

# **First** *impressions*

of

**Holmen, WI**

*by Fennimore, WI*

*Visit Conducted 9/18 & 21/1994*

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*A program for community improvement*

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*Revised: 1/22/91*

**Holmen First Impressions Report**

***Introduction***

Due to scheduling conflicts we had to split up and visit Holmen on two separate days. One group visited on Sunday, September 18, 1994, and the second group visited on Wednesday, September 21st. Because of this you will note some conflicting comments, especially relating to the condition of lawns. *My, what a difference a few days make.* (Especially when it finally stops raining long enough to do some mowing.) Please keep that in mind as you review this report.

The following pages include the combined reports of the five members of our First Impressions team. Our team consisted of:

- 2 females, 3 males.
- 2 business owners
- 2 in government related positions
- 1 in education
- All between 35 & 50 years old**
- 4 are longtime Fennimore area Residents

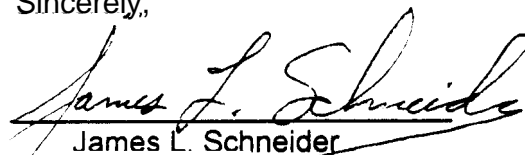
Our Wednesday team arrived about 11:00 **AM** and stayed until after 2:00 **PM**. The weather was great during our visit.

We were very impressed, somewhat surprised and even a little bewildered by certain aspects of your community. *A lot of what we saw made more sense when we discovered that you were a community of only 450 just 40 years ago.*

***If I had to describe Holmen, I would say that in many ways you are still a village of 450 that is struggling with being a community of 4000.***

We enjoyed our visit and feel that you have tremendous potential. We hope our comments are beneficial and we thank you for doing this exchange. May all of your First Impressions be winning ones.

Sincerely,

  
James L. Schneider

## ***First Impressions Report of Holmen***

### **As you approach the community.....**

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

- I did not know what to expect other than a small, older community.
- It was my first visit to the town. We followed "The Great River Road".
- I had never been there nor had any previous impression.
- I expected a small, older-type city.
- Expected a 'suburb' of Lacrosse that would be showing some growth, but still would be a typical rural community of 3,000 people.

#### ***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 other in your group for this part.***

- Excellent road into town "looked new". Welcome sign in need of repair (new paint). Nice school from the looks of it. Some business; nice looking in general.
- Coming into town, there is a boulevard with flowers planted around the light poles. These were a good start to showing off the potential that could be given to the first impression.
- It seemed typical, boulevard was nice, basically pleasant.
- I like the comment on the welcome sign--'Industry Invited'. The drive-through showed a very nice street with well maintained residences and businesses.
- Came in on Holmen Drive....WOW! But where was the downtown? Lots of newer stuff, more Lacrosse influence than I expected.

### **As you "drive" around town:**

#### ***III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.***

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

- All entrances to town are very scenic and nice. Good road. Please paint or redo entrance welcome signs! Thank you.
- The south entrance starts with some used trailer houses sitting. It was difficult to tell if they were for sale or just stored there.
- The Holman Fish signs were visible, but need some updating. Some color on the signs would be an advantage. North entrance seemed much cleaner and inviting. County V was nice with the grade school.

## ***First Impressions Report of Holmen***

- North entrance to town was o.k. but not impressive, there was a nice home there that had put out large amounts of garbage along the road (on Sunday morning) and it detracted. I think that the Holman signs shaped like fish are missing a great opportunity for something that would be quite a bit nicer. Check around and I think you would be enthused by what you could have. Potosi, Wisconsin, for instance has a beautiful sign that depicts fishing, lacking that I would suggest painting the fish in a more imaginative way and vary the sizes and shapes of your community organizations.
- South entrance had a bad looking trailer house. County V entrance was o.k.
- Everything positive--pleasant, clean. Good streets.
- All of the entrances I checked out were OK in most respects. The surrounding farms and homes are all attractive and there are no major eyesores that would detract from the community.

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

- Not much for store signs. Old downtown clean but very few businesses. New part very nice - lots more room for expansion. All buildings look to be in good shape as is whole town.
- The downtown area seems to be pretty dead. It has the potential for rebuilding the older buildings to something to make people aware of what could still be there. I hate to see things die out.
- The highway businesses were well noticed and kept. It seemed difficult to find the rest if any of the downtown area. We found the sign for the library and the library easy to find, but there was not much else of any interest. There was one flower shop on the highway that had an interesting display, but was not open.
- After driving around I discovered that the business area has migrated to the highway. That explained why there were no arrows pointing to "downtown". We did see what probably was the old business district, Hometown Video with a torn awning that looked temble. Also, it is possible that the "Learn and Grow Preschool" is in process of improving their appearance, if not the two windows with white paint are an eyesore and the sign needs painting.
- Both business areas were neat and clean.
- We came in on Holmen Drive and I wouldn't have known what would be considered the downtown area. There were no signs directing me to the original downtown. When I did find it I was astounded that it was so small. How can a community of your size have such a small original retail area....I found out later that you have only recently grown to this size and then this all made sense, but it was a real surprise at first. The general appearance of the original downtown area is not very appealing.

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

- The dental office on the south side was very attractive and well kept. The fire station, post office and St. Elizabeth's Church were very well kept and the landscaping was perfect.

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-The rest of the business area lies along the highway. Most is new and attractive. South side Dentist building, bank (tank looks extremely out of place), beautiful fire station, post office, St. Elizabeth Church and backdrop was very pretty.

-Both business areas were neat and clean.

-The business area on Holmen Drive is interesting. The fact that the shopping mall had been converted to other uses (School Dist, etc.) was a puzzle. **How** could you have this many people and not have that venture succeed as it was originally intended? Still the overall impression of this area was positive in that it indicated that you were growing, even if fitfully.

### ***V. Driving...comments on residential:***

-One of the cleanest, well maintained residential areas (all) I have seen in a long time. You should be proud. A lot of construction going on.

-Beautiful residential areas. In all areas I looked for old, poorly maintained homes but could not find any. I'm impressed. No junk in any yards - lawns well mowed.

-Most of the houses seemed in good repair, but noticed that almost all of the yards were in need of mowing. Do they only mow lawn on Mondays?

-The houses were pretty uniform in care and upkeep, saw only one that was really dilapidated (more later).

-Very neat. Clean.

-I was floored by your residential areas. They are well kept and attractive. Even the smaller homes show pride in ownership. I was surprised by the lack of larger older homes until I found out that you were a much smaller community years ago. I was also intrigued by the fact that most of the homes that have been build in the last 30 years seem to have been in the moderate price range. You are obviously not a 'high-end' market but you sure are appealing to the mid-range homeowner. I would guess that young families make up a big part of your population.

-Hillcrest Drive....nice, very nice.

-Whispering Pines - Great subdivision, well done, I wonder what the new grey house on Amanda Ct. goes for?

-Impressed with the attention to yards and the almost complete lack of junk...no cars in the yards, etc. Not sure how you do that, but keep it up!

-Country Estates - just happened to stumble on to this and I couldn't believe it. You're not growing.....you're exploding!

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### ***VI. Driving...comments on:***

#### ***a. street signs***

- Street signs were well placed and easy to read
- Street signs were adequate. Traffic patterns were simple and we were able to drive around slowly and only one driver became irate. Streets were o.k.
- Okay.
- Street signs were visible and seemed in OK condition.

#### ***b. traffic patterns/street conditions***

- Excellent streets - very good condition.
- Town a little hard to drive around in because a lot of streets are dead ends.
- Traffic pattern was laid back. We were able to drive around and look at things.
- Very good.
- Getting around wasn't a problem at all and the streets seemed to be in very good condition except where construction was in progress.

#### ***c. welcome signs (at entrances)***

- Nice welcome signs, but need to be redone. At least paint or stain.
- The fish (?) signs need to be updated.
- Signs for the park - we caught because we were looking for them. They are small and a bit hard to see under the tree.
- Need to be renovated and repainted.
- Your welcome signs (the 'arrows'?) need to be replaced. They were done a long time ago and now they show it. With the new roads and the dramatic growth, you now have different entrances to the village so you might want to reconsider the location for these.

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

- No directions to anything except library and one park sign hidden by trees. No signs for police, city clerk, etc.
- We found the park because we were looking for it.
- The old high school was easily seen from the highway, but we had to really look for the other schools. We stumbled across the new high school and only knew what it was when we made a complete circle around the building. Maybe they are planning something because of the newness of the building.

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-I do not remember any sign for city hall. There was no sign for the new school on the west side. We found that school by accident. It is very impressive, but from the back (we approached from Whispering Pines) it looked like a municipal plant.

-Definite lack of **signage** to schools and parks.

-These are really lacking. Saying, 'you can't miss it' probably was right when you were talking about the old high school, but it sure isn't the **case** for the new one. Finding a park is a real challenge. If you've got signs, I didn't notice them.

### ***VII. Driving... comments on industrial park/area: Sign well defined...busy...growing...new...etc.***

-Lots of new and old business in industrial park. **No** signs. All land owned by same person or company as near as I could tell.

-The industrial park seemed to be in the right place. There were some new looking businesses there that seemed well groomed for their areas. The rest of the area was weed covered and rather ugly. Something should be started to keep that better under control.

-Just assumed the location of industrial park by the nature of the area. It looks like there are several companies that are thriving. Prairie View rental stalls looked excellent. Midwest Products and Cabintree were very nice. However, the rest of the area was weedy and messy. I think it would be more attractive to develop if it were mowed once or twice during the summer. It is located just right in that it is close but not readily visible from the highway.

-Nothing, no signs that really state that there is an industrial-type park.

-The **industrial/commercial** area is very impressive. It's not very well defined and wasn't easy to locate at first, but I was impressed after I found it. The sewer and water work in this area messes it up right now but that can't be helped. I think that area will be really impressive when that is completed.

-Olympic Builders - Sharp looking place.

-DeLuxe Screenprinters - good looking facility.

-Midwest Products - another nice facility.

-Holmen Concrete - outside storage can be a real challenge, but you've done a fine job of keeping those area neat looking. Great job!

### ***VIII. Driving...comments on schools:***

-The only school well marked was the old high school. It was also very obvious that the dumpsters were full and over flowing from the highway. We all need such a service, but it needs attention when full. The grounds needed to be trimmed for quite a while. The old school has a lot of character along with the areas for **gathering** outside with the trees and the benches.

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- Holman has two nice looking, well maintained, older schools and one new high school that is very, very impressive. It looked beautiful! Be proud!
- Sign for school along highway looks awkward. It should be lowered just enough to be visible from over the fence, but would suggest two at poles instead of the little ones. The dumpsters in back of school (visible from highway) were filled to overflowing and looked terrible.
- The grass was long and it was weedy and scraggly along the fence. Paper and other garbage was lying in this area also. When driving around front I thought it looked inviting and pleasant with the bell and seating area. The Viking field too needed grass trimmed especially along fence and a pine tree could be removed and replaced with a nicer tree if shade is needed. The school by County V was solid and imposing, good but could use some softening • landscaping?
- Very good.
- You have the finest looking schools I have seen anywhere. The new high school is awesome, but if I had never seen it (and I almost didn't) I would still have been impressed by the rest. Evergreen Elementary is great and the Middle School is a very well maintained older facility. It is VERY obvious that you are committed to the education of your children and it is equally obvious that you are proud of what you are doing. Your school system reeks of pride. Congratulations.

### ***IX. Driving...comments on parks, play grounds, athletic facilities, etc.:***

- Nice, well shaped park. Hard to find • lots of trees with small stream running through it.
- Ball park looked nice (maybe schools?)
- Good athletic fields and tracks at school.
- Swimming pool!
- Excellent ball fields & equipment at new town center on edge of town.
- The park was a real shock. It was very small. No equipment for the children to play. No sign of a water fountain or running water anywhere. The shelter did not have electricity and there were few tables.
- The park was almost an embarrassment. It did not appear to have any lights or water and just a few tables. Toilets were old and grass was long.
- Very good.
- Parks were another story. I only found the one near the downtown. It was OK but not what I expected for a community of your size. OK for who you used to be but not for who you are now. If there were other parks I didn't find them.

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

#### ***a. hospitals/clinics***

- Found one doctor's clinic (under construction • hard to find).
- Saw chiropractic and dental offices.
- No hospital.
- None found.
- Clinic expanding, it looks very nice and capable of serving the community.
- Given the closeness to Lacrosse I thought that you were fortunate to have a clinic.

#### ***b. billboards/advertising***

- Only a few billboards which is nice.
- Nice signs on most businesses.
- I did not see any bill boards that I thought were particularly bad.
- I didn't find anything relating to billboards or other advertising that I found objectionable.

#### ***c. other***

- Saw a cute little shop next to Kochies but it was closed.

### ***XI. Walking around...comments on businesses (physical part): Appearance, displays, signs, etc.***

- We visited on a Sunday and were not able to visit any businesses.
- The appearance of the businesses I looked at were very nice.
- Nice picture and frame shop (friendly).
- Nice supermarket • clean, good selection of products.
- Nice signs outside.
- Businesses look well-maintained. Signage is good.
- I walked around the older business area and I saw a real mix.
- The front on the "Sjolander Building" which houses Bearly Used & the Hair Studio is not a pleasant addition to that building. I saw a law office sign that was in need of improvement and the cornice on the 100 State St building looks a little scary. Hometown Video, your awning is tom.

## ***First Impressions Report of Holmen***

-Ziegler Heating - your building is well maintained, nice job. The sculptured block buildings at State and Second are well kept up. Viking Tool and Mfg - your building is well maintained.

-Nice Fire Station!! Very nice library and Village Hall.

### ***XII. Walking around...comments on people:***

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

-Not many people around, the ones that I did see and talk to were very friendly and tried to help give directions and answer questions.

-Police officer on duty gave us the name of the only restaurant in town that was open. Kochies Bakery had good economical food with friendly service. It seemed to be run by a family. It was small but nice. Everyone seemed to be friendly, from the police office to the customers at the restaurant.

-Most of our socializing was done at Kochies. The operators were friendly and the atmosphere was good. We asked to use the phone and the waitress readily agreed. It was an 800 number, but she did not even check it out. Asked the policeman on duty if they had choices to eat and he responded that we really don't have much - and seemed apologetic about it. It turned out that the only choices were Kochies, a microwave sandwich at Kwik Trip or a drive-in which I think was closed.

-People at the restaurant were friendly, but not very knowledgeable about the community in general. The person at the Frame Gallery was exceptionally friendly and helpful, a definite asset to the community.

-The people I talked to were all very friendly and helpful. The folks at the 76 station helped me with information and directions. Jean (?) at the library did an excellent job of answering my questions - she even knew how Holmen got its name. Lady at School District office was well prepared and interested in answering my questions. Nice job!

### ***XIII. Community information: comments on.....***

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

-A real nice town brochure. Gives a little history. Glad it talked about the new school, as well as the old.

-None found.

-We picked up a small free newspaper at Kochies.

-The information I got was fair at best.

-There is one community brochure but it was a little hard to find.

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### ***b. businesses/attractions brochures or directory***

-None that I found.

-None.

-b. & c I didn't get any type of community profile or business brochure. If I wanted to know more about Holmen, I guess I was on my own.

### ***c. community profile (demographic, Industrial type information for prospective business people, etc.***

-None that we found

### ***d. map***

-Only map in city brochure, otherwise nothing I could find.

-Only of city.

-The city map was outdated.

-I got a map at the village hall but didn't see one anywhere else. The map isn't completely accurate.

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

-Saw none.

-Sadly lacking.

## ***XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:***

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

-We did not visit since it was Sunday.

-This was a Sunday visit, so we were unable to do this.

-Nice, new facility.

-Sign on outside of building only.

-Restrooms.

-Not applicable.

-It's a nice building.

-Nice facility but the entrance doors are not very inviting. I thought I was at the back door at first.

## **First Impressions Report of Holmen**

### **b. helpfulness of staff**

-The staff was very polite and helpful. Did know of other people to talk to about different things, i.e., industrial park.

-The staff was very helpful and knowledgeable.

-Enjoyed meeting your village administrator, Eugene Alberts. He did a great job in helping me. He gave me a map, showed me where certain things were located and even looked up the phone numbers of the Chamber president and the owner of the industrial land as well as some local real estate agencies.  
Anyone who works with Gene is aoina to be impressed with your community.

### **c. other**

-Put up a "police department" sign and directions to it.

## **XV. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit**

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

-Only one or two people knew a phone number of person(s) to call for assistance.

-Not applicable.

-The village office knew who was the head of the chamber, but most other folks weren't sure. When I asked for information I was usually referred to the Village Hall.

### **b. comment on information available**

-Very little.

### **c. comment on staff**

-City office staff helpful.

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

-N/A

## **XVI. Other stuff.....**

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

-One in city office - good condition and one in park (didn't go in).

-The park restrooms were outdoor facilities. No running water.

-The ones at park were primitive. Plenty in places like Kwik Trip, etc.

-Facilities were fair.

## ***First Impressions Report of Holmen***

-The restrooms in the library were well maintained. Didn't see any more, other than the ones that would be available in restaurants, etc.

### ***b. payphones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)***

-Saw three payphones that looked in good condition. Did not use them.

-Didn't see any. The bakery was very generous when I asked to use their phone. It was an 800 number, but I was not asked if it was long distance or not.

-May have been there, but did not see them.

-Phones were available and working at several locations.

### ***c. Parking***

-Parking did not seem to be a problem anywhere.

-Parking was sufficient.

-Could park almost anywhere.

-Parking was good.

### ***d. water fountains, benches, etc.***

-No water fountains or benches that I saw.

-None found.

-Saw no fountains or benches.

-Fair.

### ***e. other***

-Nice war memorial (if you find it).

-The fire department was well-equipped and maintained. The VFW war memorial, park and pool are very nice but there needs to be more signs to help a person locate them.

## ***First Impressions Report of Holmen***

### **WRAP UP**

#### **A. Using your "senses"...**

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

- No taste.
- The meal was lunch at Kochies, which was very good. It had that homemade taste.
- The lunch at Kochies was tasty and very reasonable.
- The bakery is good. At Al's the food and service was good, the waitress very helpful. But there is a definite need for more food service establishments.
- There were no distinctive tastes that I would associate with the community.

##### **2. What does the community SMELL like:**

- Clean, fresh air. Butcher shop on old Main St. smelled good.
- It was a clear day with fresh air smells.
- There were no smells other than nice fresh air.
- It smelled clean.
- Holmen smells like fresh air

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

- Very few, quiet. Noise around school from kids.
- There didn't seem to be a lot of noise even from the highway.
- It was very quiet even with the highway nearby. The only thing I heard was Church bells.
- I heard a quartet.
- The only sound that impressed me was the sound of planes flying overhead. An obvious reminder that the regional airport was nearby.

##### **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.)**

- Deserted - clean - nice streets.
- The town seemed very quiet and friendly. There didn't seem to be a lot of things going on. There were people going to and from churches.
- It felt like a very laid back type of town, friendly and probably quite safe.
- The city was quiet due to most people being gone during the day (commuters?).

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-The community has a somewhat empty feeling and I guess you could expect that with **so** many people commuting to **LaCrosse**. It feel like a small **community** and just didn't seem to be a village of nearly 4,000 people.

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

- 1.) Clean
- 2.) Lots of opportunity for growth
- 3.) Lots of construction going on - especially new homes and roads
- 4.) Excellent schools
- 5.)

- 1.) Holmen School District
- 2.) Holmen Drive...soopen
- 3.) Eugene Alberts
- 4.) Library building
- 5.) Amazing growth of mid-range housing

- 1.) Following the Great River Road could bring a lot into the city.
- 2.) The boulevard is a start to make people notice, rather than pass on.
- 3.) New schools always impress me. It means the community cares.
- 4.) Some of the buildings are new along highways.
- 5.) It seems to have a relaxed way of life style.

- 1.) The location, surrounding terrain, "Great River Road" area.
- 2.) Quiet, relaxed, safe feeling.
- 3.) Several new, beautiful buildings (schools, fire station, bank, post office, Church
- 4.) Very nice policeman.
- 5.) Boulevard along highway through town with occasional flowers.

- 1.) Well-maintained streets
- 2.) " " **schools**
- 3.) " " residences
- 4.) " " fire department
- 5.) " " businesses and industries

### ***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:***

-Did not find anything to bring back.

-I feel that the boulevard with the flowers is a great idea. Something to bring a pleasant feeling along main street. Our Hardees grounds could be made more attractive close to the street.

-Kochies has the size, feel, and atmosphere of the type of restaurant I wish we had. It is not likely I will have the opportunity to utilize this idea. Would be glad to give input to local owners.

-Can't think of an idea I will steal, but I'd steal the picturesque view if I could.

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

- How clean it was and the new high school.
- The drive to Holman and around the area was very pleasant, along with the friendly people.
- The calm, peaceful, beautiful area and all those people going to their respective Churches on Sunday morning.
- How neat and clean and well-maintained the residences and mobile park are.
- The strange contrast between the actual size of the community and the size that you perceive when visiting (much smaller).

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

- Stopped at Kochies - had a pop and excellent homemade chocolate chip cookie. People inside very friendly and helpful.
- Had lunch at Little Als - very good, nice place, fine food.
- Linda ? was there (Little Al's) eating lunch and between her and our waitress, they were very helpful. Knew lots about town and the area.
- Why does school need space in building on Main St., when they just built a new school?
- I was very surprised to have only one establishment to eat out on a Sunday. If a wider choice was given, maybe there would be more people in the area.
- The park was disappointing. No playing equipment or water available.
- It really did look like Monday was the only day that you could mow your lawn, for everyone seemed to be on the same schedule for that. Everywhere they were long and needed attention.
- Improvement on the city signs is needed. It looks like they may have been put up 20 years ago and forgotten.
- About Kochies, when using the restroom, I noticed a rack in the hall that they used for baking, it was very unappetizing. We missed their sign the first time through. It is not big enough.
- About the boulevard, it is vastly under exploited. It could be so attractive with tubs of flowers and possibly benches?
- The other most apparent aspect of this whole town was the lack of care of lawns, etc. It was everywhere. It was businesses and private homes. It was the park. I saw a rather new looking funeral home on the north entrance to town, and it looked like it had been built and abandoned when you looked at the surrounding grounds. Everywhere the grass was long even at the schools. The result is that the town does not have that crisp, well cared for look. ***Did they have rain for days and days before our visit or is it something else?***

## ***First Impressions Report of Holmen***

- The city must be suffering growing pains. City fathers, staff, employers and group members must be facing and meeting a great challenge.
  
- The number of people in your area is going to continue to grow, the challenge will be to see if your 'community' grows to match those numbers.
  
- Your centennial publication done in 1962 is a very nice publication. Your new residents could learn a lot about their new home town if they saw this. How about an update??