

# *Impressions*

of

**PLAIN, WISCONSIN**  
**BY BLOOMINGTON, WI**  
**VISIT CONDUCTED 5/29/92**

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*A program for community improvement*

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*Developed by:*

**Andy Lewis**

*Grant County UW-Extension Resource Agent*

**James L. Schneider**

*Exec. Dir., Grant County Economic Development Corp.*

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## Report Introduction

Our Bloomington team visited Plain on Friday, May 29, 1992. The weather was exceptional with clear skies and warm temperatures.

Our team consisted of six people:

- 4 male, 2 female
- 4 were business people
- 4 had long time village ties
- 1 was a former village board member
- 1 commutes from Bloomington to Dubuque for employment

We were all favorably impressed with the community of Plain, and surprised by many of the strengths that your community has to offer. In particular, we were very much impressed with the residential areas in Plain. There appears to be a considerable amount of wealth within the community and the community seems to take pride in its appearance.

The availability of retail services was a disappointment but not unlike many small rural communities. It appears as though the community has made some recent attempts at improving the community by making investments in the school system, a community brochure, park, village hall, and industrial park.

The surrounding landscape offers a beautiful entrance to your community. Although some residents perceived your community as having limited recreational opportunities, there appears to be a number of attributes which could be promoted for public use by "non-residents". For example: A picnic in the park, a dip in the pool, a round of golf, a taste of cheese or sausage, a walk through the stations of the cross, or a stay at the B&B. These are all things that could be promoted to visitors passing through the area.

Thank you for doing this exchange - we hope that this program will prove to be an educational one for both communities!

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Andy Lewis, Grant County Resource Agent  
U.W. Extension

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

I had no preconceived notions of Plain, I have likely driven through Plain before but couldn't remember anything about it.

None - I had never been there.

Passed through the village many times, but never stopped. Always smelled like it was a clean village. It is still a small village and will stay that way.

From past visits, I found Plain neat, clean & friendly. I expected that everything would be very nice.

Very attractive. Had been through Plain many times when going to the Dells and always impressed me.

2. **Approaching the community, what do you notice first? (Evaluate EACH entrance)**

**Positive:**

Approaching from the south on Hwy 23, it is hard not to notice the golf course. Not many communities of this size would have a golf course.

Approaching from the north on Hwy 23, there is a beautiful view of St. Luke's Church on the hill!

From South - very nice, new subdivision of high-end houses, golf course, much landscaping, private & public, everything very neat & well kept, much work in progress.  
From North - beautiful church complex on hilltop.

Village on the right track.

Golf course, neat homes & lawns.

The first thing one noticed was the well-kept golf course.

Clean, neat homes. Golf course a very attractive valley.

**Negatives:**

Approaching from the East on County Rd. B it's a bit depressing to see the only supper club in town closed - Someone should take down the sign.

Approaching from the West, the cemetery on the North side is in poor repair. Looking at the well kept cemetery on the South

side, one couldn't help but think that there was a catholic and non-catholic cemetery in town. Many people now go to cemeteries to trace ancestors or just to learn about history - some work is needed here.

From South - none, except welcome sign difficult to read, BAD restaurant sign.

From North - not as pretty, due to construction equipment, could possibly be screened with plantings, as this is a very picturesque approach to the town.

Main street - all small villages lack of business.

Main street - lack of business, some buildings could be improved on.

Nothing.

Main street (forgotten look). Not many prosperous looking businesses other than Kraemer Co.

**3. As you drive around town your comments on:**

**A. Appearance**

**1. Downtown**

Almost non-existent. An un-inviting hardware store and grocery store do not compromise a downtown.

No real downtown to evaluate - most businesses scattered, but well-kept, no sign to business district, church, etc.

Good.

Needs work.

Small downtown, but everything was in good shape.

Ghost town - clean, not too prosperous appearance.

**2. Residential**

The residential is outstanding! I have never seen a community which was this clean and well kept. There is not run-down house in the whole community. Obviously Kraemer's has had an impact on the value of the housing but you will not likely find this kind of wealth in a community of this size. We were later told that a community ordinance regulating the appearance of the

residential areas helped but that it really was not needed.

Perhaps you should promote your community as the cleanest in Wisconsin - At least some mention of the housing stock in your community brochure! I noticed only one "For Sale" sign.

Older area - well-kept, very nice newer areas, high-end houses in nice settings.

Good.

Neat.

Very neat & clean.

### **3. Industrial park**

Saw only a sign, but was told by several people (The gas station attendant, a woman at St. Luke's, and City Hall), that you were in the process of building one. The field where the sign is appears to be rather steep with no improvements.

If a new water tower is constructed for the park, perhaps the old one could be removed or replaced also.

Not developed.

Good - Appears to be an attempt.

Not yet in operation.

### **4. Parks**

The park was outstanding - even a swimming pool!. The sign next to the park should be moved out to the highway ... you wouldn't know it was there.

Good... Perhaps you could promote picnics in the park (sell lunches at the restaurant or gas station).

Park appeared more a sport complex rather than a passive use (picnic) area. Golf course very nice. Pool, tennis courts very nice, no signs.

Good.

Good shape.

Very good.

**5. Schools**

No High School - this is obviously a negative point. However, we were surprised to see that the community was building a new elementary school. A very friendly woman at St. Luke's explained that one of the reasons the school was being built was to attract younger families. The catholic school is also a plus.

Catholic school exterior in excellent condition, beautiful older buildings, near perfect maintenance, new public grade, couldn't evaluate - not complete.

Good.

Did not tour.

Very nice.

Nice new elementary school, but no high school in town.

**6. Infrastructure (Sidewalks, streets, lighting, etc.)**

Most of the public infrastructure was in fine repair or in the process of being repaired - several streets were being repaired when we visited the community.

Water tower was in poor repair. This was probably the only "eye sore" in town.

Very well kept.

Fair.

Good.

Everything in good shape - some repairs being done.

Good.

**7. Other**

The new public facilities - parks, city hall, fire station, and school are very nice. One of the members in our group pointed out a beautiful American Elm near city hall... A rarity these days.

Stations of cross have great potential with plantings & landscaping - currently are well-maintained, but appear out of place on open lawn due to their great rustic design. Graveyard at west end poorly kept - stones broken and tipping over.

Water tower needs paint. Thank you for Kraemer's being there.

Fair - thank goodness for Kraemer's.  
Not so good, water tower needs painting.

Well kept.

**B. Signing**

**1. Community entrance/exit signs**

Noticed only a sign on the south side of town that was built by the Lions - nice.

Not easily read on approach from south. Saw no others.

Very good.

Great.

Entrance signs could have been better.

Very good.

**2. Streets**

All of the streets appeared to be signed, although a few were hard to read.

O.K.

Good.

Good.

Okay.

Good.

**3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.**

I noticed no directional signs to any of the fine public facilities in town.

Not clearly marked.

Good.

Good.

Could have been better marked.

**4. Storefront signs**

Signing on the new retail area on the highway is a bit confusing. With such small windows its hard to tell what store you are going in or what to expect. The highway sign advertising this business south of town on highway 23 is too cluttered to be of any use. The cheese sign (with the mouse) on County Rd. B is good.

The hotel or rooms for rent on the highway was a bit mysterious. I wasn't sure if it was closed but I wasn't interested in finding out.

Straka's had a nice store and sign but how would you know it was there? This was one of the nicest butcher shops I had seen before (Bloomington is **also** fortunate to have a high quality butcher shop).

O.K.

Needs work.

Not well kept.

**5. Industrial park**

The sign at the industrial Park was fine until further improvements are made. I didn't try the phone number listed on the sign, but if it is for city hall an answering machine-might be of use given the limited office hours.

New, good initial signage.

Good.

Good.

Good.

**6. City Hall, police, etc.**

The library was identified better then city hall. Were the police located at the fire station?

Found by asking.

Very good.

Good.

O.K.

Very good.

**7. Billboards/advertising, etc.**

Not much sign clutter. See earlier note on storefront signs.

Restaurant sign on south end BAD, too much information to read while driving and distracted from welcome sign & natural beauty of setting.

Good.

Good.

Only 1 billboard - too much information for such a small space - maybe should be removed or at least moved.

Nothing that was too unpleasant.

**4. Visitor/community information (Visited by one team only)**

**A. City/Village Hall**

**1. Is there a street map?**

The woman at city hall gave us a photocopy of a street map and also referred us to a large map on the wall.

Yes - photocopy adequate.

Yes.

Did not see one.

Yes.

Good.

**2. Community brochure/directory**

A lot of communities this size would not have gone to the trouble of preparing a brochure - nice job! The brochure was also available at several businesses (Bed & Breakfast and Cheese Store). If it was available in all stores it wasn't visible (Restaurant, gas station)

Didn't see one.

O.K.

Great.

Yes.

Very good, it should be available in all of the businesses.

**3. Community profile (including business and industrial opportunities).**

Did not exist or was not given to us.

Nice community brochure.

**4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit.....etc.**

Several people referred us to one of the three B&B's. Restaurants was easy ... they referred us to the bowling alley or the only restaurant in town. It is hard to believe that a community as wealthy as this could not support a supper club ... Why not at the golf course?

Limited - saw no motels, very nice bed & breakfasts - old & new.

Nice bed/breakfast - great otherwise.

Great.

Good.

**5. Contact people & addresses listed if I want more info.**

The woman at city hall was very helpful. She attempted to call three or four people when we requested information on the industrial park. When she was unsuccessful, she gave me the name and number of Ralph Ruhland and the village clerk. Although she was helpful, I was surprised that she never asked for my name or number although she did ask what type of business I was involved with.

**6. Complimentary Items (Postcards, bookmarks, coupons, etc.)**

Didn't notice any.

None - not important to

None.

None.

**B. Chamber office/visitor info center**

**1. Easy to locate (and did people refer you to it?)**

None - perhaps one of the businesses could serve as an information center.

**2. Comments on info available (Streetmap/brochures/community profile/etc.)**

I liked the brochure. How about a sign directing people to the stations of the crosses. A sign explaining the stations would also be interesting. I didn't know there was a shrine at the top of the hill until I got home and read the brochure!

Adequate - nice brochure.

O.K.

Good.

Good.

**3. Recommendations on places to stay/eat/visit etc.**

N.A.

**4. How prepared/helpful were they.**

N.A.

Good.

**5. Convenient hours?**

N.A.

1 - 5 O.K. by me (For City Hall)

Yes (For City Hall)

**C. Info from general community (servicestation/motel/bars/restaurants/shop employees/etc.)**

**1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?**

a. Most people were not that clear on the plans for the industrial park.

Waitress - good directions, friendly, helpful.

Good.

Fair.

Very good.

- b. When I asked the clerk at the cheese store how Plain got its name, she told me she wasn't sure but that it was explained in the brochure!

Kraemer worker - good insight into community background & economics.

- c. The attendant at the service station was helpful.

Teacher at Catholic school - very informative.

- d. We met a very friendly young woman near St. Luke's who told us a lot about the community. When we asked a man exiting the Kraemer Brothers office building, we asked him what the building was and he replied, "Why do you want to know". He wasn't entirely positive about the community but was very friendly and informative once we started talking.

**2. Did they refer you to someone else who could help?**

- a. Most people referred us to Village Hall which does not open until 1:00 (She was on time!)

Waitress - referred us to city hall.

No.

No, but we didn't ask.

- b. The village clerk tried very hard to call several people to help us - Very persistent! Walked into friend from Loganville and he answered everything I want to know.

**3. Attitude, appearance, etc.**

- a. I found most of the people to be very friendly (At the gas station, meat market, B&B, City Hall, and on the street).

Fair - waitress at cafe needs an attitude adjustment to be more positive.

Waitress - typical "there's nothing here" attitude but very helpful.

Fair - waitress at cafe was helpful, but had a negative attitude about her own village - was not impressed with that.

Good.

- b. The waitress at the restaurant (The place where many of your visitors likely stop) was not a happy camper. She told us that there was nothing to do in town and that if you weren't catholic there was probably no reason why you would want to live there (What about the golf course, the stations of the cross, or nearby Spring Green?).

Kraemer worker - fairly positive.

- c. School teacher - positive on educational information.

#### **4. Other comments**

- a. I was impressed with the community - for it's size, it has a lot going for it.
- b.
- c.

#### **5. General**

##### **A. Do residents know their community history/events/directions/etc.**

See notes on waitress listed above.

Didn't really ask.

Yes.

Yes.

##### **B. Services...variety of retail...lodging facilities...**

The older B&B in town was very nice! I wouldn't think of staying at the motel (If it was even open). Retail is lacking, although some larger windows on the Highway retail business would help. Visitors need to be directed to the Meat store.

The Hardware store was a mess. When I walked in there, after a few minutes someone came out the

back room eating a sandwich. He wasn't very knowledgeable about the community.

Limited.

Lodging good - they are only 45 miles from Madison - that makes a difference.

Good lodging, very small retail.

Lodging good - business & retail fair.

Toured 1 bed & breakfast - was impressed.

**C. Are there public restrooms?**

Yes, at both the park (could use some work) and the village hall.

Yes - clean & nice.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

**D. Payphones...are they working, phone books intact.**

Payphones were available next to the "hotel" and one by the bowling alley. Both were in good working order and both had phone books!

Yes - at least one.

Yes.

Didn't check.

Yes.

**E. Industrial park...does it look active & attractive.**

Just another corn field. Approaching from the north there is some clutter at Kraemer's that could easily be improved. Just purchased.

Yes.

O.K.

Not finished.

Yes.

**F. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty restaurants/bakeries/etc.)**

Had some great cinnamon rolls and muffins at the restaurant. I also purchased some good cheese at the cheese store, and will likely stop at the butcher shop the next time I'm through this way.

Fair.

1 Restaurant - Fair.

Very good restaurant.

**G. What does community SMELL like?**

Nothing out of the ordinary (nothing good or bad).

Small town.

Fresh/Clean.

**H. What SOUNDS did you hear?**

A fair amount of highway traffic.

Quiet.

Quiet small town.

Peaceful.

**I. What did community FEEL like (Emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc.)**

The community felt a bit cold despite the fine appearance of the residential area. It's clear that the entire community commutes for retail services and recreation. I sensed some resentment of the wealth created by Kraemer's by a few individuals in town.

Warm.

Warm.

Warm.

**DESCRIBE THE PEOPLE YOU MET (Friendly, helpful, etc.)**

The village clerk was the most helpful...she did her very best to help us.

The waitress at the restaurant was a community's worst nightmare ... actually very helpful but she trashed the community.

Waitress - very nice, not real excited about her small town, but how many young people are?

School teacher - excellent information on educational system.

Kraemer worker - initially cool, then warmed to be very informative.

City Clerk - very nice.

Friendly - people need to be a little more positive.

Very friendly.

Friendly - didn't talk to many.

Friendly, but a little negative.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:**

If you didn't understand the impact of Kraemer's the residential investment would seem a bit out of place!

Not really on the same level as Bloomington, as it appears Kraemer's Construction is the lifeblood of the town - and artificially inflates the economy compared to a normal village - many facilities normally not seen in small town apparently due to benefactors (Kraemer's).

Employer must do better by having employee's think positive.

Nice place to live - a lot of fresh air.

**WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW**

The residential investment, The cleanliness of the

community, the Stations of the Cross, Straka's meat market, the B&B, and the waitress at the restaurant.

How lucky they are to have Kraemer's. No junk cars. Neatness of all areas. Great muffin (peach) at restaurant.

Village neat. It is great to have Kraemer's Const. Co. Also great to have that many professional people in village the size of Plain.

The neatness & well groomed lawns.

It was a very neat & clean community.

The clean, neat attractive town of small size.

## **6. Doing it Right!**

### **A. List the 5 MOST positive things you observed about the community.**

The residential area - All of it!

The stations of the cross.

The golf course.

The Public infrastructure - the park, village hall, and fire department

Kraemer's & Kraemer Brothers

The availability of a Doctor in a town of this size.

How well kept the private property was.

The many recreational facilities.

Beautiful church complex on hill.

The high end subdivisions.

The amount of private & public landscaping.

Everything was clean & neat.

All public property well-maintained.

It appeared that everyone had pride in their community.

- B. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your business/community and describe the steps you will take implement it within the NEXT 72 HOURS!**

It may take longer then three days, but we need a brochure.

I intend to lay out some plantings of trees & shrubs on approaches to town - I definitely saw their value in Plain.

Try to clean things up. Get rid of junked cars etc.