

First Impressions

of

Baraboo, WI

by Platteville, WI

Visit conducted 10/1/91

A program for community improvement

Developed by:

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REPORT INTRODUCTION

The First Impressions visit of Baraboo by Platteville was conducted on Tuesday, October 1, 1991.

The five member Platteville team profile:

Three men, two women;
Four are business people;
One is involved in education;
All are currently of working age and actively employed;
Combination of life-long residents and "moved to the area".

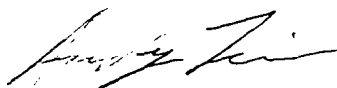
The weather was very cooperative when we arrived around 10:00 a.m. and only became overcast with some rain as we returned from our visit in the afternoon.

We had two teams and one individual making visits. There was some overlap of places visited, but not completely. We each took turns driving around the community for the visual impressions and then walking in the business district. The teams traveled in two separate vehicles.

The visitation team was probably most impressed, and perhaps a little intimidated, by the industrial park and its tenants and the diversity of retail businesses in the main street area. We were impressed with the quantity and quality of the industries and retail businesses. We were surprised to see that the community could support both specialty stores like the children's toy store and specialty cosmetics as well as three major furniture stores. In addition to the strong retail and industrial economy, we were obviously impressed with the tourism attractions in Baraboo.

The following pages provide a composite of the five individual reports. If further explanation is required on any of these, I invite you to contact me at (608) 723-2125.

It was a pleasure visiting your community. You certainly opened up some eyes in the Platteville area.



Andrew B. Lewis
Grant County Resource Development Agent
UW-Extension

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

I remembered visiting the Ringling Brothers Circus Museum in Baraboo as a child. Obviously, when I think of Baraboo. I think of Al Ringling and the circus.

No expectations.

Clean mid-american town-

Near Devils Lake.

All I knew was that the Ringling Brothers Circus Museum was there.

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

Positive:

Hwy. 33 East, vacant building.
Hwy. 12/33, nice shopping center.
Hill Street, o.k.
County A, o.k.

Negatives:

Although the city doesn't have a lot of control over it, there are a number of roads entering and exiting the City of Baraboo. This makes driving rather confusing. Highway directional signs it seems could be improved.

Junk yard 1 1/2 miles south of Baraboo on Hwy. 12.

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

A. Appearance

1. Downtown

Retail businesses appear to be exceptionally strong. The business improvement district (BID) seems to have provided some cohesion to the downtown business district.

I was indifferent to the yellow flags marking those businesses that were open.

The bronze historical markers on downtown buildings were a nice touch.

More attention could be given to river frontage - the only positive river frontage use was at the Circus World Museum.

Above average.

Working at updating.

Average signage on square needs updating.

Thriving business area.

Streets around square need surface work.

2. Residential

I felt that there was a good mix of new and well-preserved. older housing stock.

Average.

3. Industrial park

Baraboo's industrial park is indeed impressive. You would be hard-pressed to find another community of 10,000 with the number and quantity of industries located in the park.

Good signage, tenants in park.

Needs grooming along streets, mowing.

Huge.

4. Parks

I was very impressed with Ochner Park. Very clean and appeared to be well used.

I was very surprised to find that Baraboo had a zoo. A surprise because that is not something I would expect to find in a community of 10,000.

Excellent.

18-hole golf course - nice.

Close to one of the state's nicest parks - Devil's Lake.

5. Schools

The school system was **very** impressive in terms of its appearance.

Excellent, newer, three elementary, nursery school, middle school, high school.

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

Adequate sidewalks, handicap assessable needs, on-going upkeep.

7. Other

The Sauk County Fairgrounds appeared to be in very poor condition and needs a lot of maintenance work. It is truly an eyesore at this point.

Liked the old Woolworth Company sign, but the awnings were ripped and in poor repair.

B. Signing

1. Community entrance/exit signs

Adequate.

Business district, poor.

2. Streets

Excellent.

Adequate.

See comments noted earlier under #2.

3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.

Schools, UW campus very poor.

4. Storefront signs

No consistency, not harmonious.

5. Industrial park

Old one, excellent.

New one by golf course, poor.

6. City Hall, police, etc.

Chamber, excellent.

City hall, poor.

No profile available for above.

7. Billboards/advertising, etc.

Average.

Noted that the Al Ringling Theatre did not mention times for tours.

The menu outside of Susie's Restaurant was helpful.

The bronze plaques on historic buildings was a nice touch.

The Old Rocking Horse Antiques Company had a nice sign, but it was closed and did not say when it would re-open. The same was true for the Betsy Ross Ice Cream Parlor.

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

A. City/Village Hall

1. Is there a street map?

Did not have key locations: hospitals, schools, police, etc.

2. Community brochure/directory

Noted that the brochure with the color circus wheel on the front entitled "Baraboo Wisconsin Hub of Your Vacation Activities" was well done. It provides good information on businesses, accommodations, community events, and things to do in the Baraboo area. We also enjoyed the walking historic tour guide of Baraboo Wisconsin (the 8 1/2 x 11" publication). This brochure was very informative and well done.

Average.

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

No information on profile.

4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit.....etc.

Most of the business people seemed to be knowledgeable about the different accommodations and restaurants in town. Received good information from the salesperson at Hill's Gallery and Gifts. She recommended three different restaurants in Baraboo.

Suggested to go to chamber office (received good advice on eating locations at the chamber office.

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

Most of the brochures did list a contact person for more information.

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

The chamber of commerce was well stocked with a variety of brochures. I did purchase a map of the Baraboo area with cartoon caricatures.

B. Chamber office/visitor info center

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

The chamber of commerce office did have directional signing. The identification sign in front of the building was a little difficult to see. Most of the residents did know the location of the community building and chamber office.

Baraboo is fortunate to have both the chamber office and the Sauk County Industrial Development Corporation Office in the same building.

Excellent, very friendly.

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

Excellent.

Street maps need key locations.

Excellent information received from Sauk County Industrial Development Director in same building as chamber.

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

The chamber of commerce was very informed on the numerous restaurants and overnight accommodations.

Excellent.

4. **How prepared/helpful were they.**

The chamber office was very helpful, although when we first came to the office she was busy on the phone for a couple of minutes.

Very good.

5. **Convenient hours?**

The hours were convenient and were listed on the office door.

Adequate.

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

1. **How knowledgeable about the community were they?**

- a. Alpine Restaurant waitress very helpful.
- b. Fashion Showplace very helpful.
- c. Alpine Restaurant waitress was very good.
- d. Residents appeared to be knowledgeable and proud of the community. One older woman with a sweatshirt saying "aged to perfection" provided good directions and was very friendly. The owner/operator of the Simply Amish store was very informed about activities in the community and provided some good information on the BID district in Baraboo.

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

- a. Most of the community was knowledgeable about the sources of assistance in the community and referred us to the appropriate chamber or development corporation office.
- b. Fashion Showplace owner referred.

3. **Attitude, appearance, etc.**

- a. In several of the stores I had to initiate a discussion or ask for help. This was the case in several visits such as the one to the antique mall and the children's store. Sales personnel at the Glacier Ace Hardware store did offer help.
- b. Very friendly.
- c. Neat.

4. **Other comments**

- a. Had to wait for clerk to wait on, had to ask for help.

5. **General**

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

Most residents and business people were very informed about the history of Baraboo and the Ringling Brothers connection.

Yes, aware of what's going on.

The waitress at the Alpine Cafe was very knowledgeable about her business and the community. She noted that the business had been an ice cream parlor since 1930 and that the tin ceiling had been featured in a story by the Milwaukee Journal.

B. **Services...variety of retail...lodging facilities,.-**

Very nice facilities.

Large variety, interested to find community can support three furniture stores, cosmetic specialties, and two camera shops.

C. **Are there public restrooms?**

. At chamber, parks.

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

I was pleased to find a free phonebook at the chamber office. In several communities the phone companies charge for phone books.

Yes.

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

Looks active and attractive - could use grooming.

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

The waitress at the Alpine Cafe recommended some tasty, homemade chocolate chip cookies and homemade pie.

The owner of the Simply Amish store also recommended that we come back for the Taste of Baraboo festival.

I was surprised to see that the Betsy Ross Ice Cream and Candy Parlor could afford to be strictly a seasonal business in the main street area. Their business sign said, "see you all next year" (a date of opening and closing would be helpful).

Has specialty restaurants/bakeries.

G. What does community SMELL like?

No industrial.

Agricultural smells.

Bakery.

H. What SOUNDS did you hear?

I liked the atmosphere and creaking wooden floor boards at the Simply Amish store.

Normal, dogs barking across from chamber.

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

I was amazed by the high level of pedestrian activity in Baraboo on a Tuesday in what could be considered to be "off season.

Warm, active, inviting.

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

Most residents were very informed about their community history.

Friendly, clean, outgoing.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:

The City of Baraboo has turned its back on an important resource - the Baraboo River. As a child I visited the Ringling Brothers Circus and remembered some kind of a story about a hippopotamus or elephant that had gotten loose into the Baraboo River and was surprised to see that it was difficult to find the river in Baraboo. The city could better use the river frontage on that important resource.

Has the community done any tourism promotion in the Florida area (the summer home for the Ringling Brothers Circus)?

City hall - not well informed!

Very little promotion of the UW campus.

Noted that the Al Ringling Theatre had no mention of the tours although the chamber office said they take place twice a day.

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

The Ringling Brothers Museum and Circus.

The pedestrian activity, for example, the tour bus was full on a Tuesday afternoon during the "off season."

The retail variety (the number of specialty stores) and the fact that the city is able to support a number of hardware stores and three major furniture stores.

The community zoo.

Amount of industry located in park, zoo.

Number of businesses for size of town.

Mill rate seems high.

6. Doing it Right!

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

1. The Ringling Brothers Circus and Museum.
2. Industrial park tenants.
3. Number of business and types.
4. Impressed with schools and medical facilities.
5. Parks and recreational areas - zoo.

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!**

It would take longer than 72 hours, but liked the walking historic tour guide of Baraboo and the bronze plaques noting the location of historical buildings in Baraboo.

Make sure city hall contact is knowledgeable about our community.

Chamber members are aware of Industrial Development contracts (get information on park).