

# ***FIRST IMPRESSIONS***

***A REPORT FOR  
RICE LAKE, WISCONSIN  
FROM  
MENOMONIE, WISCONSIN***

***OCTOBER 1993***

## *I. What was my perception before visiting? What did I expect?*

**Picturesque Northern** Wisconsin community lying along the Red Cedar River. Retail Center for a large share of Northwestern Wisconsin. Two year UW-Barron Center with Technical College.

**My brother** lives in Rice Lake. I've been to meetings at the hospital. My impression was of a lively community that is a sort of gateway to northern Wisconsin with high quality services and shopping.

**I perceived** Rice Lake to be a quiet town. I expected people to be friendly.

**A peaceful** small community with a great deal of pride in community.

**I saw Rice Lake** as a quiet, growing community just off Highway 53. I expected to see the traditional Wisconsin community with a downtown and near a lake.

**Had passed** through Rice Lake a couple of times. Expected a small town that serviced outlying rural communities. Also expected a "tourism twist" to the community.

**Small town U.S.A.** Farm community. Small business/family community

## *II. The "five minute" impression:*

**The weather** was perfect for this type of exercise. As you approach from south and from the west, you are able to view the entire city from rolling hills. This shows the layout of the city and the relation of the river and lake to the city. Impressive.

**More spread** out than I had remembered, neat lawns and houses. Noticed some "shacks" on the left in the woods on **48**. I don't recall a welcome sign.

**It was nice** to see the fall decorations and welcome banners with the sunset and duck.

**Clean.** Very nice neighborhoods. Beautiful older neighborhoods. Downtown looks prosperous with almost all buildings filled.

**An orderly** town, wide streets, long mainstreet, signs everywhere.

**Liked the** "Welcome to Rice Lake" banners. Lack of signage for fairgrounds, race track, hockey, schools, etc. Fairgrounds quite delapidated. Nice medical complex. Liked corn stalks around street lights. Liked boulevard on North Main.

**As I expected,** a small town, working to improve store fronts. (Improve signage.) and street lights. (Need sign ordinance like ours and guidelines like our Landmark).

## *III. Driving ... evaluate each entrance.*

**South entrance** on SS from Cameron. Striking layout of the whole city noting the straight streets and tree lined streets. Mall provides first notice of retail. Other retail stores then appear along with lodging. Adequate for this size city. West entrance from highway **48**, again coming from rolling hills. View includes hospital, lake, blue hills. Impressive.

**I was impressed** by the medical facilities which seemed to be well located and a lot of activity in the area. Nothing very notable about any of the entrances to town. Initially came in on Hwy. **48** from the west ... noticed population sign. No welcoming signs that I

noticed. Kiwanis had a sign posted. What other organizations are there? (Rotary, Lions, etc.)

**Beautiful vistas** of the city, both coming in from the west on Hwy. 48 and from the south on SS. Didn't notice any welcome signs. Well-maintained homes and churches.

Commercial sprawl on south side. Small billboards all in a row on the east side of SS ... too cluttered.

**48 from the east** - nice upscale, well kept housing. Welcome sign could be a little larger. SS from the south - nice panoramic view of city. East off of 53 - smacks of potential for commercial development.

**Good advantage/view point** coming in from the south on SS. Clean approach to the city. On 48 from west, uncluttered "woody look except for cluttered "services/churches/etc. sign." North approach looked somewhat shabby.

**48 entrance** - improve signage. Pleasant to look at. Old 53 S, signage good, mall nice, hotel good. N - older section - some cleanup - need a new or different fence at fair ground - new entrance by mall off 53 is good.

#### **IV. Driving .. evaluate the downtown business area:**

**I had previous** impression that downtown had been devastated by the mall and businesses on south edge of city. I felt this impression was not valid after this drive through. Streets are wide and well-maintained, very few empty storefronts, tree-lined boulevards, adequate parking. Did not denote any buildings in rough shape physically.

**Nice, wide main street** with no parking meters!!! Signage sort of busy. There were some nice fiftyish looking signs, Obvious progress toward store front restoration.

**Signs were all** different. I like the variety. All seemed to be well maintained. Some store windows very dirty. Kleenair Vacuum sign looked very shabby.

**Downtown seems** to be thriving with most store fronts filled. Some building restoration beginning. Need to work on signage. Like the corn shocks on the light poles. Love the wide Main Street and free parking! Very nice banners.

**Most store fronts** occupied, too many advertising signs, neat/clean storefronts. Variety of awnings, overhangs, etc. on buildings that were clean but didn't look in place. Two story stucco building looked out of place.

**Liked it a lot.** Seems big for a town of Rice Lake's size. Well kept. Some inappropriate signage. The vacated video store was "really tacky."

**Too many different** kinds of signs - old .., lots of weeds back and front of buildings ... lots of parking (large area).

#### **IV.(b) Driving ... evaluate other business area.**

**Mall area and** businesses in south part of city are on new highway surface, traffic controls. Well maintained.

**Mall and businesses** on the way to the mall looked prosperous.

**Mall area** was easily accessible.

**Mall easy** to find. Good stores. Clean.

**Fast foods all** located on south end of city. **A distinct downtown area.** Some businesses located in residential areas. Good mixture of businesses.

**As a rule,** pretty good.

**Signage OK.** Surprised at the amount of industry. Improve bottle neck at hospital - confusing for someone new.

### *V. Driving ... comments on residential.*

**The residential part** of the city is a tribute to the ancestry of this whole area of Wisconsin. Houses well maintained, painted, yard clean and mowed, etc. Did not note a "poverty stricken" area in any part that we drove. We did drive a major portion of the whole city. Streets well laid out. Some older areas did not have curb and gutter yet did not detract from overall appearance to any degree.

**Houses neat,** lawns nice. Many nice old homes. Saw only one run down looking house.

**Residential was** nicely maintained. Traffic seemed ok.

**Beautiful older** neighborhoods. Like the boulevards. Wish I could have seen the flowers in bloom. Nice new neighborhood by the high school.

**Housing mix** throughout city was well represented except for new development on hills. No real architecture to older homes, two mansions on north side were converted to businesses. Curb and gutter throughout, houses good to well maintained. Apartment buildings looked solidly built.

Very well kept. Did not find a "run down" section of town.

**Nice. People** proud of property. Lawns are clean and landscaped.

### *VI. Driving ... comments on:*

#### *a. street signs*

**Street signing** was adequate

**Can't remember** one way or the other.

**OK**

**Fine.**

**Good. Noticed** "leaf design" signs in better area of town, not in other areas. Why?

**For the most part,** pretty good.

#### *b. traffic patterns/street conditions*

**Street surfaces** good. Traffic patterns well controlled with signals and stop signs.

**Main Street** looked recently paved.

**OK**

**Was a busy** Thursday. Traffic smooth through Main Street which looks newly paved.

**Good geometric** layout except for around public schools, very confusing there.

**A little congested** on Main Street. Seems like all the traffic in the town ends up there.

This was a weekday in the fall. I can see where it might be a real mess in the summer.

*c. welcome signs (at entrances)*

**Only one sign** noted. That on 53 before exit "O". I might have missed but this area could be improved.

**Don't remember** a welcome sign.

**Not evident**

**Didn't notice** any.

**Service/churches** sign too cluttered. Didn't notice any welcome signs.

**Signs were there.** Would like to see them a little bigger.

**OK**

*d direction signs to parks, schools, hospitals/clinics, attractions, services (i.e. police, etc.*

**This area did** not jump right and hit me. Could have been there but did not attract my attention readily.

**Directions to hospital/clinic** very good. Saw no signs to parks, schools, attractions or services. Once there, the signs were fine. Map handed out at city hall has no key to help you find anything other than streets. (i.e. city hall on D6) Downtown business directory very well done.

**Saw "H" sign** for hospital and signs for Barron County campus. No signs for the high school, parks, fairgrounds, etc.

**Couldn't find** any signs for parks, schools, fairgrounds, etc.

**Were there any?** City seems to favor routing signs; seems council added new regulations to park as new portions of signs were in white rather than yellow; park signs were all negative - no swimming, no dogs, no parking, etc.

**Seemed almost** non-existent.

**Not good,** I feel someone who wasn't from there (Rice Lake) would have had problems getting around. With Marty driving it was easy. Need traffic lights, etc.

**VII. Driving ... comments on industrial park/area:**

**Industrial area** real plus for the city.. Well defined, busy, growing.

**Well landscaped** industrial park. Was impressed with industries in the park.

**Industrial park** appeared to be stable. I did not notice any new construction. Some business signs don't give a clue as to what they do, e.g. American Excelsior.

**Looks busy** with a nice mix of industry. Good streets. Maybe better directional signs for different businesses.

Not well signed from SS. Curb and gutter in industrial park, well laid out, growing industrial park, just off Main Street and near Hwy. 53.

**Fairly well defined.** Too bad have industrial sites on lake front. Showed a lot of vitality. I was surprised. For the most part, pretty well kept. Where will the park expand? Vacant land by the campus - would like to see signage as to where/who to contact regarding industrial property.

**I was surprised** at the amount of industry here - very impressed.

### VIII. *Driving ...comments on schools:*

**Schools observed** in excellent condition (some building going on)

**Schools well** maintained. Saw no litter or kids "hanging out." The campus was pleasant to look at and well maintained. Didn't see a "student housing" section of town.

**Schools (especially** high school and junior high) looked good. There were some kids "hanging out" and smoking next to the school premises - it was about 11:30 a.m.

**Nice mix of** older and newer schools. All appear (from the outside) to be well maintained.

**Good looking buildings,** plenty of space, playground equipment. No directions from Main Street to schools.

**Nice, well kept.** A little hard to find. Campus area around high school is a real jewel.

**Confusing to find** grade schools. Others fine. Clean. Would improve orange color ... ick.

### IX. *Driving .. comments on parks! play grounds, athletic facilities, etc.*

**There were** a number of parks and playgrounds though not any one of real large size. They appeared to be well taken care of. Area around lake does make for some very scenic park areas.

**Fairground had a** lot of nice pines, well maintained. Fence needed repair.

**Playgrounds looked** appealing. Athletic facilities looked good. People were fishing in the creek, very relaxing feel.

**Beautiful small** parks throughout community. Athletic facilities appear well maintained and adequate.

**Water fountain** painted green in park looks bad. Small parks scattered throughout city - neighborhood parks good idea, Good athletic fields - tribute to Pug Lund.

**Seemed** well-kept but not well marked. Would like to see a larger community park.

**Seemed to be** on the small side. Signage at park entrance - no camping, no dogs, no this, no that - would like a little more upbeat welcome.

**Can't find signage.**

### X. *Driving .. comments on other:*

#### *a hospital/clinics*

**All the appearances** of being well planned, new buildings, and wide range of services.

All in close proximity to one another.

**Great location** for a hospital!

**Looked good.**

**Easy to find.** Beautiful location.

**What hospital is not** under construction? Excellent view of lake, good tie-in with clinic, etc. **Peaceful area.**

**Seemed like** very nice facilities.

**Bottleneck ...** change parking problem.

**b. billboards/advertising**

**Billboards noted** in good condition

**Nothing noted.**

**Please look at the** small billboards on south edge of town on the east side of the road.

They are clutter.

**Does the city** have a sign ordinance?

**Mixture of really** good and really bad.

**Not impressed** ... messy.

**c.**

**South side** water tower needs painting.

**Extra wide Main** Street and avenue gives city a nice layout; downtown parking full, liked use of parking behind stores with store names on back doors.

**XI. Walking around .. comments on businesses (physical part):**

**Downtown area** well represented with active stores. Appearances in generally good condition. Signage in general good condition. Buildings outside appearances very good.

**Downtown didn't** have curb cuts for wheel chairs. I stopped by the Smith Furniture and someone directed me into the store to see a drawing of what the building will look like.

Liked the corn stalks, yellow ribbon and farmer's market.

**Carol's Cafe** - waitress had a very abrupt approach. Front blinds were all crooked - looked sloppy! The back of the beverage area was full of finger prints (facing booth).

Nice variety of shops.

**Downtown thriving** - good **mix** of businesses. Signs need work but look pretty good.

Love the corn stalks on the light poles, wish we could do the same. Like the banners.

You might trim the trees so they could be seen better. Clean up the weeds by the buildings.

**Corn stalks** on street lamps nice autumn effect. Store windows were clean - good window displays. Sidewalks in excellent condition.

**Really liked downtown.** Very nice shops - especially book store(s) and Burnell's Decor. Some benches were in need of repair.

**Streets and walks** had lots of weeds and grass. Signage very inconsistent. Some display windows good ... some need work.

**XII. Walking around ... comments on people**

**Downtown** - very friendly. 3 out of 4 where they immediately wanted to know if they could help you. Clerks presented good appearance and were knowledgeable of their store as well as what might be available in other stores in downtown district.

**People smiled** and waved. The **4-H** display and pictures of marines in the store window was a nice community touch. Rice Lake could use business racks like Menomonie.

Everyone know the chamber had maps. It would have been handier if they had a map.

**People were nice** and friendly, knew the answers and tried to help.

**For the most part, friendly.** Took three tries to find directions to the Main Street office. Most were knowledgeable about their products and services.

**Very friendly people.** Eating at Maxine's was an experience, waitresses and diners were very conversant. Good food, good conversation. Clerks gave good directions.

**Pretty friendly lot** except for a waitress who was really grumpy.

**Very friendly and helpful.** Happy except for one business owner who just lost husband a week ago. I will send card to her. In one furniture store, not waited on or approached. New bookstore great. Antique store very good.

### ***XIII. Community information: comments on:***

#### ***a. community brochures (tourist type)***

**This area is in** excellent shape. Community brochures and general information readily available and well laid out and presents the community in a great way. Tourist type as well as serious shopper.

**Good**

**Very informative** - both from the chamber and Main Street project

**Excellent**

**Well done**

**Good.**

#### ***b. Businesses/attractions brochures or directory***

**Very adequate** and numerous

**The Downtown Shopping & Entertainment Directory** was very well done. Might want to include city parks, boat landings and beaches.

**Good**

**Pamphlets broken** down according to interests.

**Couldn't find** Main Street office.

#### ***c. community profile (demographic, industrial information for productive business people)***

**34 page 1993 Visitor's Guide** handles all this area in fine fashion. Slick in appearance and readily available. Bright color immediately catches your attention.

**Excellent Chamber** and Main Street brochures

**In brochure**

**Didn't see**

#### ***d. map***

**Number of maps** available. Maybe could use one that denotes parks and attractions as a separate item. It may be here but I could have missed it.

**Maps didn't** include parks.

**Map in Chamber** brochure needs to show parks, etc. Good. Like the map in the Main Street Shopping Guide - even shows parking lots.

**Yes.**

**Didn't check.**

*e. other (i.e. bulletin/notice boards, kiosks, etc.)*

**I did not** note any number of these

**Not available.**

**Not much**

**Didn't see any**

**Need to improve mini** mall downtown (diamond in the rough). People were unfriendly ... bathrooms not clean. Whole place is out of date. Smoking bad. Bring it out of the '60s.

#### **XIV. City Hall .. describe your visit:**

**a. appearance of facility, including signing**

**Other parties** in the visit covered this area

**Facility looks** old, inside was clean. It appeared that a lot of make-do remodeling had been done. If the building is functional and working conditions are good, fine. Exterior could use a "face lift."

**Did not go.**

**Didn't go.** Others covered.

**Didn't visit.**

**I didn't** visit.

**b. helpfulness of staff**

**Staff was nice,** explained about the plate and other questions

**c. other**

**The booklet,** "A Saga of Furs, Forests and Farms", is worth the \$1. The remains of a building next to city hall looked like an accident waiting to happen. The snow fence was falling down and apart.

#### **XV. Chamber of Commerce ... describe your visit**

**a. did people know where it was (or who to refer you to?)**

**A real high** point of the visit. Fine facilities, very knowledgeable of city and county.

**Several businesses** referred to the chamber. All gave good directions. Health food store dug out a map.

**Yes, first place** we stopped gave directions.

**Saw sign.**

**Knew when** I asked.

**b. comment on information available**

**Great deal** of information readily available. Well organized and presented (physically)

**No information** available on location of parks

**Plenty - demographics,** places to go - excellent

**Excellent, including info** on most of Western and Northwest Wisconsin, Duluth, Lake Superior.

**Good.** Picked up numerous pieces.

- *c, comment on staff*

**All of the** things you would expect of a good Chamber staff were present. One of the highlights of the tour.

**Very friendly.**

Knowledgeable, friendly.

**Excellent. Marlene** is an extremely gracious person. Karen is a very friendly, courteous secretary. Handles public visitors promptly and kindly.

**Nice, friendly, helpful.**

*d. other (hours, appearance, locations, etc.*

**Hours had been** established according to traffic. Location is a real plus.

**Information on** exterior of building was very informative.

**Good location** Downtown. Good signage - plenty of parking.

**Good location,** plenty of parking, could use larger space for storage. Meeting room contained storage boxes.

**Good parking,** clean, knew what was going on.

*XVI. Other stuff...*

*a public restrooms (available, condition, etc.)*

**These did not** stand out in my mind. One used in mini-mall (downtown) could have been better maintained (cleaned).

**The public restroom** in the mini-mall (downtown) was dirty and in need of paint. No place to change a baby.

**All were OK**

**Restroom in** downtown mall was dirty. Others in restaurants, shopping mall, were clean.

**Seemed to be around** - didn't check them out.

**Downtown dirty** ... chamber clean.

*c. parking*

**No meters.** Parking was adequate at the time of day we were in the area. There is some off-street parking.

**Lots of parking** - no meters. Parking well marked on map.

**Did not seem** to be a problem.

**Plenty.** Well maintained.

**More than** adequate.

**Ample. I don't** know about a busy summer day though.

**Great.**

*d. waterfountains, benches, etc.*

**There were benches** in the downtown area, Bus waiting structures were provided and well placed. They were being used. One did not have schedule posted. Appeared to be torn off. Maybe could use a clear cover over schedule to prevent loss.

**Water downtown** in mini-mall wasn't inviting. No wheelchair fountain. Whenever I felt like sitting down there was a bench handy.

**Benches in** bad repair.

**Plenty** - well maintained.

**One fountain** painted ugly bluish green.

**Benches could** use repair/coat of paint.

**Fall time**, didn't check water fountains. Liked the bus stop - would like to see us have one.

*e. other*

**Almost tripped** on a box that used to hold a tree. I sort of gawk around and didn't notice

### **Wrap Up**

**A. Using your "senses" ...**

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

**Community "tastes"** like woodworking, A number of furniture stores as well as wood working plants.

**The water** tastes great.

**Good coffee** - three places. Good food - two places.

**Very nice restaurants.** Downtown Cafe - good, fast service, excellent food and plenty of it.

**A German** smorgasbord at Maxines.

**Carol's Cafe** - good food. (get rid of orange blinds). Beer Cheese Blooms ... excellent food ... very good.

**2. What does the community SMELL like?**

**Community has** a clean smell to it. Bright and open.

**I smelled some** roofing tar. Wasn't aware of any bad smells.

**No noticeable odors** - fresh air! "All Seasons" - great smells.

**Clean, even** in the industrial park.

**The co-op.**

**Potatoes and** saw dust and pine cones. Smell of ginger.

**No comment.**

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

**Traffic sounds** were obvious. This is needed, of course, to keep stores in business.

Voices lent a positive image to area. Not overbearing but yet cheerful.

**The usual.**

**Very quiet, nice.** Maxine's - bustling, happy customers.

**Nothing distracting** - soundwise, pretty quiet for all the activity.

**Birds, water** lapping, and a breeze.

**Busy community.**

**Noisy.** Main Street like a race way.

**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.**

**The day of week** were and time of day did have some bearing in this area. Area was not crowded. Those people we did come in contact with were warm and friendly. Streets in good shape.

**I could be** happy living in Rice Lake.

**The community** seemed very neutral to me. I think it would be what you make it.

**Friendly people**, busy retail, very inviting.

**Warm, inviting**, an uptown versus downtown tension.

**Warm, friendly**, bustling.

**Very friendly** for the most part. Very concerned about my being a stranger and getting around.

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

1. People were moving in a very business-like manner. Purposeful.

2. Very scenic position for tourism.

3. Solid industry base.

4. Streets well laid out.

5. Generally "clean" appearance - residential well-maintained.

1. The shopping was great - carried a full range of sizes and products.

2. Clean and neat.

3. The lake was beautiful. So was the view from the top of the hill on SS.

4. Friendly

5. Great shopping.

1. It was clean.

2. It seemed prosperous.

3. People were reasonably friendly.

4. Good medical facilities.

1. Lovely parks.

2. Thriving downtown.

3. Busy university and tech school campus - really nice grounds.

4. Very nice industrial park.

5. Wide Main Street with free parking.

1. Layout

2. Lakeside potential

3. Good business mixture/vitality

4. Wide Main Street

5. Friendly people

1. Great downtown/bookstores
2. Busy Industrial Park
3. Medical facilities
4. Golf course
5. Onthelake

- 1.
2. Growth
3. People nice
4. Industry - impressed
5. Parking good.

*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.*

**Develop a "slick" visitors' guide annually.**

**The centennial plates** and prints were a great idea. Our 150th is coming up soon. We need to do something like it.

**Encourage business** people to decorate store windows for fall or Halloween. Make it seem festive and gives a sense of community.

**Rewrite Downtown** shopping guide and develop a general brochure about the Main Street Project.

**Liked the** welcome banners.

**Found a rack in** antique store to display rugs. Will make one very soon. A wonderful idea. Also liked their outside sign.

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

**For a city of 8,000**, it does reflect a retail center for a large section of northwestern Wisconsin. Picturesque setting with lake and river attributes, College and technical school available for area. Citizens concerned about their future role in the further development of their community. They are asking questions as to how to better their appearance as well as attract more businesses and industry to their area.

**Great use of lake** front. Bright clean town.

**The book stores** are great and the mall had a lot to offer. The industrial park looks like a going concern. Rice Lake seems like a vibrant, growing community.

**A thriving, friendly** community with a great mix of business, industry and a sense of its history.

**The view from Hwy SS** south of the city.

**"Big" for a town** of its size.

**A growing place.** Would consider moving there.

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

**Rice Lake** does represent a fine model of a city their size.

**Great mix of shopping.** Great shopping (lots of clothes in my size). 6 furniture stores, appliance stores, great book store, famous makers, etc. How about a path to walk along the lake in addition to the sidewalk across the street from the lake?

**Is the ski hill still operating?** Did not see any signs directing me to the hill. Should be planning some bike paths/lanes through town, perhaps along the lake. Liked the stores that had signage in the alleys. Rice Lake Transit - is it for everyone? Are there regular bus stops? Is there taxi service?

**Enjoyed our visit** very much. Like the bus service and bus stops on Main Street. Thanks for a wonderful day.

**There seemed to be** no focal point in the city, i.e. building, statue, central park, etc. The lake shore isn't being used to its greatest potential. Excellent layout for UW-Barron campus and WITC campus. Could landscaping make it seem less of a frontier?

**Great fall day** - "Chamber of Commerce" weather.