

First Impressions

of

ELLSWORTH

October 1993

A program for community improvement

*First Impressions developed by Andy Lewis, U.W. Extension
Resource agent and James Schneider, Grant County Economic
Development Director. Revised and edited for Kansas by E.J. Sisk,
K.S.U. Community Development in Nov. 1992.*

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

All too often community leaders say--and may honestly believe--that they want to improve their community. However they may go about it the wrong way. Too much self-evaluation and too little outside evaluation may continue to mask real problems and opportunities.

The "First Impressions" program is designed to bring outside community leaders to a community they are not familiar with to express their First Impression of that community. The team members will pose as visitors, vacationers, shoppers, prospective business owners, and they will look at your community from that point of view.

The team arrives unannounced in your community. The basis for the team's First Impression of your community will be through the auto windshield; visiting with people on the street; and visiting with business owners. The observations are jotted down and then compiled into a community report. No individual business or comment will be considered as a First Impression of the total community, it will be the composite of all.

These impressions, true or false, are the result of the team members' honest and straightforward feelings about your community. We feel that if a team of visitors feels this way, then others coming into your community may also have the same First Impressions.

There is no cost for the use of this program. However, we do ask that our standard cover be used for the purpose of credit. Also, we would appreciate copies of any newspaper articles resulting from the process and a copy of the final report.

Thanks to Barb Kongs, Kansas Department of Commerce & Housing, and Gary Satter, Director, Glacial Hills RC & D for their assistance in revision of the "First Impressions" document.

For more information on the "First Impressions" program, please contact:

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SAMPLE NEWS STORIES

PEER REVIEWS - Outside opinions good for town

It's fairly straightforward, really. If you want an honest opinion, ask someone whose judgment and viewpoint you can trust. It works for individuals. And it has been shown that it can work for communities, too.

"**First Impressions**" is available to interested Kansas communities through County Extension Offices.

The program operates by representatives trading visits with another community wanting to obtain "**First Impressions.**" Representatives work from a list prepared for the "**First Impressions**" program. Its emphasis is on factors that would be important to a visitor or prospective employer - the representatives arrive unannounced into the community. They check things out. They visit with citizens on the street. They jot down observations about city buildings and businesses. The emphasis, as the name suggests, is on first impressions.

"**First Impressions**" makes available valuable observations for little expense. It's a free program and the anonymous visitors are volunteers. Apparently the biggest expense would involve travel and meals during the brief visit.

Whether the evaluation comes through "**First Impressions**" or programs communities choose to develop themselves is not important. What is important is that communities seek outside evaluation. It is important that they be open to the findings. And it's important that they use the information to build their strengths, minimize their weaknesses and identify opportunities.

FIRST IMPRESSION NOT ALWAYS GOOD

_____ residents should be very proud of the positive responses the city received after the "**First Impressions**" visits of other communities similar in size.

For the most part, _____ ranked high in the minds of those who toured it. Particularly praised was the well-kept downtown. The hard work and planning of local business people is paying off. It is making a good first impression, which means people are more likely to return.

_____ recently found the opposite in its initial experience with the "**First Impressions**" program. A visiting delegation from _____, in describing the city, said it needs revitalization and that the downtown appears dead. While this report represents the views of only a small number of people, it certainly gave a jolt to some _____ residents. It also shows that the "**First Impressions**" program is effective in pointing out things that locals become blind to after living in an area for many years.

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

Friendly, clean rural community.

The typical county-seat Kansas town.

Nice place to visit, nice people. I expected to see rundown homes and yards that needed clean-up.

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

Positives:

Clean. To get to downtown, well-marked. Using natural "post rock."

Community groups are interested in Ellsworth - Ellsworth is proud of itself.

Clean areas - the Dairy Queen, Hotel, signs directing you into Ellsworth.

Negatives:

A few cluttered, junky areas on the fringes of town - mostly salvage areas.

Area flood plain.

111. As you drive around town, your comments on:

A. Appearance

Very clean, orderly, flowers at most homes.

1. Downtown

Business storefronts were neat, including both signs and advertising.

Some sidewalks could use repair to make them safer. Clean streets and businesses.

Curbs broken, brick sidewalks with grass in brick.

2. Residential

Mixed zoning in some areas. Well-balanced set of homes. Not many for sale.

Ninety-nine percent of them were clean, neat in appearance. Some homes could use repair or demolition, which is common in all communities.

Some dead trees in city. Some dilapidated housing.

3. Industrial park

None designated. Highway frontage area would be available for industry. Needs for future may require

development of an industrial park.

Did not find an industrial park. But the business areas looked good and were on a major street in town.

4. Parks

Well-located, equipped parks accessible to neighborhoods. Rooks Park is least accessible.

Nice large, clean parks with lights in most.

Krizik Park is well groomed.

5. Schools

Adequate, in good repair and showing growth through building projects.

Noticed construction at high school. The schools appear to be well-maintained with nice playgrounds and running track.

Good school facilities.

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

Slanted sidewalks may present difficulties. Multi-level walks a hazard. Most in good repair.

Most of the sidewalks appear to have been improved in the last couple of years. There are a couple of areas where the sidewalks have quite a drop-off to the street.

Curb and guttering and streets west on 11th and Gay, gravel streets, poor drainage.

7. Other

Art center and museum area were attractive and invite my return.

A couple of properties which look to be salvage yards could use fence or large bushes around edge of property.

Trailers intermingled with residences. City storage area unsightly. Railroad track not in use.

The city buildings all look to be in good shape. Some of the City Hall has been remodeled in the last two years and the police station has been remodeled.

B. signing

1. Community entrance/exit signs

Adequate

Signs look to be in good shape.

Good signage.

2. Streets
Adequate for normal use.

There were a couple of streets in residential areas that need signs posted notifying you of a dip in the road.

140 Highway not on city street signs.

3. Directions to hospital/parks/etc.
Hospital signs may be ambiguous from park side. Park signs not obvious.

Easy to locate.

Hospital well-marked, but parks are not. Noticed camp dump, but how does one know about it?

4. Storefront signs
Adequate and attractive.

Signs are good, but there is no coordination of how signs should be hung or standard size of signs.

No consistency in signs, high/low - some block other signs.

5. Industrial park

The one area where most businesses are located has a nice road and signage, but no industrial park sign.

6. City Hall, police, etc.
Proximate to courthouse and well-signed.

The buildings all look to be in good shape. Some of the City Hall has been remodeled in the last 2 years and the police station has been remodeled.

Handicapped parking and entrance.

7. Billboards/advertising, etc.
Inconspicuous.

Is museum advertised any place but downtown?

At least 99% of advertising is in good shape and looks like it is redone often.

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

A. Convention & Visitors Center/City Hall

Adequate

1. Is there a street map? Are they widely distributed?
Yes

Yes.

2. Community brochure/directory
Yes

No.

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

Yes, except for business purposes and industrial opportunities. Could include civic groups as well.

The city does have a community profile that is used when attracting businesses.

4. Calendar of Events - Are they widely available?

5. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit.....etc.
Local folks were helpful. Invitations given to return to tour, especially during cowtown festival.

Yes, motel.

We ate at the bowling alley, which has good food. There area number of good, clean eating establishments and a nice place to stay on the main highway through edge of Ellsworth.

6. Contact people & addresses listed if I want more info.
Chamber of Commerce very helpful.

The Chamber, City and County have always been willing to send information on events and the community.

Historical Society.

7. Complimentary Items (Postcards, bookmarks, coupons, etc.)

Chamber of Commerce had these items.

None.

B. Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Info. Center - visited by one team only.

1. Easy to locate (and did people refer you to it?)
On Main Street; visible signage.

Easy to locate; the Chamber will be looking for a new location because a dress store is taking over the building.

2. Comments on information available-
(street map, brochures, community profile etc.)

Street map, brochures, community profile available and more.

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

People were very open to recommending.

4. How prepared/helpful were they?

Service attitude.

People in Ellsworth are always helpful and nice.

5. Convenient hours?
Business hours.

Most businesses seem to be open anywhere from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and some of the businesses close at lunch.

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

1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?

Longtime residents knew town. Very helpful.

Everyone in Ellsworth seems to be able to tell you where anything is, including the type of service you will receive plus information on owners/managers if you desire the information.

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

Yes. Cooperative, helpful attitude.

Yes.

3. Attitude, appearance, etc.

Shops, offices were very clean and hospitable. Community looks prosperous and as having pride.

Good, helpful and informative.

Upbeat.

4. Other comments

Lots of activity, building expansion, parks.

V. General

A. Do residents know their community history, events, directions, etc.?

Yes. Community festivals involved many restaurants.

Yes.

Yes.

B. Services...variety of retail...lodging facilities...

Adequate for city size.

Yes, services are varied. The City has worked to attract certain types of businesses such as the photography studio, if they do not already exist in town.

Good variety of retail.

C. Tourist

Museum and Historical Society active.

D. Are there public restrooms?

At parks.

Yes, in City Hall.

In Krizik Park.

E. Payphones...are they working, phone books intact?

Observed; not all functional.

Removed.

F. Industrial park...does it look active and attractive?

None; industrial area is active and attractive.

N/A

None.

G. What does the community TASTE like? Specialty restaurants, bakeries etc?

Wholesome.

A little bit of everything, but more "down home" cooking.

H. What does community SMELL like?

Fresh air, open.

Clean.

I. What SOUNDS did you hear?

Friendly and active.

J. What did community FEEL like? (Emotional response, i.e., cold or warm, crowded or deserted, inviting, etc.)

Warm and friendly welcome.

The community feels inviting.

Warm, inviting, active.

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

Friendly, personable, helpful and satisfied with their community.

Very informative and pleasant.

Involved, supportive locally.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:

Will remember clean, wholesome appearance of town and the friendly, personable attitude of people.

VI. Doing it Right!

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

1. Signs of community pride, buildings under construction.

Cleanliness.

Nice mix of downtown businesses.

2. High school band fund drive evidence.

Very few homes for sale.

3. Friendly, personable and helpful shop employees.

Storefronts are full downtown.

4. Clean and attractive business, public and residential areas.

Really nice, well-maintained parks.

5. Diverse business in business district.
Variety of businesses and attractions.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE

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November 21, 1994

Janeen Erickson
PO Box 523
Fertile, MN 56540

Dear Janeen:

Thank you for calling and suggesting First Impressions to me. Our team visited your community on Wednesday, November 16. It was a windy, cool fall day, but our reception was warm and friendly.

We visited a number of stores and shops including: Book and Bible Shoppe, Coast to Coast, Encore, Country Mouse, Mill Street Floral, Variety Plus, Eide's Mercantile, Locker and Meat Market, Pierson Hartz and Pioneer Drug. We also visited the Community Center, the school, the Fair Meadows Nursing Home, and Summerfield Place. We had lunch in two of your restaurants (Mac's Cafe and Eats N Antiques), and asked for directions at the Cenex and by Pierson's Hartz. We also stopped at Dave's Standard to use the restroom.

We drove around your town, coming into town from three different directions. We particularly enjoyed the terrain on the east and south entrances.

Our team thoroughly enjoyed the visit. We were impressed with the friendliness and the variety of shops and services in a town your size (under 900). The women in our group particularly enjoyed the Country Mouse. This owner was a wonderful example of a community minded business woman who made a great first impression. Our male team member, in visiting the nursing home, said it had no odors, was very clean, and the staff was friendly and helpful. He also visited the school and found a very friendly, helpful staff. We all purchased items in your community ranging from Christmas gifts to dried beef. We appreciated the calling cards given to us in at least three of the businesses.

Thank you for taking the time to visit Hallock. We are looking forward to your comments. If, after receiving our comments, you would like to talk them over, please give me a call. We also thought it would be fun to revisit the communities in five years with an eye for first impressions. Have we changed for the better?

Sincerely,



Mary T. Jenkins
Extension Educator