

# *First Impressions*

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*A program for community improvement*

Profile of Princeton, Illinois as compiled by  
Salem, Illinois

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

- a) I expected a community very similar to Salem, with similar sized industries, houses and retail shops. Because of its proximity to larger communities, I also expected somewhat of a "Suburbia" feeling.
- b) No familiarity with Princeton except that its size was similar to Salem.
- c) A small city with moderate traffic, comprised of light to medium industry, service organizations and a good mix of retail outlets.

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

Positive :

- a) North entrance has an active restaurant and hotel section. New truck stop will be a great plus when it is landscaped. ACE Hardware is obviously very noticeable. South entrance has lots of beautiful old homes.
- b) ACE Hardware building is impressive, large. Highway exit had new buildings and an industrial park sign. Other entrances presented a clean, pleasant residential image.
- c) North-Busy commercial areas for service to interstate and local traffic.  
West-Older business section  
South-Nice older residential sections leading to nice statue.  
East-Nice mixture of business and older residential with Tree City honors.

Negatives:

- a) West entrance has awful fairgrounds. Looks like our south edge of town with run-down businesses and general unkempt look.
- b) The West entrance is improved by the Metro Center. Farther in it did not sparkle - especially the fair grounds. I would look for some monies from the state to upgrade it.  
As G.K. Chesterton once said of New York's Times Square it would be beautiful to one who could not read. I refer to the signs, the fast food outlets, etc.
- c) North-odd mixture of business and residential near downtown area.  
West-Run-down look about fairgrounds and businesses.  
South-  
East-

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

A. Appearance

1. Downtown

- a) Many small towns have dying downtown areas. I was impressed to see how many businesses are located on Main Street,
- b) Impressed by large number of stores and mix of buildings, Memorial statue was beautiful. Gives town a graceful look. Underpass or overpass needed to overcome the bottleneck at the railroad tracks. Got caught in a long traffic jam there,
- c) The sidewalk view is impressive in the way the shops have the windows displayed. The store front signs indicate proper controls are in place on signage to provide an uncluttered appearance.

2. Residential

- a) VERY IMPRESSED by all the big, old houses! Seems like most of the homes have large front yards, That gets them off the street and makes them much more impressive and stately,
- b)
- c) Lovely older homes. Very few distinctive subdivisions noticed. An odd mixture of residential and modified older homes/commercial sites on the main street.

3. Industrial Park

- a) It goes without saying that the ACE building is IMPRESSIVE, Kudos to whoever landed them, But, there's nothing to indicate that they are located in the "south" industrial park. Other park looks good but could use some road work,
- b) Checked out 1 park across from Super Duper 8. Would like to see our park developed like this.
- c) The location of the industrial park is convenient to the interstate and looks like it would not hinder normal traffic in the commercial areas adjacent to the interstate.

4. Parks

- a) Only saw one. The Met is, without a doubt, Princeton's biggest secret. What an amazing facility!
- b) Only saw the park downtown.
- c) The park systems seem small to adequate but lack adequate signage from the main drag. We located them only by stumbling on them.

5. Schools

- a) There were a large number of schools and they all seemed very well kept. I was surprised at how scattered they seemed to be.
- b) Impressive elementary and high school.
- c) The school facilities seem to be spread around town but lack any adequate signage from the main avenues with the exception of the high school.

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

- a) Like the streetlamps in the downtown area. Didn't notice any new street work, but they are in fairly good shape.
- b) Wide streets and quaint brick street gave town a special character. The brick streets must be old but looked in great condition. Must have been fed vitamins and minerals. Brick streets are handy in a town in case one needs something substantial to throw at one's wife.
- c) The sidewalks downtown appear to be in good shape. The blend of trees and antique lamp posts are a nice touch. The yellow curb painting leaves something to be desired. The paint is too light and looks like it was slapped on. So many 4-way stops off the main drag.

7. Other

- a) The fairgrounds need a lot of work!
- b)
- c)

**B. Signing**

1. Community entrance/exit signs

- a) Like the idea of using club logos and wish we had the same. Shows civic pride.
- b) No problem in locating turn-off. All areas were clearly marked.
- c) We noticed entrance signs from each end of town identifying the local service clubs. They served their purpose, but the signage could promote the historical side and city slogans with more artistic and eye-catching signage.

2. Streets
  - a) Easily readable.
  - b) RE: 6
  - c) Street signs seemed adequate although they seem to be located above normal eye level on the main drag in many places.
  
3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.
  - a) Saw one hospital sign and no park signs. Found the park by accident and never did find the hospital. (Did find it after all with some work)
  - b) Good signing for hospital. Didn't have time to search for parks.
  - c) The parks desperately need to have additional signage. The hospital was relatively easy to locate by following signs on Peru Street and Rt. 26 I did not notice any signage on far north or south ends of town.
  
4. storefront signs
  - a) Beautiful! They keep the town in the "last century" historical theme.
  - b) Impressive. Some downtown buildings were even cleverly used for signing.
  - c) Apparent signage controls indicated by lack of signs overhanging the sidewalk.
  
5. Industrial Park
  - a) Sign on "north" park, but if ACE is in the south park, I would recommend a sign to let people know there's land available for development.
  - b) Good job. Sign even included a number to call for info.
  - c) Ho-hum. Lacks definition.
  
6. City Hall, police, etc.
  - a) Didn't know the police department was in City Hall until we entered the building.
  - b) Easy to locate and clean, well-kept look.
  - c) We saw no external signage to denote that the police department was housed within City Hall nor was the Fire Department signage very prominent.
  
7. Billboards/advertising, etc.
  - a) Was surprised to see billboards in town
  - b) Two signs on outskirts for downtown stores. Good idea.
  - c) Adequate but not overbearing on billboards.

#### 4. Visitor/community information

##### A. City/Village Hall

1. Is there a street map?
  - a) Didn't see a city map and was not offered one.
  - b) Yes.
  - c) No city map was displayed in the outer lobby. We were provided with one at the local ERA office.
  
2. Community brochure/directory
  - a) Saw nothing in the way of promotional items or info items and was not offered any.
  - b) Yes.
  - c) We were provided with a variety of information on the city when we contacted the ERA office. We were not given any community information in writing when we visited City Hall. Clyde was unable to list other communities in Bureau County.
  
3. Community profile (including business and industrial opportunities)
  - a) We asked for info and got it verbally, but weren't given anything printed to keep and study.
  - b) Community profile smacked of mediocrity. Wise marketing demands one (one unique). A town cannot afford to sit on good times. There is too much competition out there.
  - c) We were able to glean some information on the city from our conversation with Clyde Wray, but we were met with a indifferent attitude towards the prospect of locating a new business within the community.
  
4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit...etc.
  - a) Asked Clyde Wray for recommendation for lunch and he indicated there were some restaurants downtown but offered no names.
  - b) Eat=Prime Quarter, cook yourself steak house. Change that to you (the server) cooks the steak.
  - c) Clyde was polite in reference to a place for lunch, but didn't boast of any particular establishment.

5. Contact people & addresses listed if I want more info
  - a) Wray gave us a Post-It note with his name and number. Not very reassuring that he'll be there to answer questions later!
  - b)
  - c)
6. Complimentary Items (Postcards, bookmarks, coupons)
  - a) Saw nothing.
  - b)
  - c) None received.

B. chamber office/visitor info center

1. Easy to locate (and did people refer you to it?)
  - a) Looked several times the night we got in and never did find it. Would recommend more lighting and bigger sign. Realtor did tell us it was in the Prouty building and give directions.
  - b) Easy to locate. Did people? Yes. At the Big Apple, they gave me a map and showed me how to get to City Hall. A customer at the check out even chimed in to help.
  - c) We were referred to the Chamber office by the realtor at the ERA office. He gave adequate directions, but the Chamber signage itself seemed somewhat subdued.
2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile, etc.)
  - a) Had a large selection of brochures, maps, etc.
  - b) Above restaurant did not have a local paper available - either to buy or to read. The hostesses did not even seem to be familiar with it.
  - c) The informational package given to us at the real estate office contained a city map and some additional information on the city. The display rack of brochures allowed us to browse for information on points of interest. The display cases showing local manufactures wares could use more fanfare to showcase the city's industries.
3. Recommendations on places to stay/eat/visit etc.
  - a) Didn't request this information at Chamber.
  - b) The Big Apple - no local paper or even a knowledge of. Very helpful re: location of City Hall and Chamber. Provided maps and indicated on map. Customer at counter volunteered help.

- c) We asked for and were given directions to the local Catholic Church and the historic covered bridge. The receptionist was pre-occupied with something else and made to no further attempt to ask us about our trip or point out any community highlights.
4. How prepared/helpful were they.
    - a) Gave good directions to St. Louis Church and covered bridge. Seemed friendly and were helpful.
    - b)
    - c) The clerk gave us directions to the covered bridge and the Catholic Church as we requested but made no effort to inquire about our visit or even tell us about the rack of brochures on points of interest in the lobby.
  5. Convenient hours?
    - a) Didn't notice a sign posting hours.
    - b) Like most small town merchants they stay open for the unemployed. This practice will, in time, send people to Wal-Mart.
    - c) I don't recall seeing any office hours posted for the Chamber office.
- C. Info from general community (service station/motel/bars/restaurants/shop employees, etc.)
1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?
    - a1) Motel desk clerk didn't know where Prime Quarter was, but was very apologetic. However, didn't offer to call for directions.
    - a2) Gas station attendant gave directions to golf course without hesitation.
    - a3) Chamber secretary gave good directions to St. Louis church and covered bridge.
    - b1) AMOCO-No map and No suggestions
    - b2) Key Shop in Mini-Mall. (Carlson's Lock Service) talked in detail-positively-about Princeton.
    - b3)
    - c1) Gas station attendant gave directions to the Country Club.
    - c2)
    - c3)

2. Did they refer you to someone who could help?
  - a1) No. He could have called for us, but we went back up to the room to call for directions.
  - a2) No need to.
  - a3) No need to.
  - b1) Yes.
  - b2)
  - b3)
  - c1)
  - c2)
  - c3)
  
3. Attitude, appearance, etc.
  - a1) Clean, friendly, helpful
  - a2) Neat, clean, but a little "stand-offish"
  - a3) Friendly, helpful.
  - b1) Found a friendly, positive attitude in contact with all sales clerks.
  - b2) Clerks all had sharp, clean look.
  - b3)
  - c1) Considering the inclement weather, people were friendly.
  - c2) A mixture of attitudes from sales clerks at various retail outlets.
  - c3)
  
4. Other comments
  - c) I like the "Customer of the Month" at the Hallmark store.

## 5. General

- A. Do residents know their community history/events/directions/etc.
  - a) Most we talked to gave good directions and seemed proud of their community.
  - b)
  - c)
  
- B. Services...variety of retail...lodging facilities...
  - a) Amazing selection of nice clothing stores. Walmart doesn't seem to have hurt anyone. Almost a shopping mecca!
  - b)
  - c) The area around the interstate provided ample lodging facilities. The bed and breakfast facilities are a unique item that could be developed further.

- C. Are the public restrooms.
- a) Restrooms in the Prouty Building.
  - b) Yes.
  - c) The only public restrooms observed outside the park system were located in the restaurants and the Prouty Building.
- D. Payphones...are they working, phone books intact.
- a) Didn't see any.
  - b) Yes.
  - c) Failed to notice any.
- E. Industrial park...does it look active & attractive.
- a) The north industrial park had several buildings, but I never saw anyone moving around. Didn't seem busy.
  - b) Yes.
  - c) The industrial park north of 1-80 looked active with a new building project but the infrastructure could be improved.
- F. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty restaurants/bakeries, etc.)
- a. MUSTARD!
  - b. Very tasty. Donut Shop on the lower level. Scent Shop - OUTSTANDING Hallmark. Large number of specialty shops.
  - c. Bonnelli's food was great, The Country Kitchen breakfast was good with a variety of menu items. The Prime Quarter steakhouse was a fun experience and the food was delicious.
- G. What does the community SMELL like?
- a.
  - b. The painter Cezanne said we should be able to paint odor. The shops smelled like a Michelangelo.
  - c. Clean.
- H, What SOUNDS did you hear?
- a. Heard a lot of traffic noises at the hotel and downtown. Never heard a siren!
  - b. The hum of a busy, viable town.
  - c. Normal traffic sounds, quite otherwise.

- I. What did the community FEEL like? (Emotional response ie. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc.)
- a. People seemed just a little reserved.
  - b. Warm, viable, busy, controlled - except for that railroad crossing.
  - c. Overall rather cool and indifferent with an occasional burst of sunshine.

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

- a) Most people were helpful when asked, but never spoke first. I was a little disappointed that there wasn't more of a hometown, small town feeling. Felt more like a suburb.
- b) Friendly, helpful, sharply dressed. Waitresses typical. Some stared into the wall (not AT the wall). Most of the talk was pre-recorded. They all looked like single mothers with two kids at home. Actually a good, hard working group.
- c) Sales clerks were courteous but not outgoing. The highlight was talking to Matt at the Metro Center. He was very friendly and outgoing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:

- a) The maintenance worker at the Met, Matt, was the most helpful, friendly, and outgoing person I met the whole time. He's a definite asset to that facility.
- b)
- c) Why keep the Metro Center a secret? I was quite impressed by the facility, but no one else made any effort to talk about it. The Country Club clubhouse was impressive.

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

- a) The beautiful old homes, the fantastic downtown and the Metro Center.
- b) The busy, one street, shopping area. The exceptional friendliness and working expertise of Buck Sutliff, the fact that Dave Silverburg charged a fellow newspaperman full price for the two newspapers I bought at the Tribune.
- c) The Metro Center, the impressive older homes, the Prime Quarter restaurant.

6. *Doing it Right!*

- A, List the 5 HOST positive things you observed about **the** community,
- a1) Beautiful old homes. Could be bed & breakfast heaven!
  - a2) Very impressive downtown with vast variety of stores. **Why** leave town to shop?
  - a3) The Metro Center! The only word to describe it is **AWESOME!**
  - a4) The A.M. "info-station" is impressive.
  - a5) The ACE Hardware building.
  - b1) Friendliness-everybody smiled at me, even people I passed on the street.
  - b2) The upbeat look of the major buildings, e.g. Prouty building, Metro building, etc.
  - b3) The congeniality of the hosts.
  - b4) The industrial parks.
  - b5) The well-trained, friendly sales clerks.
  - c1) The Metro Center **is** very impressive and is an undeservedly well-kept secret.
  - c2) The downtown area was clean, active and attractive.
  - c3) Such an abundance of older homes gives the town a very historic appearance.
  - c4) The ACE Hardware Distribution acquisition.
  - c5) The hospital facility was nice.
- 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!
- a) Chamber of Commerce brochures. We need them and I ~~hadn't~~ even realized we didn't have any. I'll do them on the computer ASAP.
  - b) Hospital signs. I will send a note to City Hall.
  - c) Customer of the Month club idea from Hallmark store.