

First Impressions: A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement

Community visited: Centerville, Iowa

Date of Visit: October 9, 16 & 17, 2007

Visit completed by: Keokuk, Iowa

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**First Impressions:
A Program for Community Assessment & Improvement
Final Report**

Community visited: Centerville, Iowa

Visitation Team Profile

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Age: 55 Gender: Female Occupation: Account Manager

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Age: Gender: Female Occupation: City Community Development

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Age: Gender: Female Occupation: Main Street Director

Tim Gobble

Age: 39 Gender: Male Occupation: Economic Development

Kathie Mahoney

Age: 53 Gender: Female Occupation: Code Enforcement

Katie O'Brien

Age: 40 Gender: Female Occupation: Chamber Director

Jamie Short

Age: 31 Gender: Female Occupation: Marketing Director

Barb Smidt

Age: 44 Gender: Female Occupation: Vice President/Retail Sales/Marketing, First
Community Bank

Date of visit: October 9, 16 & 17, 2007

Time spent: 4-5 hours

Weather on date of visit: Partly cloudy, 55°-70°

Past Perceptions

What is your impression of the community before this visit? What did you expect to see? Please comment on your knowledge of the community.

- Small rural town. A lot like Keokuk on paper.
- A smaller community, very well kept.
- Old buildings. Small industries.
- No impressions to speak of. Have never been there.
- Hwy. 2 pass through, ag town, flat.
- Former Main Street town, Hwys. 2 & 5 run through town, have an annual gun show, expect to see ag and hunting-related businesses, expect to see buildings in good condition.

Prior to your visit

How easy was it to get information by mail and telephone about the community? Are you satisfied with the quality of the information received? Did the information arrive in a timely fashion?

- Nice Web site.
- Easy information. Portrays “lake” community.
- I called from my Illinois home and requested info be sent to my home. Have never received the info.
- Had nice Web site! Seemed to be informative.

Please rate and comment on the community’s online Web materials and information. Could you find information on state and regional tourism Web sites about the community?

Range of scores: 7

- Lake community represented.

Five Minute Impression

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

- Lots of older empty buildings – boarded up. Sidewalks were weedy. Stopped at Hardee’s to use restroom. It was 10 a.m. and the restaurant and bathrooms were filthy! Kitchen floor was dirty and garbage overflowing.
- Rural; poor signage/lack of obvious signs; cluttered; unplanned – businesses/buildings appeared to have “sprouted” wherever; did not pull me in...make me want to stop; rubble everywhere (appeared to be from a road project)
- Juncture 2 & 5 real opportunity to “make an impact”
- Motel looks unappealing (black & white) when we came through town; Majestic Theater – good opportunity to renovate; homes seemed outdated along Hwy. 2; Dave’s Discount Doors & More – eyesore; in front of IA Steel & Wire Co. messy – rock piles, dirt piles, construction?
- Mostly older buildings – most of them well-maintained; could use more signage; a few residential areas need to clean up and paint houses.
- Smaller town but not as well kept on the outer limits as I thought.

Community Entrances

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



Hwy. 2 in from East

Average score: **4.3**

Range of scores: **3 to 7**



- Entrance sign nice, well-maintained.
- No sign, run-down buildings.
- Weeds, rubble, poorly-signed although evidence of new sign going up.
- One green Centerville sign, working on new one.
- No Business District sign, Centerville sign not very noticeable, unkept residence on north side of Hwy. 2.

Highway 2 in from West

Average score: **5.7**

Range of scores: **3 to 6**

- No sign. Liked the vet hospital for large animals on the outskirts.
- Lots of industrial, no welcome sign.
- Better than east side, rubble.
- Green sign indicating Centerville

Highway 5 from South

Average score: **3.3**

Range of scores: **2 to 4**

- No signage; unkept area.
- Worn down; no welcome sign; lots of gravel drives; empty buildings, industrial park – good signage.

- Industrial looking, lumber company, old houses, 2 veterinarians, industrial park, Sharon Bluffs State Park sign.
- Stone Centerville sign, Oakland Cemetery – artificial flowers at entrance.
- Rubble, rural, industrial.



Highway 5 from North

Average score: **5.8**

Range of scores: **3 to 8**

- No signage; neat and clean.
- Nice road, beautiful homesteads, no billboards (way out), no welcome sign, nothing significant at junction of Hwys. 2 and 5, later we found Centerville sign.
- Green Centerville sign across from Wal-Mart.
- Small, green Centerville sign, not very attractive.
- Sprawl, nice mix of chain store choices, development happening, medical/fitness/health niche.

Other entrances (airports, bike trails, boat landings, train stations, snowmobile trails, etc.)

- Rathbun Lake very nice – picnic area – information area – clean.
- Airport: good signage to airport, no signage from airport to town (would have no idea which way to go until you get to Hwy. 5), picked up but not nice.

Other comments:

- Did not notice a motto or slogan! No signs on Hwys. 2 or 5 directing us to schools or lakes, however the square and hospital were well-marked!



Housing & Residential Areas

How would you rate the overall quality, affordability and availability of housing?

Average score: **6.2**

Range of scores: **6 to 7**

Quality

Average ratings for:

7.8 - Housing for seniors

6.3 - Apartments/rental housing

7.0 - New homes

4.7 - Vacant lots for new homes

6.5 - Existing/Older Homes

- Lots of interesting stucco. Great new affordable units.
- One subdivision we saw overlooked a junkyard (where trades class built a house) that was the only one I saw.
- 205th Avenue: new housing nice (no street lights or sidewalks), many types of homes/quality.
- Saw very little construction going on.

Affordability

Is there an adequate mix of housing to suit a variety of income levels?

- Yes.
- Yes – appears to be.
- Apartments – saw two nice apartment buildings on N Park. Lots of options, lots of neighborhoods, different types.
- Yes, there appears to be – did notice a lot of houses that need “work” or clean up.
- Yes. If any segment lacking it is upper income although some new construction is taking place.
- Yes. Different areas offered different types of housing.

Availability

Average ratings for:

7.3 - Apartments/rental housing

6.8 - Existing/Older Homes

7.3 - Housing for seniors

6.3 - Vacant lots for new homes

7.0 - New homes

- New development is happening in an area of town where the view is a junkyard.
- Not sure how available seniors housing, apartment/rentals are, but know it is available/present in the community.
- There appears to be a lot of apartment complexes in town.
- Did not notice a large amount of housing for sale.

What are the most and least appealing features of the housing in this community?

- Back-drop for the new subdivision has a lot to be desired.
- Old and new neighborhoods, some nice homes, liked density of old neighborhood, seemed in general – housing was well-kept and lots of options and mostly nice neighborhoods, housing was a plus here.
- Most – wide range of choices; Least – houses along key roads are in need of renovation.
- Good - income based and senior housing is located within existing neighborhoods; modest but lovely homes throughout community. No real negatives. Centerville has a decent mix of housing stock for community of its size/population.
- Most – well-kept older homes and new home subdivision; Least – home with refrigerator/appliances for sale in yard next to street, homes that need painting and/or repair.

Comment on the quality and availability of residential infrastructure (i.e. roads, sidewalks, lighting, public transportation, bike trails/lanes, green space, trees, yards):

- Large trees along the streets add character to the community. Sidewalks were in good repair.
- Good green space within walking distance of schools, residential. Private homes for the most part were neat and maintained.
- All seemed good. Not sure if there are bike trails – park entrance was blocked due to road work or something.
- Good streets.

Appeal

Average ratings for:

8.0 – Senior citizen	6.4 – Young families
7.6 – Middle income	5.2 – Single young adults
6.6 – Upscale/professional	

- Newer homes are available.
- Options are good.
- Senior citizen – saw a couple of apartment complexes, assisted living very nice, upscale/professional – didn't see tons of upper-end houses – a few here or there. Single young – not a very “urban”, fun, fast-paced feel to the town. Seems more catered to older people. No public Internet access, trendy stores, downtown living that I could see. Young families – probably okay if you grew up there – didn't see much other than a park for kids. Middle income – has enough amenities to live/raise kids.
- Single young adults want “cool” – we didn't see the things they would consider “cool” anywhere. Young families and middle income have a wide variety of choices. Good place for senior adults to live. Upscale housing is lacking or least visible.

Education, Health, Social & Emergency Services

Education

Comment on the availability and appearance of schools.

Pre-school/Kindergarten/Head Start:

- K-3 nice, older neighborhood school. Helpful and enthusiastic staff. Pre-K and K facility looked like fun.
- Preschool/Head Start facility nice.
- Catholic school (St. Mary's) looked older but nicely kept.
- Nice – located at the college campus.
- Clean, neat, orderly.
Found by accident.



Primary/Elementary/Middle School:

- Building was old but well-maintained and centrally-located in town.
- Did not go in but like the way classes are structured in separate buildings (4-6, 7-8).
- Saw Central Elementary and 7-8 school. Look like typical older school buildings.
- Okay – need to have more signage as to what/where it is. Easy to just walk in without being stopped.
- Clean, neat, orderly. Hard to find – no sign.

High School:

- Large high school campus. Again, buildings seemed well-maintained.
- Older with new addition. I like that the school is within walking distance for most in – town students.
- Very odd in set-up – seemed added onto many times. Need better signs to identify the school – only saw one sign on the front entrance after driving all the way around.
- Looked nice, in a good neighborhood, poor signage to school.
- Need signage.
- Clean, neat, orderly. Hard to find – no sign.

College/University:

- College campus was beautifully-landscaped and buildings well-maintained.
- Indian Hills campus appears well-maintained but dated.
- Indian Hills very attractive campus.
Welcome/Visitors Guide sign very dirty and impossible to read. At first glance, I liked the “barn”



building look (ag focus?). No people around. Wonderful student center (rehab barn). No community info at front desk.

- Nice layout (appeared) but the entrance has overgrowth of weeds in/around signage.
- Clean, neat, orderly. Signage okay.

What do residents think about the quality and availability of their local schools?

- They are very proud of them.
- Strong pride in schools demonstrated by signs, logos, etc.
- Seem to think they are good.
- Like their schools. Good things to say about Catholic and public schools.
- Think very highly of them.

Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of schools for a community of this size?

Average score: **7.8**

Range of scores: **7 to 8**

- Not sure about K-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-12, Pre-K and Head Start all separate. Seems like a lot of overhead in buildings.
- Lots of school spirit.

Health Care Services

Comment on the availability and apparent quality of healthcare facilities.

Hospitals:

- On the outskirts of town. Well-marked, easy to find, very nice facility.
- Outside appearance is attractive and large campus on edge of town.
- Very nice, friendly, with a presence downtown.
- Very nice facilities, easily accessible.
- Clean. Very helpful with what information requested.
- Easy to find, bring in specialist, hospice, dialysis and hospital.

Physician, dentist, optometrist and other medical offices and clinics:

- Limited service providers at time of visit. Looking at getting new doctor within month.
- Adequate.
- Seemed to be several of these offices scattered around town in new and old buildings.
- Easy to find, in open and obvious areas, clean, neat.

Long-term care, assisted living and nursing home facilities:

- Very nice facility, beautiful, new.
- Very impressive, new facility.
- Very nice!
- Quality,



comfortable, nice setting.

- Very nice campus across from medical facilities. Very well landscaped.
- Happened upon a very nice assisted living.

Other health services (i.e. Chiropractic, psychotherapy, naturopath, massage, etc.):

- Saw a chiropractic clinic and a fitness clinic. Very nice.
- Several other health services in different areas of town.

Overall, how would you rate the adequacy of health care services for a community of this size?

Average score: **7.5**

Range of scores: **6 to 9**

- Health care appeared to be one of the community's strongest assets.

Social Services

What social services (i.e. day care, senior center, counseling, etc.) are available?

- Daycare located at the college campus.
- Did see congregate meals on square, not sure about daycare or counseling.
- Senior center with meals, daycare/preschool.
- Saw Head Start, daycare, DHS office.

Overall, how would you rate the level of social services for a community of this size?

Average score: **6.8**

Range of scores: **6 to 8**

Civic

Are there a variety of not-for-profit organizations and clubs within the community?

- Only saw a Lions Club sign.
- Yes.
- Rotary, Lions.

Overall, how would you rate the level of nonprofit/civic services for a community of this size?

Average score: **6.5**

Range of scores: **5 to 8**

- Appear to have a good group of people reinforcing the betterment of the town.

Emergency Services

Overall, how would you rate the police, fire, ambulance and emergency medical service facilities?

Average score: **6.7**

Range of scores: **5 to 8**

How do local residents feel about these services?

- Very visible, easy to find.
- Location of services is centralized enough.

Local Economy

What is your impression of the health of the local economy?

- It appears to be on an upward trend with new businesses starting up. Chamber office was very upbeat about the community.
- Holding its own with some expansion growth.
- It looked great. So many businesses for a town of their size.
- Appears depressed until you get to downtown district. Rubbermaid closed.

Downtown

Could you locate the downtown easily? If not, why did you have difficulty finding it?

- Not very big signs showing you the downtown.
- Easy to find but not well-signed.
- It wasn't difficult to find, but the only indicator was a green downtown (or business district) sign – had to watch for it.
- Locating was easy – getting around more difficult. There were a lot of one-way, narrow streets. I like the city square with businesses around – good variety.
- Yes, however, only one block off of main road and not really easy to know that good things very close by.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance of the downtown (buildings, displays, signage, streetscape).

Average score: **6.2**

Range of scores: **3 to 8**

- Was not impressed with the square. Looked unkept.
- While storefronts were well done with fresh, season appropriate displays, there were some problem areas. Café was open but sign was off and building appeared dark; cluttered window. Bank sign out of proportion for downtown, building and bank's image. Abandoned theater unsightly at main entry into square. Equal mix of cared for buildings and those in need of attention.
- Buildings well-maintained, Tuscan (restaurant) was weird to have fake brick façade above awning, liked historical markers on some buildings, sidewalks very nice, love lamp posts, signage okay, there were banners up all around talking about an event held in September and it was mid-October when we visited.
- Great vital downtown but rest of business district (i.e. business at Hwys. 2 & 5) seems depressed.

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping in the downtown.

Average score: **6.3**

Range of scores: **4 to 8**



- Good variety of services – eating, shopping.
- Very nice, especially for a town this size.
- Enjoyed what was in downtown. Did not go in mall/sprawl areas – drive by showed number of chain restaurants but limited shopping.
- Very impressed with the variety and quality of the downtown stores.

Rate and comment on the customer service you received in the downtown.

Average score: **8.2**

Range of scores: **7 to 9**

- Store personnel were very friendly and helpful.
- Everyone was friendly, answered questions, gave good directions and cross-promoted each other.
- Everyone was so nice. Service suffered a little at Tuscany over lunch rush.
- Very courteous.
- Great people, friendly, lots of elderly people at downtown.

Rate and comment on the signage in the downtown.

Average score: **5.5**

Range of scores: **3 to 7**

- Square – is good/very good. Tuscany restaurant was most recommended but had very poor signage.
- Only noticed one sign and it was small – but located it easily even without signage.
- Hated US Bank sign – did not compliment downtown at all. “Big bank” look among mom and pop stores. Other than that, nothing stood out, which is good.
- Yellow signs around courthouse were too big. They over-shadowed the building and the streetscape.



Rate and comment on the window displays in the downtown.

Average score: **6.2**

Range of scores: **4 to 9**

- Appropriate seasonal displays in most windows were well-done.
- Good, appropriate, fresh.
- Computer shop looked a little unprofessional – see receptionist from the street – when we drove by she was holding her dog in her arms.
- Nothing really pulled me in.
- Very impressive.

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise in the downtown.

Average score: **8.0**

Range of scores: **7 to 9**

- Once inside, quality was good as was variety.
- Saw men's clothing, women's clothing, furniture, cellular, shoe stores, financial services, realty, groceries, home décor – very nice.
- Men's clothing nice variety price to value was in line.
- Great variety of items available in the downtown including a new department store just now opening. Several restaurants to choose from while shopping.

Comment on the mix of facilities and services in the downtown (housing, professional services, retail, recreation, accommodation and food, industry, parks, etc.).

- Housing surrounding downtown was rundown-looking for the most part. Plenty of professional services – law, financial, medical, courthouse. Retail great. Recreation and accommodation – not sure. Food okay. Not much industry. Parks not around downtown.
- All the state offices were located downtown.
- Very good diversity – service, retail, grocery, young/old.

Rate and comment on the quality and availability of parking in the downtown.

Average score: **7.0**

Range of scores: **4 to 10**

- A lot of parking but confusing to have in middle of road. One-way streets confusing.
- Poor – for the amount of people on the streets – parking in square limited. Having courthouse there I'm sure takes away parking availability.
- A lot of parking, but almost dangerous for pedestrians to keep track of all possible places traffic could come from.
- Lots of parking around square but it appeared to be occupied by business employees. Often we were the only people in shops but all spaces were filled.
- Quite a bit of parking in the downtown.

Rate and comment on the quality (appearance, adequacy, etc.) of lighting in the downtown.

Average score: **7.0**

Range of scores: **5 to 9**

- Were visiting during the day.

- Wasn't there at night.
- Was daylight, but appeared to be adequate.

Does the downtown play a role in tourism? Is there potential for the downtown to play a greater role?

- Had sign to direct us to square – advertised as “historic”.
- Several antique/novelty shops. Several historic buildings to visit.
- Downtown historic architecture and tour is a tourism draw. Adjacent to downtown are museums, good architecture, history.
- Yes – historical markers, courthouse. Thought Chamber could be more professional looking, which would help perceptions of visitors.
- Yes, yes. An area “destination” shopping at square.

Describe the residential housing mix in the downtown (apartment, single detached).

- Housing up to and around square.
- None, but a few apartments that most likely need renovated.
- Didn't really notice the upper story.
- We couldn't tell if there is upper level housing – only at Continental.

Would you find the downtown a desirable place to live?

- No, was not impressed with the square area.
- I would live in downtown Centerville. Close to dining, amenities, library, etc. Lots of potential for “cool” spaces in upper stories.
- No – too much traffic – not suitable for families (yard).
- No – no parking for housing that I noticed.
- Yes, has a small market. Energetic; clean, neat and attractive; great variety of stores.

Were there any government or nonprofit organization activities that are serving as traffic generators for the downtown (city hall, post office, YMCA)?

- Chamber of Commerce, Library, Courthouse.
- Chamber of Commerce, Hospital.
- Courthouse.
- County courthouse, Chamber of Commerce.
- Definitely. County courthouse.

General Information about Overall Retail

Describe the mix of retail shopping available (malls, specialty shops, strip malls, big box stores).

- Good mix of specialty retail, service and dining in downtown. Healthy mix.
- Wal-Mart. Mall – didn't have anything open anymore.
- Specialty shops, big box, strip malls (small).
- Centerville has all the above. The mall is just coming back after a fire.
- Average.

What retail goods do local residents appear to need to travel to surrounding communities for?

- Others appear to travel to Centerville but large “shopping mall” experience.
- Maybe home improvement (Lowe’s, Menards), clothing choices, recreation.
- Women’s clothing.
- Night life entertainment.

What stores or services were missing that you would expect to find?

- Can’t think of anything.
- Not sure.
- More available dining instead of merely fast food.

What retail stores or services did you find that were unusual or unexpected for a town of this size?

- The big furniture/home store on the square.
- Maytag, Schweisers, Bradley Hall, A Catered Affair.
- Two shoe stores. Nothing really unexpected.
- Lots of convenience stores and gas stations.

What store(s) in this community would you travel a distance of more than 30 miles to patronize?

- None.
- Antique/specialty stores.
- Stores serve local market. I did not visit any that would cause me to travel 30 miles unless Centerville was the only choice in 30 miles – one exception on east side of square soon moving elsewhere on square.
- A Taste of Country.
- The big furniture store.

Rate and comment on the overall condition of the retail sector.

Average score: **6.7**

Range of scores: **5 to 8**

- Good. Pretty much what I would expect for town of 6,000.
- Rated an 8 because of downtown density and diversity.

Other Retail Shopping Areas

Type: Shopping mall.

Location: Outskirts of town.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance.

Average score: **3.5**

Range of scores: **3 to 4**

- Anytown USA.
- Had a fire, so unable to visit.

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping.

Average score: **3.0**

Range of scores: **2 to 4**

- Most stores were closed in the mall, except theater.

Rate and comment on the customer service of businesses you visited.

Average score: **8.0**

Range of scores: **7 to 9**

- Pretty good. Higher than I expected. Friendly people. Helpful when asked.
- Were very talkative and helpful but not pushy.
- Everyone met was friendly and passerby always waved.
- Hardee's, men's clothing, specialty shops, shoe store – all good, friendly.

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

Average score: **7.5**

Range of scores: **7 to 8**

- A good mix of business.

Type: Wal-Mart.

Location: Hwy 5.

Rate and comment on the overall appearance.

Range of scores: **6 to 6**

Rate and comment on the variety of shopping.

Range of scores: **6 to 6**

Rate and comment on the customer service of businesses you visited.

Range of scores: **10 to 10**

Rate and comment on the variety and quality of merchandise.

Range of scores: **9 to 9**

Local Industries

Consider industries only within or adjacent to the community. What are the major industrial sectors in the community (i.e. manufacturing, construction, transportation)?

- Not sure.
- Industrial park – Wells Dist., Rubbermaid, Barker Co.
- They have two or three manufacturing facilities.

Who do you think are the major employers in the community?

- Schools, hospital.
- Hospital, schools, government, manufacturing.
- School system, hospital.
- Manufacturing in industrial park, schools.
- Hospital, clinics, manufacturing facilities.

What are the major types of manufacturing in the community?

- Not sure.

What are the major types of primary industry in the community (i.e. agriculture, mining, forestry or fishing)?

- Agriculture.
- Ag community, retail hub, healthcare mini-hub.

Is the community noticeably dependent on any one type of industry?

- No.
- Not noticeably.
- Very big Rubbermaid plant.
- Didn't notice. Rubbermaid empty.

Is there a well-defined industrial park or improved land where industries could locate or expand?

- Yes (2 team members said this).
- Yes – very nice, lots of room to expand.
- Yes, land available.
- There was a park but wasn't noticeably laid out.

Are the industrial facilities well-maintained?

- Yes (2 team members said this).
- They appear to be very well-maintained.
- Yes, seemed to be well-maintained.

Would this community be an attractive location for industrial development? Why or why not?

- Not sure major highway running through – only 2 or 5 (two-lane).
- It is located on good roads.

- Major roads? Transportation option.
- Yes – available building with Rubbermaid leaving.

Commercial Services

What types of commercial businesses serve the local community (high-speed Internet provider, print shops, etc.)?

- Barbershop, cleaner, US Cellular, realtors, insurance, banks, newspaper, car repair, restaurants, gas stations, monument shop, funeral home, veterinarian, hair salon.

What commercial services appear to be missing in the community?

- Could not assess because not sure I saw everything.

Professional Services

Are banks and ATMs conveniently located? Do the banks have convenient hours of service?

- Yes (4 team members said this).
- ATM's.

How would you rate the adequacy of financial services for a community of this size?

Average score: **7.6**

Range of scores: **6 to 9**

- Several different banks.
- Noted three banks, one credit union.
- Lots of banks.

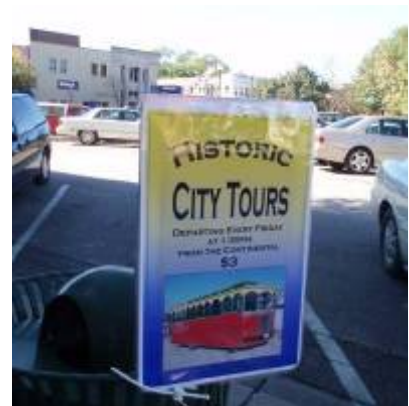
What other professional services are available (accounting, insurance, legal, etc.)? Are there any apparent gaps?

- Did not notice accountant. Did see insurance, lawyers, real estate.
- All.

Tourism

Does the community have a strong tourism sector? Please comment.

- No for community. Yes for Rathbun.
- Lake Lelah Bradley.
- Appears to – historical markers, trolley bus.
- The area has a strong tourism sector. It appears the area is expanding recreational amenities as well as



business retreat opportunities.

Does the community have a slogan/brand?

- No (2 team members said this).
- Not that we saw.
- Didn't notice it if they did.
- Not that we could discover.
- Not that was noticeable.

Is the community well-known for an attraction or event?

- Rathbun.
- Lake Rathbun, but not really part of this community – poor signage to it.
- County fair grounds are there in town.
- Rathbun Lake area, Bradley Hall.
- Re-enactment. Proximity to Rathbun.

What have you seen that could be developed into a tourist attraction (natural or man-made)?

- Nothing.
- The old theater – that could be wonderful to add charm and charisma to town.
- Instead of advertising Lake Rathbun they should build their tourism on the Lelah Bradley Lake area – beautiful.
- Architecture, lakes.

Rate and comment on the quality and appearance of existing tourist attractions.

Average score: **5.8**

Range of scores: **4 to 8**

Do you consider any of the attractions underdeveloped?

- Architecture – great start.
- No.
- Lake areas could be more utilized.
- Lake area was disappointing. How do you access? Why can't we stay there?

Are there any community events that could be expanded/developed to be a tourist attraction?

- Not sure.

Comment on the availability and selection of overnight accommodations in the community (hotels, motels, campgrounds, B&B's).

- Adequate hotels.
- Super 8 – typical. Motel 6 – needs updated. One-of-a-kind B&B – beautiful.
- Not great for hotels/motels. Only saw Super 8 and 2 local motels that looked a little iffy.
- Hotels and motels – signage and visibility good.

- No name-brand hotels.

Are there facilities to accommodate a conference and/or a large number of visitors?

- We don't think so. One by the lake being developed has potential.
- A Catered Affair.
- Major plans to expand amenities in 2008 outside of town.
- Yes.

Is there a Visitor's Center, Chamber of Commerce office, or other facility serving the needs of tourists? Comment on staff, facilities, signage, marketing material, maps, etc.

- Yes – Chamber. Office and signage needs updating. Lake marketing – not descriptive or accurate of real experience.
- Chamber of Commerce on square.
- Chamber – unprofessional sign, staff friendly, had lots of marketing material.
- Chamber of Commerce was very helpful in finding brochures for me and bragging on the community.

Rate and comment on the customer service of Chamber/Visitor staff:

Average score: **7.4**

Range of scores: **5 to 9**

- Great customer service.
- Very pleasant and helpful.

Rate and comment on the quality of restaurants:

Average score: **6.4**

Range of scores: **5 to 8**

- Continental – great lunch. Limited options. Tuscany was most recommended but not an appealing storefront and appears to be a diner.
- Hardee's was filthy!!!! Ate at the Pizza Hut – floor was sticky and dirty. Mostly fast food visible – where can you get a drink with your meal?
- Only visited Tuscany. Would like to have seen Continental – appears to be very unique.
- Locals always referred us to downtown restaurants – especially the Continental.

Variety/Mix of restaurants:

Average score: **6.5**

Range of scores: **5 to 8**

- Lots of fast food. Several locally-owned restaurants.
- Didn't see a lot of chain sit-downs, i.e. TGI Fridays, Bennigans, Applebee's, etc.
- Mostly fast food.
- Fast food, Continental, community college, golf – nicer tea room!

What do local residents recommend on where to stay, eat and visit?

- Three people asked for recommendations to eat. All three recommended the Continental and Taste of Tuscany.
- An older lady told us about the Continental and a place out by Wal-Mart – we didn't see it.
- The place we ate lunch was recommended – was good and obviously a place where most go for lunch – busy.
- Recommended a dining area south on Hwy. 5 if we wanted a drink.
- Continental, Tuscany (needs new signage), golf course place.

What local restaurant, specialty shop or attraction would bring you back to this community in the near future?

- The Columns and Bradley Hall. Brochures were very appealing and inviting.
- To visit Bradley Hall, Continental, A Taste of Country.
- None.
- Furniture store on corner, square.

Local Government Information

Are municipal offices conveniently located?

- Yes (2 team members said this).
- Didn't notice them.
- Yes. On the square – but restroom located on third floor – yikes!

How would you rate the availability and quality of the following information provided by the municipal government?

Community brochure/guide:

Average score: **6.5**

Range of scores: **6** to **7**

Business directory:

Range of scores: **1** to **1**

- Didn't see one.

Community profile (includes business and industrial sites):

- Yes, business people helpful, call back prop available, names for rentals.

Public Infrastructure

Comment on and rate each of the following for quality, accessibility or availability.

Sidewalks:

Average score: **6.5**

Range of scores: **4** to **8**

- Nice at downtown. Side streets in disrepair. New housing lacking sidewalks. Old neighborhoods nice.
- Recently replaced in downtown.
- Okay.
- Too narrow, some areas had none!

Streets:

Average score: **6.0**

Range of scores: **5** to **7**

- Very good.

- Okay – odd narrow streets around downtown – a lot of one ways.
- Too narrow. Parking in yards. One-way traffic if parking on streets.

Landscaping, street trees:

Average score: **6.3**

Range of scores: **5** to **8**

- Sidewalks on main drag “2” were weedy. Lots of boarded-up buildings.
- Tree City USA...a number of trees dying does not fit with designation.
- Nice.

Public restrooms:

Average score: **5.3**

Range of scores: **3** to **7**

- Lots of gas stations and fast-food places to use restrooms. Hardee’s was filthy.
- All but one restroom visited were clean and nicely appointed. Hardee’s had a strong, bad smell.
- Hard to find one. Hardee’s only one open – was smelly in there. Courthouse – only one, no mirror in there (a unisex bathroom), toilet would not flush well.

Street signage:

Average score: **4.2**

Range of scores: **3** to **6**

- On side streets and corners signage was good.
- Street signs were old; peeling.
- Street signage okay, but could do a better job with welcome signs.
- Could use more signage for business areas.
- Actual street signage – very faded and hard to read. No good tourism signage.

Pay phones, drinking fountains, benches, public Internet access points, other misc.:

Average score: **4.3**

Range of scores: **4** to **5**

- Not readily apparent.
- Benches nice on square. Did not see a pay phone, drinking fountain or public Internet access point.

Planning

Do you see conflicting land uses in the community (i.e. a residential subdivision next to a pulp mill)?

- New residential with view of junkyard!! Fairgrounds are a mess.
- Yes – subdivision overlooking a junkyard.
- New housing development overlooking junkyard.



- Lots of residential and commercial mixed together on Hwys. 2 and 5.

Are all land uses appropriate (commercial, residential, green space, etc.)?

- We liked how industrial park was off a ways of main road. We knew it was there, good signage but not part of landscape.
- Not sure.
- Appeared to be.

Did you experience traffic congestion anywhere?

- No (2 team members said this).
- One-way “alley” size streets very confusing once on the “square” as to how to get out.
- Feel that a fire or other natural disaster would create a bottleneck at exits from square.
- A little on square. A lot of coming and going.

Are community facilities and infrastructure generally accessible for people with disabilities?

- Appeared to be.
- Yes.

Does the community appear to be pedestrian/bike friendly?

- No – narrow sidewalks and streets.
- Yes.
- Pedestrian-friendly – yes. Bike – not so much.
- Not sure.
- Not really bike-friendly. Some neighborhoods without sidewalks. Good roads.

Recreation, Faith, Culture and Heritage

Recreation

Rate and comment on the availability and appearance of each of the following types of recreational facilities.

Parks:

Average score: **6.6**

Range of scores: **5** to **9**

- City park – scary neighbors, muddy playground, weeds on tennis court.
- Could not see it – road blocked by road crew.
- Nice parks – colorful equipment – well-kept.

Public recreation facilities:

Average score: **4**

Range of scores: **3** to **5**

- Ballpark – very nicely kept on Park Road.
- Little league park – very nice. Sports complex for schools – very nice.
- Fairgrounds had ruts in the driveway, weeds everywhere, building not well-kept.



Private recreation facilities:

Average score: **6.0**

Range of scores: **3** to **9**

- Fairgrounds – nice buildings but grounds in disrepair. Community college – pretty view, front sitting/outdoor rest., nice homes/lots, well-kept.
- Fairgrounds needed maintenance – grass out of control.
- Expanding.

Based on your impression, what do people appear to do for recreation/fun?

- Could not tell you just by looking.
- Boat, golf.
- Go to the lake, boat, ball fields.
- Movies, school events, dining.

What recreational facility (private or public) in this community surprised you?

- Lelah Bradley Lake.
- Poor shape of fairgrounds

What recreational activities or facilities seemed to be missing?

- Public tennis courts.

Rate the overall suitability of the recreational facilities for each of the following populations using a 1-10 scale (10 is best):

6.0 – Senior citizens

4.0 – Families

3.5 – Children (12 and under)

3.5 – Teens

3.0 – Singles, young adults

Entertainment

What does the community do for entertainment?

- Not sure – assuming dining, shopping.
- Family/kids sports, events on square, movie theater, lake.
- Four-plex theater.

What entertainment opportunities do residents feel they lack?

- Did not ask.

Does the community have a vibrant nightlife?

- Not sure.
- Nice restaurants, community college & Manhattan clubs.
- Not that I could determine.

Faith/Religion

Comment on the number, appearance and selection of denominations.

- Saw a lot of churches. It was noted that we didn't see a Catholic church.
- Seems quite diverse, many options.
- We stopped counting at 10. We could not find and no one could direct us to the Catholic church.
- A lot of churches.
- All the churches were clean – neat – assets to the community – plenty of them!

Are there any outstanding architectural or design features found on the religious buildings you visited?

- Churches – old and new all very nice!
- Yes – very nice churches.

- None I noted.

Please rate the religious buildings and denominations represented in this community.

Average score: **8.0**

Range of scores: **7 to 9**

- Many different denominational buildings and religions to choose from.
- Seemed like many religious options.
- Methodist very predominant it appears.
- Nice variety.
- Very diverse.

Culture and Heritage



Does the community hold any events (festivals)? Which events are held annually?

- Wine tasting, children's Art Fair, Pancake Day, Goat running Jazz Fest.
- Appeared to have a Pancake festival or something.
- Re-enactment, Pancake Day – long history, Summer Splash – fairly new.
- Fair.

What events are popular with residents?

- Pancake Day.
- Not sure.

Do the residents feel there is a lack of community events?

- Not sure.
- No.

Does the community have historical buildings or places? Are they well-maintained?

- The downtown buildings have numbers on them to do a walking tour with brochure.
- Yes – Continental, Bradley Hall, Coal Mining Museum – one-of-a-kind.
- Yes – appear to be.
- Yes. Downtown buildings, Continental, hotel, Bradley Hall, cool museum, Drake library.
- Churches and parks were well-maintained. Schools neat and clean. City hall and police and fire – visible neat and clean. Library had one door and window boarded up. Courthouse outside neat and clean, inside very poorly maintained – not clean or neat – eye sore!
- Yes, they are well-maintained.

General Observations

Role Playing

Would you consider this community as a suitable location for a young family?

- Yes – appears to be friendly, safe, inviting.
- No – did not see a lot of things to do. However, schools seemed okay.
- Yes. Good schools, outdoor recreation, friendly.

Would you consider locating your retail or service business here?

- Yes – appears to be a lot of synergy from existing businesses – they thrive off of each other.
- No – no drawing points. Nothing stands out.
- Yes, on the square.

Would you consider locating a manufacturing business here?

- Not sure if the community could support a large manufacturer because of the size of the workforce.
- They said need more industrial jobs, have industrial buildings available (appears).

Would you consider this a suitable location for a retired person?

- Yes, lots of friends. Nice retirement/assisted living.
- Yes, just seemed like an older community to me! Health care facilities and churches in great shape.
- Yes, quiet and having the assisted living quarters.
- Yes, health care, affordable living, golf, fishing, gathering places.
- Yes – seems to have all the services a retired person may desire.

Would you consider this a suitable location for a young adult?

- Good place to raise your children, good schools, lots of outdoor recreational opportunities.
- No, no visible draw to the community.
- Downtown not 24/7...things to do/places to gather. No “cool” spaces that I could immediately see.
- No – more of a family town – not a lot to do to meet other young people that I could see

Would you consider visiting this community as a tourist?

- Yes, Rathbun Lake.
- No, no visible draw to the community.
- Not really – didn’t appear to be a lot to do/see.
- I certainly would visit the area – first – and community second.
- Yes – Lake Rathbun, shopping, do some dancing, checking things out.

Information from Community Residents

Were community residents knowledgeable about their community?

- Yes – met a nice lady at Hardee’s who referred us to a couple of places to eat lunch.
- Little old lady in Hardee’s was asked about a good place to eat.
- Yes, for the most part, very knowledgeable.
- Yes.
- Yes. The ones who lived here are – lots in downtown from out of town.

Did they refer you to someone else who would help?

- No.
- Yes.

In general, did residents you spoke with have a positive or negative attitude toward their community? Why? Did you sense community pride?

- Positive. Very entrepreneurial spirit.
- Positive, upbeat and proud of their community.
- Positive attitudes overall.
- Those talked to were very positive as to their business and being there.
- Positive.
- Positive. Yes – community pride. Young professionals – enjoy life. Say “better than it was”.

Did residents identify a particular issue to be of major concern?

- Lots of people went elsewhere for healthcare.
- No (2 team members said this).

Overall, how would you rate the quality of information from community residents and business employees?

Average score: **7.5**

Range of scores: **6 to 9**

- Spoke mostly to business owners which obviously like the town or they wouldn’t invest in a business there – all were pleasant and inviting.
- Very good, accurate, no oversell and no under-appreciation apparent.

Using Your Senses

What did the community taste like? Was there any specialty food item, bakery, restaurant or candy store that you will remember?

- Average. A Taste of Tuscany while good (and popular), food/décor did not match name.
- No (2 team members said this).
- Not really.

What did the community smell like? Was there any offensive industrial, agricultural or sewage smells? What about pleasant odors?

- Strong smell of sewage around Hardee's.
- Nothing to speak of.
- There was an offensive odor around and in Hardee's – smelled like sewer.
- Neither – no definite smell.
- No offensive or good smells.

What sounds did you hear? Please comment on the level of noise in the community (traffic, industrial, birds, water falls, music on the street, trains, noon whistle, etc.).

- Quiet.
- Very little noise.
- Mostly noticed traffic sounds – there is a lot of traffic on that square.
- Average.
- No unusual or memorable sounds.

How would you describe the overall environmental health of the community (air quality, litter, noise pollution, etc.)?

- Overall – very nice.
- Good.
- Average (2 team members said this).
- Good. No litter or pollution that was obvious.

Did you experience anything that had a strongly negative or positive impact on the way the community felt to you (hateful or angry responses, crowded or deserted streets, safety issues, smiling faces, etc.)?

- Noted elsewhere...exiting square and rubble.
- No.
- I visited Central Elementary School and unfortunately was a bit concerned about safety. I walked right in the front door (it was unlocked) and began to roam the school. The office was only marked with a sign on the door and since the door was open (like every other room) I did not know where to go. So I went to the right, down the hall, up the stairs, through the second floor hall, stopped and asked some kids where the office was and proceeded downstairs to it. I was never stopped, no one was around to see me

roaming the halls (teachers were all in class teaching) – I had free reign of the school. It does pose a safety concern – office needs marked clearly and ideally needs to be set up to view visitors approaching building entrance.

- I felt very closed in on the narrow side streets.
- Warmer and friendlier feel on square than on highways through town.
- Picked up a 2003 brochure in one business. Encourage up-to-date info or no info rather than outdated info.

Do you think your impression would be different if your visit occurred during evening hours?

- Yes – I have a feeling that downtown closes at night (after 5:00).
- No – as there didn't appear to be a lot to do after downtown closed.
- Possibly – what we saw were downtown business people or elderly people – young people probably at work, so not visible.
- Would be less activity on square.

Wrap-Up

Was your perception prior to the visit accurate? In what ways was the community different from what you expected?

- No.
- More businesses and the town was larger than I expected.
- Had no perceptions – never been there or heard anything about it.
- I didn't expect the amount of "chain" stores, dining to be there.
- Enjoyed square/downtown more than I anticipated. Pleasant surprise when drove off of highway.

Did the information you collected prior to the visit accurately reflect what you observed/experienced?

- No – thought the Web site painted a better picture.
- Never received my info.
- Didn't get.
- The lake info promised much more than the lake appeared to provide.

What is the most outstanding feature of this community?

- Parks, cemetery, healthcare facilities, churches.
- Historic buildings.
- I love that the square is basically completely full of businesses. There really is something for everyone. There were people coming and going, the café was packed at lunch. Business owners were so friendly and genuinely glad to have us visit their stores.
- County courthouse.
- Square and use of that area for events and activities in addition to the stores.

List five positive things you observed about this community.

- Friendly; walkable; clean (with a couple exceptions); healthcare facilities.
- Variety of "specialty" shops; town square; amount of shopping outlets for consumer goods; hospital; assisted living locations.
- Beautiful assisted living facility; Very nice Head Start and preschool facility; Bustling downtown square; new "chain" business was opening on square soon – Schweiser's – impressive!; Beautiful sidewalks, light posts, trash receptacles and benches in downtown, also historical markers on buildings.
- Friendly residents, upbeat and positive attitudes; Chamber office personnel very helpful; very attractive senior living facility close to hospital; new subdivisions with very nice homes; very interesting specialty shops.
- Beautiful parks and lakes and cemetery; plenty of beautiful churches; great medical facilities; housing sufficient; schools appear to be good.
- Vibrant square/downtown; cultural events; good streets; college; potential of junction 2 & 5

What are three potential opportunities available to the community?

- I feel there is a story behind all the stucco that could be played up; It may be there and I didn't see it but...bike/hike trails connecting downtown to lakes, golf, lodges.
- Community college growth; industrial growth with available buildings and space.
- Town has great "small town" feel with all the conveniences of a big city – I would play this up – Centerville, a great place to stay, work, shop & play!; Make entrances into town "speak" to people; Develop the old theater into an attraction, renovate and run with volunteers for movie showings during afternoon/evenings on Saturday/Sunday, make it a dollar theater to make it irresistible! It's on a heavily-traveled street, so even cosmetic improvements will improve the "feel" of the area.
- Clean up and upgrade fairgrounds; spruce up the entrances and add appropriate signage; clean up yards and paint houses in certain areas.
- Building tourism with Lakes, encouraging the town to be a retirement community.
- Potential of junction 2 & 5; lake – tourism

What are the five biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?

- Limited workforce.
- Streets; weed control (as with any community).
- Bringing in new industry; creating/sustaining job growth; fighting the "brain drain" – young people not returning after college; a lot of outdated housing – getting people to reinvest/maintain their homes.
- Need more industry; older buildings that need repair; more of a variety of retail shops.
- Streets; signage; the square; lack of entertainment; garbage procedures.
- People driving through on highways and not stopping; empty Rubbermaid plant; state-owned lake – no private ventures at lake; entries to town are all very industrial and not very attractive.

What will you remember most about this community six months from now?

- Lakes/recreational amenities; architectural tour/plaques.
- Positive – town square with courthouse.
- St. Joseph's assisted living, downtown business district being so busy.
- Friendly and helpful residents and business owners.
- How well-kept the parks and cemetery was.
- Square.

What have you learned here that has changed your impression of your own community?

- Need to do more with signage, weed control, look at niche market businesses.
- I am more aware of problem areas, things we can improve on, things we should brag about more.
- I tend to ignore the unattractive areas and now realize what it looks like to visitors.
- Need to look at our community as if we were visitors!
- I look at things much differently – look with "new" eyes and as a visitor.

Has this experience given you any new ideas about what is needed in your own community?

- Need to do more with signage, weed control, look at niche market businesses.
- Yes!
- Yes, clean up certain areas, pay attention to signage, train customer service employees to be positive, upbeat and helpful.
- Continue street maintenance, continue push to clean up yards and garbage, better retail.
- Absolutely.

Describe one idea that you will borrow for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours!

- Most of what we saw were reference points as to how we would like things to be – nothing we could steal and use right away.
- I do a walk-through of my business (in-out) more regularly looking at things with fresh eyes – as a newcomer.

Other comments:

- Very impressed that a town of this size has so many willing to invest in the community and open businesses there.