

First Impressions

of

Prescott, WI

by Boscobel, WI

Visit conducted 5/18/92

A program ~~for~~ community improvement

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Report Introduction

The First Impressions visit of Prescott, Wisconsin, by Boscobel was conducted on Monday, May 18, 1992.

The three member Boscobel team profile:

- 2 men, 1 woman
- 2 are involved in government
- 1 has ties to Chamber
- 2 have long time ties to Boscobel
- 2 are business owners.

The weather was pleasant with plenty of sunshine and comfortable temperatures during our visit. We arrived just after 10:00 a.m. and left about 2:30 p.m.

We split into one team of two and one individual. We took turns driving around the area and walking through the business district. We visited as many businesses as possible and there was some overlap.

We were impressed with your community and certainly with the friendliness of your people. The quality of your residential areas is a real plus and the work being done along the riverway downtown is very impressive. Overall your community gives a favorable First Impression.

The following pages provide a composite of the three individual reports. If further explanation is required on any of these, I invite you to contact me at 608-822-3501.

It was a pleasure visiting your community. May all your "First Impressions" be winning ones.

James L. Schneider, Executive Director
Grant County Economic Development Corp.

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

I really didn't know what to expect as I had never been in this part of Wisconsin before. I will admit I had a pre-existing negative impression from knowing a previous resident and not caring for him personally, but I did not let that influence me against the community as a whole.

Expected a small river town not quite as clean as Prescott is. Small town feel with warm open people that seem glad to see you visit their town. I was not at all surprised at the number of bars and eating places. I expected the city to be all in one spot, not divided into uptown and downtown.

Knew it was close to Twin Cities so I expected a certain amount of affluence. Wondered how they would be affected by location on the river. Would this be a traditional 'RiverTown'?

1b. What was my perception five minutes after arriving in the community?

Nice looking buildings, confused about where City Hall is, clerk at Quick Mart very helpful, wasn't sure we were actually IN Prescott...no signs, overall good impression on first drive-through.

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

Positive:

Highway 10 from Minnesota - very attractive entrance- beautiful river view and park area coming in. Jefferson Street - couldn't get out too far because of road construction, but what we saw most coming in was a spectacular view of the river and waterfront area. Highway 10 & 35 - nice attractive industrial park and business area

Coming from Minnesota - The view is striking and the city approach modern. Nice beach area, unique rail bridge, much work being done on back of building on main street to take advantage of river trade. I find this very positive that some people have faith in their downtown. Nice wide main drag, noted that deliveries were made from center of main street (different and quaint). Did not notice if there were any signs to tell drivers that they could do this.

Farms and surrounding countryside are appealing in all directions. Coming across bridge is very attractive approach.

Negatives:

Highway 10 from Minnesota - kind of confusing intersection. We weren't sure how to get into mini-mart that we stopped at or even if this was Prescott for sure because there was no sign. Jefferson Street and Highway 10 & 35 - lack of signs. The one we saw was very small and looked about to tip over. The church signs out further need straightening and repainting.

Some vacant buildings on main street. There seem to be a couple of old buildings that could be replaced by shops or a mini mall. Coming from the west and north there are no signs to tell or welcome people until the bottom of the hill. That one is in pretty bad shape and is being over powered by a big ugly real estate sign (I believe).

Lack of entrance signs - otherwise all entrances are positive. (One entrance was under construction.)

3. As you drive around town your comments on:

Appearance

1. Downtown

Nice wide main street. A few empty store fronts, but not bad. Flags on light poles were faded and tattered. Overall, nice attractive store fronts except one area of empty lot full of junk and a couple of rundown buildings across the street.

Neat and clean with wide street and many old buildings, some in need of repair or replacement, and some being rebuilt and remodeled. Some could use a face lift, coat of paint or clean up the windows. I see a great deal of potential in a small area. Need parking spaces.

Sidewalks are clean and trees are a nice addition, buildings are in overall good repair. Feed mill project will be a nice plus. Boardwalk - interesting use of old building. Courtesy docks along river - NICE!! Back of "Lil Heifer" and other buildings are being fixed up - very positive.

2. Residential

Clean, attractive, well kept homes. Very few run down properties.

I feel that most all home owners take a lot of pride in their homes. On the way home all in the group commented that they had only seen one "dumpy" looking house with junk cars around it and it was decided that we all were all talking about the same house.

Very nice houses - there is \$\$\$ in this town based on the overall high quality of homes. One street had some junk cars - that was the only place I noticed anything like that. Totally out of place compared to your otherwise high quality residential standards. Stop it before it spreads!! Jewel Street/Dexter area - nice sized lots with beautiful well kept homes. I'm glad to see that developers are staying with good sized lots - that has a tremendous impact on appearance. Area toward St. Joseph's Cemetery was very a nice residential area.

3. Industrial park

Very nice. Well located and well marked.

Your ‘uptown’ or ‘newtown’ areas are screaming for some zoning guide lines that are cut in stone before things get more mixed up than what they are. One can stand on frontage road and see city hall, a med. center, condos, a manufacturer, car dealer, bank, and on and on. I get the impression that anything goes. Please, put some thought into a zoning plan. DEFINE INDUSTRIAL PARK - THEN STICK TO IT.

Good location and a couple of very nice buildings. Some of Jacques Seed area was a bit older but overall well maintained. The ITW and Woodmaster buildings are beautiful.

4. Parks

We only found one small park that was badly in need of mowing and the garbage container was overflowing. This is a definite area for improvement.

I only came across one small park that had a great view of the river. It appeared to need some care. Mowing, trash pick-up, however, it is only fair to admit that we were there on a Monday. I see a need for more park and RV. camping areas for not all tourists come in boats. Locals would also make use of a nice park. I feel that athletic fields are not true parks.

Apparently only one park in the residential area, but I'm sure the community makes heavy use of the parks on the river.

5. Schools

Schools were attractive and nicely located. Better playground facilities and improved track, tennis courts, and ball diamonds would be a plus.

*All the school buildings that I came across looked in a good state of repair and had adequate play and athletic area. Some areas of the High School ball fields across from city hall need to be finished off, big rocks to be picked up, and soil wash outs to tend to. The areas **look** new, but need to be maintained.*

Beautiful Senior High buildings but parking lot sucks. I'm a tennis player - but not on those courts.

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

Sidewalks and curb and gutter were noticeably lacking in most residential areas. Streets also were very rough.

Glad to see the curb and gutter in the newer areas of the city. Much of city is without sidewalks, curb and gutter and storm drains. Maybe they are not needed?

7. Other

Never saw a city crew or police car all day. Why is City Hall up on the hill and not downtown? Again, leave the industrial park to industry. I feel like

the city is being pulled apart. What is the plan? Perhaps to move the city up to the top of the bluff.

Garbage was out • great to see that you have a recycling program in place.

B. Signing

1. Community entrance/exit signs

This was something that we felt definitely needed improvement. We only saw one small sign that was half falling down and was completely overpowered by an insurance agent's sign.

*You are the fastest growing city in western Wisconsin. Don't ask me how I know this for I sure didn't read it on a sign. Strongly suggest that modern, tasteful signs be placed in landscaped areas on **ALL** roads coming into town. Do not permit any commercial messages within a couple of hundred feet of them. Tell the world about Prescott. City Hall was hard to find.*

I didn't even know I was in Prescott for sure when coming across the river. Read in one of the back issues of your paper that you are raising funds for a new sign • it will be a great improvement. Other entrances didn't have much for signs. One small sign that was in poor repair as you come down the hill on Highway 10, "church welcome signs need some repair too. Nice to see the churches doing this, though. Positive statement about community.

2. Streets

Street signs were good. We had no trouble determining what street we were on or looking for.

Streets were somewhat rough and didn't seem to have a finish coat of black top. I'm sure you have frost heave problems that I cannot understand and maybe this is the reason for the coarse surface. I found the intersection at the bridge downtown a little confusing.

Lack of curb and gutter in new area seemed inconsistent with quality of housing. What kind of surface did you put on those streets (Mississippi, Cedar Lane, etc.)? Very rough - detracted from area.

3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.

No hospital? One small park sign.

I missed completely if they are there. We stumbled across the park

Didn't see much • one sign indicated a park and that was it.

4. Storefront signs

As in most towns, some very nice, some need improvement. Particularly nice was the 'Steamboat Inn' and the gift and antique shops. Also the "St. Croix

Coffee" shop. Kind of an eyesore was the one with no panels and exposed light bulbs. Probably needs to be taken down.

Nothing out of the ordinary. There are some nice things being done by a couple of restaurants downtown. I like the idea of not having a flashy main drag.

VFW - great sign.

5. Industrial park

Sign was adequate; however, we did discuss that they could have used a little more information such as acreage, improved sites, contacts, etc.

Nice sign. Boundaries of the park hard to figure out (from here to where).

Nice industrial park sign.

6. City Hall, police, etc.

Very hard to find. We knew the general area it was in and still had to ask directions to find it. Very nice facility, but inconvenient location. Another comment we made was that we did not see a police car or policeman the entire day we were there.

I feel it was hard to find. If I were a stranger in your town at 11 p.m., and needed to find a cop, I would not believe he was not downtown. I feel that perhaps a mistake was made in not keeping City Hall downtown. Feel the same about a post office and fire department.

Going along Highway 10 you would have no idea where the City Hall and High School are.

7. Billboards/advertising, etc.

Not a lot, which was good. The ones we did see seemed to be kept in good repair.

Thank goodness that this is still at a stage where zoning can control the use of billboards and other obnoxious signage. I find Prescott has a great deal of "quaint potential": Quaint sells but only by subtle means. I feel that you would ruin something unique if the "Wisconsin Dells" approach is permitted.

No real problems that I noticed.

8. Other

Port of Prescott Kiosk - beautiful (but keep it updated). Halloween and Christmas information still on one side. On one side was a list of businesses but what do the numbers refer to?? Maps and historical stuff is good. Where could I get a copy if I wanted one???

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

A. City/Village Hall

*We did not stop at City Hall **as** by the time we found it, it was almost time to leave.*

Beautiful facility and clerk was very helpful.

1. Is there a street map?

*I did not come up with one but must admit I didn't look too hard. I rather just wander and **look** around and talk to locals.*

I got a street map and clerk readily showed me where certain things were located.

2. Community brochure/directory

*I didn't see one that was even close to telling the story **of** your growth. Most **of** what I saw was sadly out **of** date. We were told that Prescott was a city about the same size **as** Boscobel, 2,600. Come to find out that you have more than 3,400 people. **UPDATING IS NEEDED.***

Didn't see one.

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

*How about a lawn service, landscaping service. I realize that your soil is not the best and see many proud home owners that would love to **turn** their home into a show place. **As** with all small towns, the more retail shops you can get, the better. I understand what you are up against just the other side of the river. Big cities do draw crowds. I feel there is still room for specialty shops for cloths, sporting goods, boat-related services, candy shop, ice cream, novelty shops, T-shirts, ethnic restaurant of some sort, etc.*

*Got a profile but it was done in 1985. Sorry **folks**, but that's ancient history. You don't need to spend a fortune, but your infonnation has to be updated to be useful.*

4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visitetc.

A real estate lady recommended a place to eat that overlooks tire boat docks. Food was ordinary but quite good. View was pleasant and the fact that there were a lot of locals eating there was reassuring.

Clerk made a number of suggestions and gave me good directions.

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

?

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

Picked up a few in a couple of stores, but not much available.

Didn't see much in the way of free, sent it on home, promotional stuff. Made note of the fact that it cost money at the "COURTESY dock BAD MOVE. You don't have parking meters for cars. GOOD DEAL!

None.

B. Chamber office/visitor info center

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

Yes - easy to locate and people did know where it was, who was in charge, etc.

YOU BET!

Very easy to locate and everyone knew where it was. Nice Job.

2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)

Could not get in as office was not open. The sign on the door was that the hours were 11:00 - 2:00 Monday through Friday. We were there at 11:50 and again at about 3:00 and it was closed. We felt this would not be a problem necessarily that they were closed, but if your hours state 11:00 - 2:00, you really should be open those hours.

WHAT INFO?

Not open.

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

NO.

Not open.

4. How prepared/helpful were they.

NOT VERYSHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE WINDOW.

Not open but they must be doing something right as people seemed to have a lot of confidence in their ability to help.

5. Convenient hours?

AH HA! The posted hours in the window were quite convenient for me but not for the Chamber. We stopped before lunch and in the afternoon and no one was there. Perhaps you might consider moving your information office with another business so that someone would always be there to cover. Insurance or real estate office would be great for this idea and give the person willing to cover it a first shot at a potential new customer.

Hours were fine - but you weren't open that day. I know it's hard to staff offices like that with our budget constraints, but could an alternate location in a business be made available for brochures, etc?

C, Info from general community (service station/motel/bars/restaurants/shop employees/etc.)

1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?

Antique Mall - gentleman was very friendly and helpful with information about the antique business, directions, place to eat, etc. Lunch at Slipp Inn - waitress very friendly and knowledgeable - gave good directions to Chamber office. She did tell us she was not very happy with their local bank and a lot of people had moved their banking to Hastings.

*The people I talked with were a big help with most anything I wanted to know. Good places to eat and how to get to City Hall. One "old timer" who spoke with a speech impediment saw me admiring the rail bridge and proceeded to give me it's whole history. He was just great, and knew what he was talking about. We had a waitress that took the time to really give us the low-down on what was happening around town. She was **fun**, warm, and sincerely tried to answer any questions we had.*

Assistant librarian - very knowledgeable even if she wasn't from town. Made several recommendations on places to eat. Very open and honest about pluses and minuses of the area, cost, etc.

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

*Did not really **ask***

Never asked.

People referred us to Chamber and City Hall but not necessarily to any certain people.

3. Attitude, appearance, etc.

Positive attitudes. Neat appearances. The bank comment was really the only negative thing we heard. Most people seemed to be quite proud of their community.

*Everyone I met was neat and **fun** to talk to. Your locals are a solid asset.*

Overall very positive. Clerk at Quick Mart was very good as were the staff and the "Lil' Heifer" - after 2 minutes I liked those people. Clerk at Cobblestone/Cellar was very pleasant.

4. Other comments

We were going to go into the "No Name Saloon" but were greeted at the door by a barking dog, so we didn't. Boardwalk shops and jewelry store both looked very interesting, but were closed on Mondays.

Went into another realty office and was greeted by a fellow who acted like a head waiter and asked us to wait to talk to someone who was on a phone call. When he left the room, so did we. Some of your people seem all jired up about the possibility of getting a gambling boat to dock in your town. I feel this would not be wise for the quality of life you have in Prescott.

*I hate to single out a certain business, but I have to make some comments about the coffee shop. Several people recommended them for lunch so you certainly have a positive reputation. The decor is inviting and obviously well thought out. Your selection of teas and coffees was certainly unique and I was pleasantly surprised to **find** that your special of the day was a "veggie potato": Now **that** was interesting...and also very good. But the service didn't quite measure up. Don't get me wrong, both of the staff people were pleasant enough, but seemed, well, detached. Instead of bragging about having rose tea, I hear, "I hope you don't mind, but all we have **is**:" (I enjoy flavored teas.) The food was served quick and hot...but you never came back and asked me how things were or did I want more tea? (I did.) The sign above the cash register said "Homemade Ice Cream". You never asked if I wanted dessert - and I'd kill for homemade ice cream. Yes, you were there, yes, I got my food, and it was great - but I left feeling disappointed. I know it was after the lunch hour and you may have let down a little, but hey, I'm a customer too. You are doing so many thing right, but.....*

5. General

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

Yes.

Some more than others, but then that's the way it was in high school, right?

People seemed pretty good on this. Better than I expected for a bedroom community.

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

Not a lot of retail variety - mostly restaurants and bars in the downtown. We did notice lots of bars.

We all need more variety of retail...Prescott is no exception. Same goes for the accommodations.

*Closeness to Hastings and Twin Cities makes this really tough. I think you are doing **as** well **as** can be expected and some of the new things like "Lil' Heifer" and feedmill project are positive additions.*

C. Are there public restrooms.

Don't know.

Didn't see any, but I never had the need to.

In City Hall (no toilet paper, tsk tsk).

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

Don't know.

OOPS! Forgot to check

Phone downtown was working and even had a book

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

Yes.

Very attractive - "you build it and they will come....."

Very attractive, and two businesses are positive signs of growth.

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

We ate at the Slipp Inn - food was good - I particularly liked the specialty coffee shop and their special flavored coffees.

Noticeable lack of specialty or ethnic restaurants. Coffee shop had a good dessert. But how about a pizza?

Salty like the popcorn at the "Lil Heifer" and the taste of that rose tea.

G. What does community SMELL like?

It smelled fine...? I guess I really don't understand this question. I like the smell by the bakery and the coffee shop.

FRESHAIR!!! It has a lot of appeal for people that work in the cities.

Basement of antique mall smelled musty • not pleasing. Incense (or whatever) at Cobblestone Cellar was nice touch • not overbearing. Two smells I expected but didn't experience: 1.) River • usually you know when you are near one (and I don't mean that in a negative sense). 2.) The coffee shop should have smelled like exciting, exotic coffee • I don't recall that it did.

H. What SOUNDS did you hear?

Trains, lots of traffic across the bridge.

Rural, boats, lawn mowers, men hammering, and the sound of progress.

Nothing out of the ordinary; although, I bet when the river has lots of people and boats, it's great.

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

Friendly and inviting. I really enjoyed it.

Peaceful, unhurried, good place to bring up the kids.

Friendly for the most part, but some people were "detached". Town felt alive and prosperous. Another "feel" was the rough surface of many streets.

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

As I previously mentioned, everyone was friendly and helpful except for one guy in the newspaper office. When we bought a paper he waited on us and I tried to start a conversation with "Well, what's new in Prescott, anyway?" and he said "Not much" and walked into the back

We spend such a short time in Prescott. I wish I could have sat in on a City Council meeting to see what you think your problems are, what you have in mind in the way of plans for the "fastest growing city in western Wisconsin". The people I met in our short stay were all helpful in one way or another in giving me a positive feel for your fair city. If it were up to me, I would jealously protect what truly makes you such a fast growing community and that is not razzle dazzle, but the true QUALITY of life that people come in search of when they move to town.

They certainly were helpful and friendly. No one was rude. I would like to have you folks for neighbors any day.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:

We did comment on a general need for better landscaping and lawn care. I know it's the season for dandelions, but we did see a lot of lawns that needed some care. Another thing we noticed was the sign 'Courtesy Docking', but underneath were a list of charges - \$2 weekdays, \$3 Sundays. This seemed to us to be a contradiction in terms. A courtesy dock, you would think, would be free.

WHY do you charge people to use your "COURTESY" docks along your beautiful riverfront? I hope that there is some way that people (boaters) can get their tickets validated for reduced fair or free docking. If I pulled up to your beautiful docks and was informed that it was going to cost me more to feed and shop with my family because I arrived in a boat instead of a car, I would say "STUFFIT. We'll go some place else that wants my tourist dollar.."

Please plant some trees in the new areas at the top of the hill. It looks awfully sterile at the present time.

Why are your City Hall and Post Office located where they are? It will be interesting to see what long term effect this has. I felt uncomfortable with that.

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

The view of the river and just that it was a nice, friendly little town.

The uptown/downtown confusion. The need for highway signs. The great rail road bridge that the old timer told me the 'Yap' built damn near overnight." Small park with a great view, impressive school buildings, and DANDELIONS!!

The experience at the coffee shop. That perplexes me to no end. Also, the locations for city offices. I'll be back in 10 years to see what happens.

6. Doing it Right!

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

- 1. The river view.*
 - 2. The friendly, helpful people.*
 - 3. The industrial park*
 - 4. The neat, attractive, well kept homes.*
 - 5. Some really nice little shops downtown - the craft place and the antique store in particular.*
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- 1. Your treatment of the waterfront - take good care of it. Put in flowers and some bushes or something.*
 - 2. High property values should give you the wherewithal to make progress.*
 - 3. Tell the world (o.k. ...Minneapolis) what a great place you have to live - then make sure it stays that way.*
 - 4. Love your friendly, helpful, people (except for the head waiter).*
 - 5. Your natural beauty must be protected with some sort of plan zoning. Do it now before it gets any more confusing to country hicks like me who have a hard time telling UPTOWN from DOWNTOWN.*
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- 1. Beautiful work along the riverway downtown.*
 - 2. Excellent quality of homes.*
 - 3. Positive, friendly people.*
 - 4. Some tremendous views of river and surrounding countryside.*
 - 5. Beautiful library/community building.*

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

I loved the specialty coffee shop. We had previously discussed having a little coffee area in our creamery project, and this idea was reinforced by stopping in there. I will bring it up again at our next meeting as I think it would be a real asset in our community.

Have placed on our city agenda the idea of R.V. parking in part of our city park, at least until private money sees it's way to build one.

Port of Prescott Kiosk - nicely done and something like this could be appropriate in a number of areas.