNDS did you hear?

- Very quiet all over - even at the campus area.
- Very quiet community - was especially impressed with the college area. Students were walking throughout the campus, but there was little noise.
- There were no loud, uncomfortable noises noted.
- Not noisy, some traffic.

-Activity - hustle & bustle - students, shoppers, business people and residents.

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.).

-I felt welcome in all the businesses. Lady at Mable Tainter was very nice.

-I felt like I was sitting with one other person in front of a fireplace in a Nursing Home. It was quiet, it had everything I needed, and those I met were courteous and friendly and helpful. But I felt like I dare not yell!

-Downtown felt relaxed and comfortable, not loud and busy on the sidewalks.

-Warm. Not very busy. Very friendly help in shops,

-Busy, active, and alive.

B. List the 5 most positive things you observed about the community.

1. Sense of history & place.
2. Industrial park signs.
3. Proactive planning seems evident.
- 4.
- 5.

1. Friendly.
2. Clean.
3. Well signed,
4. Lovely lake setting,
5. Nice college town.

1. Industrial Park was well planned and growing.
2. Residential areas were neat and well groomed.
3. A variety of businesses are locate in the community.
4. The hospital was in a very good location.
5. There are numerous well-equipped parks.

1. A definite effort to present a good image.
2. The apparent progressive attitude of the city fathers.
3. The melding of the historic and modern
4. The neatness of the properties in general.
5. The maintenance of the stately old houses.

1. Sign for industrial park.
2. Historic buildings are great.
3. Many old homes and well kept up.
4. Friendliness of the clerks in the stores.
- 5.

- 1.

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

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:

-I have been planning to insert a mill rate hand bill in the 1993/94 tax bills. The sample I received from Menomonie was very helpful to me with deciding what to include and how.

-Industrial park signs - work with industry/service committee with/in chamber.

D. What will you remember most about the community six months from now:

-The abundance of historic buildings and attractiveness and architectural style of new construction. Most significant: Mable Tainter Theater.

-Old buildings (especially Theater), clean, neat.

-The growing industrial park and its near perfect location.

-The friendly people of downtown and the unusual architecture of the buildings.

-How well the college and downtown seem to get along physically.

-How it appears to be 2 different communities. North and south of the bridge.

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

-At the Red Cedar Trail Depot area - the pesticide shed is out of place - not a good location for picnic tables.

-The pesticide storage facility at the entrance to the State Trail should be moved, Some of the Fairgrounds buildings need some maintenance.

-Post office not handicap accessible. Staff said to use rear ramp. No handicap parking in rear. Parking was noted for employee only.

-The Army/Navy store clerk visited about the downtown and indicated his business was doing well. He showed pride in the growth of downtown.

-Crosswalk between Chamber and Library would be ideal. Churches

were well signed and attractive. "Pesticides" storage near State Park Trail Office/picnic grounds was not appealing nor inviting.

-Unusually quiet for a college town, University must dominate town, but don't see much evidence. (Exception: "ABC" Children's Store),

-Signs for tourism information to Red Cedar State Trail - visitor center - this may be discouraging that there are limited hours to get information.