

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

OF

ALBANY, WISCONSIN

By

Polo, Illinois

JUNE, 1995

**A PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT
Developed By Andy Lewis & James L Schneider, Grant Co. Wisconsin**

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As you approach *the* community

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

- ◆ I'm not sure I knew what to expect other than I thought it would be a town the **size** of Polo and we would get ideas for the work we are doing.
- ◆ I was excited about visiting a town where we could compare what Polo has done to improve the community with what our "mystery town" had done. I didn't expect to find a dead town.
- ◆ I expected the community that we were going to visit would be large enough to give us some impact - at least the **same size**, not smaller.
- ◆ A small town with shops to attract tourists.
- ◆ **A** small rural community somewhere in Wisconsin. Probably older business district buildings with limited retail business.
- ◆ **Good**, better town.

II. The "five minute impression:

Take one drive through the community without stopping. **As** you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only **this** quick look. Do **this** in **silence**, don't talk with the others in your group for this **part**.

- ◆ Small quiet community. Overall clean yards and homes (natural exceptions **as** in all **small** towns. We did not drive through the business district.
- ◆ Nice **mix** of new and older homes; there were **a** few small unit apartment houses that were attractive; we **passed** an industrial park where employees had apparently parked while at their jobs; **the** Sugar River flows through the town and **the** business district appeared to be historic and needed exploring.
- ◆ Looked like **a** ghost town. There were some nice homes with shade **trees**, the Sugar River running through the town, friendly people. Two nice apartment houses with a "for rent" sign in both.
- ◆ Clean town. Well-kept, **bedroom** community.
- ◆ Minimal **signage** other than the normal "welcome **to**" signs. Older buildings downtown. The **river** looks inviting.
- ◆ **Depressing**.

1 Driving...evaluate AC entrance.

Go about 1/2 - 1 mile out each road and return. List each road and list positives and negatives for each.

- ◆ The entrances to town were well kept. One soon was in the country, after passing mostly well-kept residences. (west side, I believe)
- ◆ Nocomment.
- ◆ East and west entrances look most used.
- ◆ All poor ...not very inviting.

IV. (a) Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:
(signs, appearance, size, etc.)

- ◆ Bad.
- ◆ Limited retail businesses with very little signage. I didn't realize where the business district was until we **passed** it!
- ◆ Many vacant buildings.
- ◆ All stores were closed. Only **had** 1 restaurant and 1 tavern open.
- ◆ Plenty of parking available. **The** river flows along one entire side of town. Pretty with lots of trees. Flowers and **trees** planted along the sidewalks were very attractive.

Iv. (b) Driving...evaluate other business area.

- ◆ Drove past a factory that looked like it had about 60 cars.
- ◆ Nice industrial park with good signs for businesses there.
- ◆ Sporadic business development with the newest development **on** the East edge of town by the bike path and industrial park.
- ◆ Better, but not **good**.

V. Driving...comments on residential:

- ◆ Well kept.
- ◆ **As** in most older towns there was a **mixture** of housing - New, remodeled and **those** in need of tender, loving **care**.
- ◆ **Streets** in **good** condition. Homes well **cared** for.
- ◆ Nice **mix**. There **are** 3 bed and breakfasts in attractive large homes. No **special** area of blighted homes, but **an** Occasional house in need of **attention**, **as** in **all** towns. Friendly people. Many waved to us **as** we passed by in the motor home.

- ◆ Apartment buildings (2); Duplexes (**24**); **Bed** and Breakfast Homes (3); All appeared well constructed and well maintained. **These are** positives.

VI. Driving...comments on:

a. street signs

- ◆ okay
- ◆ Didn't notice any special signage.
- ◆ Nothing unique about street signs.
- ◆ **Good.**

b. **traffic patterns/street** conditions

- ◆ Poor.
- ◆ Street conditions were very **good** and **traffic pattern will** be improved after bridge construction is completed.
- ◆ Streets in **good** condition; some construction obstacles.
- ◆ Adequate.

c. welcome signs (at entrances)

- ◆ Attractive wooden signs on highway at the edge of town. "Albany - Village With A Vision" - pop. 1140.
- ◆ Noticeable signs.
- ◆ Previously commented "nothing unique". Same old "Welcome To".
- ◆ **Poor.**

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

- ◆ Poor.
- ◆ Lacking.
- ◆ **Inadequate.**
- ◆ **Nice** wooden sign to **village park**.

Driving...comments on industrial park/area:

Sign well defined.. .busy.. .growing.. .new.. .etc.

- 4 Signs well defined. Growing (???). Since we lack **an** industrial park, I was impressed with **this**.
- 4 Sits just off the highway (#59) with an informative sign. Appeared to **be** 50-60 cars parked near the buildings - probably the **cars** of employees.
- 4 **Yes**, the industrial park was well defined by the sign and **listed** the businesses but not what they do.
- 4 **Good**; signs well defined.

VIII. Driving—comments on schools:

- 4 Didn't notice.
- 4 School looks aged, however remodeling appears to be in progress. Construction should **enhance** the facility.
- 4 The brick school complex appeared to be fairly new. Once building for elementary, Jr. High and high school students. Approximately **2** blocks off of highway, mid-town.

IX. Driving...comments on Parks, play grounds, athletic facilities, etc.

- 4 Nice parks.
- 4 Very **nice** park. Large fenced facility for **softball**. Nicely cared for.
- 4 Parks seemed clean and well groomed. The **baseball** diamond was attractive and well groomed.
- 4 Poor.
- ◆ Very nice park.

X. Driving...comments on other:

- a. hospitals/clinics.
- 4 No comment.
- 4 Clinic **was** closed **when** we were there but hopefully is normally **open**.
- 4 **so - so!**
- 4 Saw only a **Monroe** Clinic branch office located on one corner of **the** business district. Not very **impressive**, but we have no knowledge of it's real function.

◆ Medical clinic downtown was closed.

b. billboards/advertising

◆ Nothing I remember.

◆ None.

4 Lack of.

◆ None.

c.

◆ 3 very nice bed and breakfast homes.

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

Appearance, displays, signs, etc.

◆ Most buildings empty. The few that **are** occupied were closed the day we Visited or during the hours (10 - 3) we were in town.

4 A DEAD town. Mostly vacant **stores**. **Christmas** decorations **still** up in some store windows. Buildings are old and need attention. Depressing!

4 Temble

◆ Older buildings downtown and the **rear** of downtown buildings were deteriorating and very visible from the bridge and main traffic **pattern**.

◆ Most of business district gone.

XII. Walking around...comments on people:

Were they **friendly**, did they know answers to questions, did they **try** to help, appearance, etc.

◆ **Yes**, they were friendly and answered questions. They told **us** everyone works out of town.

◆ Very friendly and knew answers to questions.

◆ **All** people seemed friendly and tried to help **as much as** possible. Did not **see** a lot of children.

4 Yes. Friendly, good people.

◆ The few people **we** saw were friendly and willing **to** visit. Mostly a bedroom

community with people working in Monroe, Janesville and Madison.

- ◆ People I met were very friendly.

XIII. Community information: comments on....

a. community brochure (tourist **type**)

- ◆ None??

- ◆ Only 1 copy was available at City Hall. Couldn't give out a 2nd one without giving up his only copy. **Asked** in restaurant for a brochure and waitress didn't know of **any**.

- ◆ Not available.

- ◆ None.

- ◆ Didn't **see** any.

- ◆ One brochure was all they had unless they gave up their copy.

b. business/attractions brochures or directory

- ◆ Noneavailable

c. community profile (demographic, industrial **type** information for prospective business people, **etc.**)

- ◆ None.

d. map

- ◆ None.

e. other (ie. bulletin/notice tourism, **kiosks**, etc.)

- ◆ None other than some hand-made signs/posters in local restaurant.

XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:

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

- ◆ Didn't go there.

- ◆ Facility was well **taken** care of and was signed.

- ◆ Fairly new **wooden** structure at **north** edge of town with **a nice** wooden sign. Houses village hall and **police** and/or fire station. Nice sign.

b. helpfulness of staff

- ◆ Didn't go to City Hall. Another team was assigned to gather information there.
- ◆ Staff was very courteous and helpful when we **asked** about the industrial **park**. Roger gave us information and an additional contact if needed. He was very polite and helpful.

XV. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit:

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

- ◆ **No** Chamber of Commerce

b. comment on information available

- ◆ **NIA**

c. comment on staff

- ◆ **NIA**

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

- ◆ **N/A**

XVI. Other stuff...

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

- ◆ **Used** restroom in one tavern and it was very clean, neat and impressive. Did not **see** any other public facilities.
- ◆ Didn't find or **see** any.

b. pay phones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)

- ◆ The only one found was at the telephone company near the **park**.

c. Parking

- ◆ **Plenty**
- ◆ **Plenty** available for **limited retail** businesses.
- ◆ **Adequate.**
- ◆ **Good.**
- ◆ **Plenty. No reason to come downtown**

- ◆ No problem. No parking meters
- d. water fountains, benches, etc.
- ◆ No water fountain
- ◆ Benches available.
- ◆ Pretty flowers.
- ◆ Nice **park** by dam area. Interesting **history** feature.
- ◆ No water fountain. Nice picnic tables.
- ◆ No water fountain, but nice **benches** and tables.

WRAP UP

A. Using your "senses"...

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

- ◆ Downtown like a "**stale roll**". Residential - "fresh morning roll".
- ◆ We were routed by friendly man to eat at the Edgewater Restaurant. It was nearly **full** at 12:15. Food was **ok** but nothing to excite your tastebuds.
- ◆ 2 intermediate restaurants.
- ◆ Friendly **rural** community **lacking** retail businesses.
- ◆ Restaurant food was **good**; service was good; unattractive building inside and out.
- ◆ No stores. Couldn't even spend money to buy peppermints.

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

- ◆ A "dying" community.
- ◆ **No unusual odors**
- ◆ Clean, fresh Wisconsin **air**.
- ◆ **Good**.
- ◆ **Lots** of **trees** along river. I didn't notice any unpleasant odors.
- ◆ Downtown "musty"; Residential "flowers".

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

- ◆ None
- ◆ Water rushing over the dam and spillway. Heavy equipment in use to build new bridge over the Sugar River.
- ◆ Water. Pleasant.
- ◆ The river.
- ◆ **Peaceful** running water. Construction.
- ◆ Construction of the bridge of Sugar River and the natives said there was **nothing** wrong with it, but it is probably better that they are building it now.

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.)

- ◆ Friendly people; deserted town
- ◆ The community seemed deserted **until** lunch hour and then very friendly people.
- ◆ Warm. Felt good, but deserted.
- ◆ Deserted...beyond dying - it's dead!
- ◆ People are very warm and friendly.

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

1. Sign entering town.. .."Village With A Vision"
 Overall appearance. Neat lawns, flowers, well-kept homes.
 River. **Needs to be** accented, cleaned and landscaped.
 Distance to major cities.
 3 bed and breakfast establishments. **Good** for tourism.
2. The Sugar River
 Unusually **nice park** with large shelter for picnics, ball **park**, playground equipment, gazebo.
 Friendly people
 3 nice **bed** and breakfasts. People must travel here for some reason.
 Industrial **park** providing employment.
3. Water
 Friendly people

4.
 - ☛ River
 - ☛ **Bike** Path
 - ☛ **Bed** and Breakfasts
 - ☛ **Good** roads.
 - ☛ Clean

5.
 - ☛ Friendly people
 - ☛ Attractive downtown flower **beds**
 - ☛ Nice downtown park
 - ☛ Well-kept city park
 - ☛ Attractive **bed** and breakfast establishments

6.
 - ☛ Friendly people
 - ☛ Nice apartments
 - ☛ Sugar River
 - ☛ Nice **bed** and breakfast establishments
 - ☛ Good park

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.

- ◆ Recreational bike path. Will begin **looking** for bike path areas.
- ◆ Greet strangers. Be more friendly to customers.
- ◆ Nothing that stands out. Just glad Polo worked to improve itself. We were close to dying **too!**

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

- ◆ Downtown was a "ghost town."
- ◆ How disappointing it was to visit Albany. There was literally nothing to bring back. I'll remember that Albany is **a** place to avoid and I felt that our **day** was a waste of time.
- ◆ **Too small.**
- ◆ The possible growth the town could **see** from the river and bike path through tourism.
- ◆ How desperately they need help for downtown.

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

- ◆ Not utilizing natural **resources** (river and bike **path**) to attract tourists.
- ◆ Concentrate on the natural beauty of the Sugar River. Hide the back of those old downtown buildings with **trees** or something.

- ◆ Why would you send **a** Chamber of Commerce to **a** town that doesn't even have **a** Chamber?
- ◆ Some towns are **too small to** survive and make it. They must fold. Most towns under 3000 may be in trouble.
- ◆ I feel *sorry* for the people of Albany. Perhaps they work and shop out of town and whether there **are** stores in downtown or not, is of no consequence to them. **Too** bad someone doesn't utilize the river with **an** outdoor cafe, **canoe** rental, water sports, fishing derby, *etc.* Polo would **LOVE** to have a river running through!
- ◆ Were told they have **a** very **poorly** run "Pro-Albany" **instead** of a Chamber. Residents work out of town and do not support downtown Albany.