

First Impressions

of

Grantsburg, WI

by Albany, WI

Visits conducted June 4 and 5, 1995

A program for community improvement

Developed by:

Andy Lewis

Grant County UW-Extension Resource Agent

James L. Schneider

Exec. Dir. Grant County Economic Development Corp.

As you approach the community..

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

- I wanted to stay very open-minded, but couldn't help being excited about this visit from the information. The brochures seemed almost too good to be true - could some of this be embellished?
- I expected it to be a bigger town than ours with all the stores/services. With the lakes and resorts nearby I expected it to be sort of touristy. Brochures were good listing lots of businesses, churches, restaurants, grocery stores, etc.
- Expected to find much more in the way of commercial and business established than Albany - about as I found on arrival.
- More business.

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.

- I like this town! Neat, clean, nice business area and patriotic too! Especially enjoyed the statue of "gust" and the Flag at Memory Lake Park.
- Nice, clean and neat. Wholesome looking! Houses/yards well kept. Unique statue of Gust. P.O. nice. Bethany Lutheran Church in country with historical marker unique. Lots of Scandinavian names, lots of Lutherans. Saw a few businesses - neat, inviting, good signage. Some newer houses. Sandy soil, perhaps causing blacktop edge of road to break up. Mostly good roads.
- Could live here.
- A lot going for the town - Fairgrounds, sign to the Airport Industries - fairly clean.

As you "drive" around town:

You now divide into your teams: one team will drive the town for about an hour while the other members will hoof it and start visiting businesses, city hall, etc. After lunch the teams will switch roles so everyone has a chance to drive the community and to personally walk into stores and visit with people.

- We had supper at the Kozy Kitchen. Indeed, it was "cozy", with good food, friendly people, and nicely decorated . Grantsburg after 10:00 p.m. (Sunday)

seemed very quiet. Was disappointed to find that the bowling alley proprietor was considering selling out after eleven years in business.

III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.

Go about 1/2 - 1 mile out each road and return. List each road (61 North, etc.) and list positive and negatives for each.

- County F in - saw no sign - Borg Road - no sign. County D (airport) nice welcome sign and slow for children. Highway 48 - loved the memorial marker at the Lutheran Church. Highway 70 - very nice welcome to Grantsburg sign. I especially liked the "Home of the Pirates," shows real school spirit and town support.
- On 70 E saw Midway School site - I'd like to see it restored. Even still has its pump and outhouses. Could be another historical site. On 70 from W showed developed shopping area. Both ways neat. County D entering from E - airport has no sign - doesn't need one? Paved runways, telephone (sign very faint:). Nice "Welcome to Grantsburg" sign, city limits and slow children - good. Crex Meadows visible and well kept. County F had no ID to indicate what town you're in. Borg Road, no sign. All entrances in good condition. Perhaps could use a few more "Welcomes."
- 70 east very good road. 70 west, motel plus no bad points. North Road - OK. County D, airport - good, rough, primitive. County F - rough in town. Jeds Gas station -C.
- Highway 70 - town name sign with population - A&W, motel, fitness center. Highway D - sign to the airport - Welcome to Grantsburg sign, slow children sign. Highway F - no sign to tell what town.

IV. (a) Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:

(signs, appearance, size, etc.)

- The main street was nice and wide with lots of parking places and no parking meters. Empty store fronts are always a disappointment (we have them, also). Liked the old-fashioned barbershop pole and the mortar and pestle above the pharmacy.
- Neat, clean, stores identifiable. Looked well used even though on Monday some stores were closed, Very impressed with quality in most cases. Looked like ample parking. Good sized business area.
- Wide main street. Mostly occupied business buildings - prosperous - signage adequate.

- Clean with nice planter boxes and benches. Bank has time and temperature sign. Cafe had sign on the sidewalk which was nice. Covered picnic area across from the grocery store. Some business closing - new ones opening.

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

- Noticed repairs being done at Vet. Office. Very nice lumberyard. The industrial buildings at Industrial Park and on Oak Street were kept in good repair, with no junk cluttered around outside. However, the grass was terribly overgrown at the Shutter Mfg. (I think) a little more landscaping and flower planting would increase eye appeal.
- Highway business along 70 W looked like typical urban sprawl - neat and somewhat sterile - the way most towns develop, toward the edge of town. Some real old stores in various places needing repair and I hope being preserved to be restored. A couple river's edge places looked interesting. Good to see lumber company with windows for sale. An indication of prosperity and new proposed building.
- Older factories scattered - not in Industrial Park. Industrial Park is a real plus here.
- Business area spread out. Lumber yard off beaten path.

V. Driving...comments on residential:

- Nice new homes on North Road, E. Madison and Maple. Especially liked the restored barn! Some houses and yards were junky, though most homes are well maintained with nicely kept yards - nice to see many flags flown!
- So well kept! Looks like a prosperous town! Old homes of many varieties and new one too in several places. Streets good, most with curb and gutter. The sidewalk and curb combo by historical jail was nice. To see something unkept or messy was unusual. On E. Benson - real log cabin, nice but windows have been changed - too bad. Keep it for what's left of historic value. On W. Wisconsin Avenue - old church to restore? So glad old treasures aren't torn down. On E. Madison Avenue a nice barn/house, new homes, football field. Nelson Road - trailers, several very nice, some need TLC - seasonal residents?
- Most houses very well kept. Very minimum of poor looking properties.
- Most yards were mowed and kept up. Most houses looked cared for.

VI. Driving...comments on:

a. street signs

- They were easily found at all intersections.
- For the most part good.
- Some need for street signs.
- OK. No sign or fire # to new house off North Avenue.

b. traffic patterns/street conditions

- Streets were clean and well-maintained, although some were bumpy. We had to refer to the map quite often, but we didn't get lost.
- Good - some street repair needed but thoroughfares excellent.
- Normal traffic pattern. Normal street condition.
- OK

c. welcome signs (at entrances)

- The people in Grantsburg are proud of their town and it shows!!
- Could use a couple - on North Avenue there's a private drive that should have a sign indicating that. We thought it was a boat landing and ended up at someone's house.
- Few welcome signs noted.
- None

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

- Good signage to hospital facilities, but an out-of-towner in need of police would have difficulty.
- We found the pool but sort of by accident - maybe you don't want outsiders in it. The yellow lines to Crex were unique! Most places were signed well. Found no police sign or station.
- More directional signs would be welcomed.
- Didn't see a sign for police station. Saw sign for hospital.

VII. Driving...comments on industrial park/area:

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

- Nice sign to the Industrial Park, but no signs on buildings except Ultra and McNally. Nice area with room for growth.

- No sign near watertower. Saw a "Lions" semi-trailer - didn't check it out close up. Wonder if it's for recycling newspaper? Saw no recycling center. Standing water on some soft roads - trucks have trouble? Seems to be room for other industries. One place needed mowing and landscape work. Most buildings/businesses were identified. Easy access. Street W. of park going out of town had no ID for town - probably not a tourist road.
- Was impressed by an excellent Industrial Park.
- Sign on corner - growing - has new roads - plenty space for more factories. Watertower painted nice.

VIII. Driving...comments on schools:

- Very nice new high school! Saw the elementary school sign in a picture, but didn't see it at the school I assumed was the elementary. Nice Jr. High sign. Liked the landscaping and flowers. Pleased to hear the plans of a new school in the same "school area."
- All schools very good! And ground broken for new middle school so all schools will be in one large area. Another example of your town's farsightedness. Good sign on high school and administration building. Saw no sign on grade school?
- One here - one there - consolidate?
- New school - has sign for administration offices. Senior high school off Highway 70. No sign - another school down the road 3 to 4 miles - planning to build new one for those children.

IX. Driving...comments on Darks, play grounds, athletic facilities, etc.:

- Memory Lake Park is lovely! RV area is nice and well maintained. Wonderful ball park with lots of parking (but parking lot needs improvement). Great pool area with bright mural on the building, but **is** in desperate need of shade trees, especially around the parking lot. Nice ice hockey arena? Town also needs more playground equipment.
- Park by river a little lacking in playground equipment. In fact, did not see a good kid's park. Athletic facilities seem OK at schools - good to see hockey rink. Didn't see many good ball fields elsewhere but maybe you have multi-purpose fields - even bleachers, etc. Nice mural at pool - could use a little shade tree cover there?

- Clean and adequate facilities available. Community pool a plus, hockey rink - fitness center, golf course - very good school athletic fields.
- Tennis Court. Fitness Center by motel with swimming pool. Swimming pool with nice mural - no hours posted - just filling hockey rink. Gold course, football field. Park by Memory Lake for RV camping and Lions picnic.

X. **Driving...comments on other:**

a. hospitals/clinics

- Very nice hospital, clinic and nursing home in a great quiet location.
- Impressed - wow - for a town that size! Hope there are good doctors too and there's a nice clinic.
- Both available.
- Has a hospital near the park and gold course.

b. billboards/advertising

- Seemed to be a nice mix. Not too many, not too few.
- Had a little trouble finding motel - no ad in Grantsburg brochure. Were a little confused with restaurants - maybe some changed names, or changed hands.
- Saw no sign on Highway 70 for high school team.

c. other

- The town has adopted a very nice logo.
- Saw garbage in regular brown bags for pickup but no recycling containers. I'm wondering how extensive - if any recycling is done or if all goes into landfill. Saw no bum barrels. Publications and maps are well done - should remember, though, to use area code.

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

Appearance, displays, signs, etc.

- I was very impressed to see the plans they have for improving the downtown area, storefronts, and business signs!
- Boyd's Hardware seems to be struggling. Nice hardwood floor and needed supplies, smells musty, helpful woman. Most were good except food pantry - shrubs are covering it. Interesting walk on board walk to business behind fence. Good sign on "Crex Warehouses and Office, 1910"! Very simple and appropriate! Loved the old barber pole - there's no need for a sign there. Kids club and senior center ice. Liked picnic table under cover near kid's club. Bowling alley and bar leaves room for improvement. Interesting taxidermy.

- Normal older small town.
- Looked like trying to keep building up.

XII. Walking around...comments on people:

- Everyone was very friendly and helpful, You could tell everyone loved their town and was proud to live there. People were the least friendly at the motel, but maybe if there were some B&B's or another motel for competition, their attitude would improve. Was especially impressed by two recent graduates of Grantsburg High School. Their future plans after college were to return and benefit the town. The man at the Historical Building was very friendly and let us browse even though it was closed. He was very informative and proud of the historical work. The man we met at Bethany Lutheran Church was also very proud of the church and grounds and very friendly and helpful.
- Man at Bethany Church extremely friendly - pointed out historical marker. Man at Historic Church Museum (secretary) extremely nice - opened museum to us and chatted. At gas station (near Crex Meadows) woman didn't turn on gas pump right away as I waited in rain. She redeemed herself by giving helpful information. Two high school boys extremely nice at restaurant - stayed and chatted, were helpful. The Postmaster invited us for lunch at appreciation event for employees - were extremely nice.
- People we contacted were all very easy to **talk** to, helpful.
- Friendly - people willing to help.

XIII. Community information: comments on....

a. community brochure (tourist type)

- Nice brochures for vacationers, skiers, campers, etc.
- Very good but in one couldn't find phone area code number, useful for us "outsiders". Otherwise they're well done and available in motel.
- Excellent
- Lots of information at motel and city hall

b. businesses/attractions brochures or directory

- Good directory of businesses
- Motel should have ad in something. They could use a little advise on dealing with public. Get it smoke free. They need to be more aware and helpful and have a brochure. Need a bell!
- Excellent

- c. community profile (demographic, industrial type information for prospective business people, etc.
 - If I had a prospective business, I would definitely bring it to Grantsburg.
 - Can't really evaluate
- d. map
 - Very nicely illustrated and easy to follow. Nice outdoor map at Crex Meadows headquarters.
 - Very good.
 - Excellent.
- e. other (ie. bulletin/notice, kiosks, etc.)
 - They were neat, not overcrowded, and up-to-date information.
 - Saw quite a few bulletin boards, notices.
 - Not noted.

XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:

- a. appearance of facility, including signing.
 - Didn't need anyone to show, Gust was there!!
 - Needs painting but saw paint chips on ground so someone's probably getting ready to paint. Restroom has no indication on door. Is it private? Is there a different public one? Ramp nice. Gust statue a treasure. Audio on tape needs a lot of clearing up, frustrating not to be able to understand it. Footprints great (of Gust).
 - Older - being painted
 - Clean - clerk out to lunch first time. Big Gustaf in front. Need to trim pines by sidewalk to front door.
- b. helpfulness of staff
 - Lots of good brochures available, some free, some for purchase.
 - Nobody there on two different stops. Librarian pleasant when there one time. Nobody at all there on one occasion but no signs on door, coming back? Lunch? Day off?
 - Very helpful.
 - Very helpful.
- c. other
 - Visited the building twice - no one was there either time. Trees in front were overgrown, need trimming in order to see the building.

- Went into basement and were delighted to discover "proposed look" of building, color and all. Very impressive! A great idea. Actually saw the historic land office being restored by architect the way the picture showed. Great idea! Tennis courts in good shape.
- Very impressed by plans for restoration of historic buildings.

XV. Chamber of Commerce.. .describe your visit

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

- The Chamber of Commerce has a very nice brochure and is very active. The president is a very nice man with a wonderful family. I was impressed with the appreciation luncheon that was served to the town's workers.
- Sorry, didn't ask but eventually met Tom at lunch. Didn't see any building or sign.
- No contact.
- Referred to president Tom Ramback.

b. comment on information available

- Could there have been more information than was mailed to us?

c. comment on staff

- President doing his job - affirming workers, supporting them, showing appreciation. The good shape of businesses must mean an active chamber. Things are functioning from an outsider's view.
- Met the president - super person.

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

XVI. Other stuff....

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

- We used the one by the library. It was clean, but there was no sign.
- No ID on the one in Village Hall. Clean in restaurant.
- Found one in City Hall, library, condition good.
- City Hall and restaurants - clean.

b. pay phones (working, phone book intact, etc)

- Phone book needs replacement.
- Seemed OK
- Observed several - OK
- Phone book at every telephone - notice quite a few.

c. parking

- Nice wide streets and lots of parking and no meters.
- Ample except for their big event - even have RV parking in town and camping along river in park.
- Parking was not a problem
- Plenty.

d. water fountains, benches, etc.

- Liked the flower boxes by the shoe store, bank, Electric Company, etc. Especially liked the covered area with picnic tables. Banners nice on poles. Seems to be good senior housing and apartments.
- Lots of benches and very nice ones. Saw no fountain.
- Found benches downtown.
- Benches on both sides of main street. Did not see a water fountain.

WRAP UP

A. Using your "senses"....

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

- Both restaurants were excellent, Kozy Kitchen and Hallway Cafe. We would have eaten at the other one also, but it was closed.
- Home cooking but too much deep-fry. Gift of ice cream by local store for Dairy month was appreciated. Kozy Kitchen and Hallway restaurants - neat, comfortable, accommodating.

2. What does the community SMELL like?

- Ordinary. Didn't smell or see any trash burning.
- Clean, fresh, pleasant.
- Remember - rain - mowed grass.

3. What SOUNDS did you hear?

- Just traffic. This is a nice quiet, though active town.
- A quiet town.
- Birds and bugs - swarms around my head.
- Frogs by Memory Lake - not a lot of loud or noisy cars roaring around.

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.)

- I got a very warm, homey feeling. People were friendly, warm, and talkative, even the youth.
- Warm, welcoming, inviting, Scandinavian, church going, proud, active, wholesome, far-sighted, well-led, caring, comfortable, benefits from newer residents from "the cities" as well as longtimers, active. The Lions water-ski events continual success means hard work, persistence, leadership.
- Warm, inviting.

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

1. Friendliness

Thriving

Most services available

A very active Chamber of Commerce

2. Cleanliness

They're far-sighted, long-term planners, thinkers

Community airport

a group started the fitness center with swimming pool

3. Good schools and locations of schools

Clean, neat

The "Big gust" theme

Several grocery stores and other services

4. Nice variety of businesses and industries

Concerned about educational facilities

Chamber of Commerce spirit

Also an outdoor swimming pool

5. Historic pride

Proud of their heritage and recognize the need for historic preservation

Seemed to be a growing community

Active Lions Club

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:

- Having more businesses fly flags. I have already made some contacts.
- Present idea for "new look" on historic downtown buildings to Pro-Albany Assn.
- Will work toward the restoration of our historic buildings with help of Historical Society.
- Contact a painter to have our downtown building painted and restore the top portion.

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

- Probably the friendliness of the residents. I would definitely like to visit Grantsburg again.
- Its proximity to MSP and what a great town it is and how they bus kids to school from 50 miles around and have good schools.
- An enjoyable short visit, with many nice people, who seemed to like what they had.
- Big Gustaf and water cross on Memory Lake. Two very nice high school boys.

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

- Was disappointed to still see flags flying at night - with no lights. Please install lights, or take flags down at night. Saw there was garbage pick-up. Please think about starting a recycling program. Saw the retirement of Mr. McNally. This town has been very lucky to have had a businessman who cares so much for his town to have served as chairman for 20 years! Grantsburg cares about its community, especially it's children!
- On Wisconsin Avenue near Olson is a big, beautiful restored house that would make a good Bed and Breakfast - even has what appears to be a livable carriage house. Town could use B&B or two - close to MSP and attracts tourists already. Saw several unusual attractive silos in rural area nearby with fancy tile work around/near top. Preserve/treasure those. They're to be commended on historic preservation. Now a house to be restored - great. Grantsburg doing so well and still trying to improve and willing to seek help from others (us). They have the right attitude and leadership. Nice to have health and fitness center.

Grantsburg, Wisconsin
May 21, 1995

My first impression of Grantsburg, when I first found out we were going to be coming up here, was that it would be a small, older town with more of a central shopping center for the County because there was nothing else within 20 or 30 miles of this location. I expected full services, including hospital, doctors, lawyers and other community services. My first impression going through the community, which I did running, was very good. As I ran down the streets, I noticed the streets were well kept and clean. There were a lot of newer sections in the community that were probably built within the last ten years, and older sections of town also. The Memory Park & Campground was very well kept and a big attribute to the village and area. The park was very easy to find. I was impressed with the schools and the ice hockey arena. It appears that they do support their youth in this area with the community center and other things that were there. One thing I did kind of see was that some of the streets could have used sweeping, although this is not a big deal since it had just been raining. As with all cities, they had some nice newer roads and some that were in need of repair. Looking up Highway 70 from the west going into town, the first sign was Grantsburg, next four exits. The next sign was Grantsburg, Population 1144. There are several businesses at the edge of 70 and the junction of HWY 48. There was a "HI" mowed out of the grass just before town on the side hill. I saw a golf course at the corner of 70 and 48. Coming in on 70 from the east, you see the schools and a school crossing sign, but there is no instruction as far as telling the name of the school or the direction to the school. There are signs for the airport and the downtown area. As I was driving through the downtown area, everything appeared very neat and well maintained. I headed out of town on Oak Street to the industrial area. As I was coming downtown, I noticed one manufacturer is located right downtown. Airport signs are well marked as are signs for Krux Meadows. This could be a naturalists dream area very easily with the meadows and the low lands and the wooded areas and the St. Croix flowage. Everything is right here. One thing I did not notice were signs for the hospital. I saw the hospital itself, but I did not see signs directing you to it. A lot of time and planning was put into the industrial park which is very nice. There is a row of trees planted for wind break and separation. Again, I noticed a weakness in signage as far as instructions to get to the industrial park. This would be useful because the industrial park is not located right off of a main road. It appeared that maintenance and upkeep of the industrial park is weak. The lawn needed mowing. Also, a map of the industrial park at the entrance would be helpful, or a sign that would list all of the campsites that are in the park. Parking does seem to be a problem around Parker's building. It is too bad that Parker is located where it is instead of right in the industrial park. There are two older companies that have been here for a while, actually not inside the park. There are people parked on Oak Street that work at Parker. Northern Manufacturing needed a little lawn maintenance also. Overall, the lawns in the residential areas are very well kept. There is not a lot of junky looking houses or yards. It was noticed that there were very few houses for sale. A good sign, showing that the town is growing is the number of new homes being constructed.

I was very impressed by the quietness of the community. Going through the park, the only sound I heard was the sound of geese. You could watch the geese with their goslings. It was very picturesque and quite. Just the kind of place you want to live. The sights were unbelievable with all the nature there is to enjoy. You could smell the rain and the fresh air. It was very homey and would be very easy to live in this area. The amount of tourism in the area was down somewhat due to the lack of snow last winter. The food was very good, served very fast and hot. I have a feeling it was alot quieter in town than it usually is, due to being the Monday after a big weekend with the Syndette Mai celebration. There were a couple of shops that were closed, which is normal for a tourist town on Monday. The town just felt very comfortable, like a place you would want to live. I'm kind of one sided on my recreational views, but I enjoy camping, fishing, some hunting and cross country skiing. This community has it all. I made a list of the five most popular things I observed:

1. It's a center for business that offers alot of services and opportunities which brings alot of people into the area.
2. The school system, buildings, etc look very nice. I guess you don't really know how the system itself fairs as well as education, but it does appear that they do have the facilities and the townspeople behind them.
3. The recreational value is unreal. There are two wildlife areas and cross country ski trails, snowmobile trails, hunting and fishing and the St. Croix river with it's scenic riverway and the beautiful park and campground in town. It is just overall very picturesque.
4. The amount of industry that is offered in this area. It really stands out that you have several good base industries that are recently expanding. This is proof that industries do not have to have a main highway nearby. The interstate access is about 20 miles away. I believe it must have been the work force in the area that probably attracted the businesses in the first place.
5. The wide variety of housing in the area including older homes all the way to brand new homes which shows the growth they have experienced in the past few years.

The one thing that I would like to see in Albany that they do have in Grantsburg is the yellow line. A yellow line from the bike trail all they way to the downtown area. This would encourage bikers and tourists to follow the line to the downtown area. I guess the one thing that stands out the most in my mind about the community is the wide variety of things that are offered to do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John W. [unclear]', written in a cursive style.