

First Impressions Revisited: Final Report

Community Visited: Tomah, Wisconsin

Visits Completed By: Black River Falls, Wisconsin

Visitation Team Profile: Our team consisted of 10 people between the ages of 30-65 with diverse backgrounds of long time residents of Black River Falls (All) to health care providers (2) to insurance (1) to local merchants (4).

Date of Visits: Due to scheduling difficulties our team went down in small groups of 2 at a time. Our team group visits were between August 28, 2004 through September 25, 2004.

Weather on visits: All reports seem to have beautiful weather during their visits. No complaints on weather.

1. Prior to Your Visit

How easy was it to get information on the community that you are visiting?

In conducting a search on the web in several different search engines under "Tomah, Wisconsin" or "Tomah", the Greater Tomah Area Chamber of Commerce site came available in the top 3 listings in each search engine researched. This site was very attractive and eye-catching with great colorful images, graphics and wonderful sound effects. Information on all parts of the community was easily obtained from this site such as lodging, dining, attractions, events and shopping.

The brochures obtained were also attractive and informative. Brochures and area guide were readily available and very useful.

2. Past Perceptions

What was your perception of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see? Please comment on your knowledge of this community:

The past perceptions of Tomah were positive. There were no negative comments regarding past perceptions of Tomah.

Most of the group has shopped and/or eaten at Burnstad's European Village, Tomah Cash Store and Amish Corner. Several have also attended the Monroe County Fair and Tractor Pulls. Unique location with the two interstate interchanges.

3. The “Five Minute” Impression

After taking a five-minute drive through the community, without stopping, the following reactions were noted:

“The city seems to have a lot to offer as with businesses, fast food restaurants, theatre, lodging and shopping.”

“The city seems to be busy and traffic flowing nicely.”

“I felt like the city needed a good sprucing up. Little things make a difference.”

“A lot of beautiful homes and some areas could use some attention.”

“The city seems to be spread out and a little over-helming on which direction was what.”

4. Community Entrances

The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances:

Entering in from I-94 (North side):

“This approach into the city seems to look like a lot happening.”

“The entrance leading into the city had tall weeds and grass, litter of trash were in the weeds. This was not a great “first impression”.

“Nice to see newly planted trees along Superior Avenue, but they seem too close to the road. Like maybe 2 feet from the road edge.”

“The area with the large loading ramp and the other side of the street with the Mobil building both need to be cleaned up and planted with grass and trees, they influence a poor “first impression” of Tomah.”

“Nice and attractive welcome signs. Great use of theme “Gateway to Cranberry Country”. Nice signage for clinic, hospital, Amtrak and Etc. No other directional signs.”

Entering from I-90 (south side) on to Hwy 12 & 16:

“No visible hospital signs or directional signs of any kind except Tomah population sign.”

“Fairgrounds seem to be well maintained”

Entering from Hwy 21 (East side and west side):

“Meridian and sides of road in desperate need of mowing. Tall weeds and grass.”

“No directional signage”

5. Downtown Business Area

Observations about the general appearance of the downtown area:

The Downtown had nice wide streets and sidewalks and interesting historic buildings. There were a nice variety of businesses, but the outside appearance did not send an inviting message to our groups. There were the exceptions of a few businesses/buildings that did stand out above a rest. Overall the groups all felt that the Downtown area was in much need for improvement. One suggestion would be more landscaping with flowers – maybe dress up the boulevard and other little details that would help warm up and make the area look more inviting.

“Nice wide streets and sidewalks, but sidewalks and gutters were littered with papers, cigarette butts and weeds are growing along buildings and in cracks of sidewalks.”

“There is too much signage and banners at the same level making it difficult to read.”

“Nice to see banners, but no directional/way-finding signs. No flowers or landscaping and some buildings in desperate need of sprucing up.”

“Metal cages around trees were very nice to see.”

“Superior restaurant had a flower container in front, but it was full of weeds and no flowers. Weeds and grass growing against buildings.”

“The Tomah Cash Store was very clean and attractive in their corner. Nice seating area with benches, drinking fountain and trees.”

“Nice wide sidewalks and streets, but sidewalks were very uneven and in some spots it was hard to walk unless you were looking down to see where you were stepping. This could be a safety issue.”

“Nice banners displaying “gasoline alley”. Disappointed to see no flowers or landscaping. What happen to the boulevard?”

“Very interesting historic buildings some were well maintained and several did look to need some attention. One area of downtown seems to have a major pigeon/bird problem with their droppings on the sidewalks and feathers flying around. This made me feel very uncomfortable to walk in this area. This was in front of and around several retail stores. There was evidence that this has been a problem for awhile.”

“The park near the downtown area seems very inviting.”

The Variety of Shopping:

Overall our groups felt there was a nice variety of shopping, and other type of businesses. Despite the negative comments on the general outside appearance of Downtown, our groups felt that when they stepped into most of the stores they were inviting, clean and offered quality merchandise.

“Very nice, clean hardware store. Wide variety of stores.”

“Good variety and quality stores.”

“Impressed with Custom Floors and Drapes with a very good variety for decorating a home.

“The Tomah Cash Store, Amish Corner, Hospital Aux. Bargain Corner all was a great plus. Other great specialty shops such as the Country Spirit and the Market Place which felt they were close enough to downtown.”

“There seem to be a nice mix of stores, offices, service businesses, restaurants and banks. Maybe could use an antique store or two.”

“Most of the stores seem to be well stocked and have quality merchandise.”

“Not as much variety as I expected to see with the size of Tomah, but quality stores that was seen.”

What kind of customer service did receive when you entered the retail businesses?

“People were helpful and friendly. We were greeted as we entered every store.”

“Amish store had a fresh bakery inside. Very nice.”

“Stores all were open and had fair hours.”

“Good customer service most clerks were informative and helpful.”

Were there any governmental or nonprofit organizational activities that might serve as a magnet for the shopping district?

“Very nice and attractive City Hall and Chamber Office building.”

“Very nice to see Hospital Auxiliary re-sale shop.”

“City Hall and Chamber of Commerce building seem very inviting.”

“Very interesting gasoline alley museum.”

“Nice looking Library and very inviting.”

Were there the following public amenities?

Pay phones (working with phonebook intact!):

“Spotted one pay phone on Superior without a book.”

“Several pay phones through out city, but most did not have phone books.”

Drinking fountains:

Most of the visitors didn't seem to find one. One of our groups did comment that there was one in the “nice seating area downtown with benches”.

Benches:

“Nice seating area downtown with benches, trees & drinking fountain.”

“No other visible benches or seating except for the park, which had benches, but no tables.”

Public Restrooms:

“No visible restrooms, except in stores and businesses.”

Appealing Landscape:

As noted previously, landscaping in the downtown felt needed improvements.

Parking:

There were no negative comments on parking. All visitors seem to feel parking was not a problem. All were able to park close to wherever they wanted to.

6. Other Retail Shopping Areas (Big Box Retailers/Shopping Malls)

Wal-Mart Supercenter, Burnstad's, and several shopping centers. There seem to be a variety of choices. All seem to be conveniently located and easy to get to.

7. Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

“No visible directional signage to find industrial area. Had to ask for directions.”

“Several nice industrial/commercial businesses such as Torro & Wal-Mart Distribution Center.”

8. Health Care Services

Full facility, insurance and emergency. Two clinics, Skemp Grandview, and Gunderson. Dental full facility, Optometrists and specialists come regularly. Conditions of facilities were very good, visiting specialists from close and larger clinics on a regular basis. Location clearly marked on main approaches but not on minor approaches. At least five nursing homes and retirement living facilities. Beautifully landscaped and buildings are all very well maintained.

9. Housing

Comments in general were positive on the existing housing. Most neighborhoods seemed to be well-kept and attractive. There were a few areas that seemed to be run down. Several beautiful older houses. Beautiful around the hospital and clinic and by the lake.

10. Schools

“Daycare facility looked very clean and quite stimulating.”

“The Middle School seems to be well equipped, clean & organized. Nice colors on exterior and well maintained.”

“Beautiful High School, but first impression of the facility was unfriendly. Inside is well maintained, but the layout did not seem to be user friendly – seemed hard to get around in. Sports facilities are up to date and well maintained. Not much parking though.”

11. Faith/Religion

Six churches of different denominations were seen.
All the churches looked well maintained and inviting.
No church-sponsored community services that we noticed.

12. Civic

Civic group signs were around welcome signs, but other visible signs.

13. Residents

There were no negative comments noted. Overall most of all residents our groups came in contact with seem to be friendly and helpful.

14. Public Infrastructure

“Hospital signs, Library and Parks all marked very well.”

“Street lights were on all corners.”

“The sidewalks in the downtown area are uneven and hard to walk on in places, you must look down at them to walk. This could be a big safety issue.”

“Public Restrooms are clearly marked and clean.”

“Parking was readily available.”

“The traffic was fast and would not stop for pedestrians we had to go to corners with traffic lights.”

“There were no flowers (What happened to the grass in the meridians?)”

“Two corners had benches, trees, and trash cans.”

“Several public telephone booths, but no phonebooks.”

15. Recreation/Tourism

Tomah is very well known for the Monroe County Fair and the tractor pulls. Both very nice well organized events.

“Very nice and attractive Chamber of Commerce building and City Hall. All staff seemed to be informative and helpful.”

“Great use of slogan “Gateway to Cranberry Country.”

16. Using Your Senses

“No bad smells. Sounds of traffic. Several businesses were playing nice music.”

“No obnoxious odors. Traffic sounds of a busy small community.”

“A pleasant surprise to see the Chamber of Commerce and City Hall building so nicely kept.”

“Very nice stores that would bring me back – Burnstad’s European Village, The Market Place, Country Spirit, Amish Corner and Tomah Cash Store.”

17. Wrap-up

Positive:

Medical care exceptional for a small town.

Easy to park and convenient locations for most part.

Two very nice beautiful parks.

Wide Streets.

Friendly shopkeepers, good variety of stores and merchandise.

Biggest Obstacles:

Challenging businesses on Main Street to maintain outer appearances - keeping sidewalks clean and weeds/grass out. Add more flowers and landscaping.

Railroad tracks & yard area needs cleaned up.

In need of maintenance of entrances to the city – tall weeds, grass and litter.

Did not seem to capitalize on the lake as an attraction.

Loading ramp and Mobile building both very unsightly.

Remember Most:

There were several unique stores that the groups noted that they would remember most: Burnstad’s European Village, Tomah Cash Store, Amish Corner, The Market Place and Country Spirit.

One Idea:

“ Nice cages around trees in downtown.”

“I personally seen some unique merchandise display ideas from some of the stores.”