

First impressions

of

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Lancaster, WI

*by Darlington, WI
Visit conducted 9/3/1992*

*A program **for** community improvement*

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Report Introduction

The "*First Impressions*" visit of Lancaster by Darlington was conducted on Thursday, September 3, 1992. The team members all agreed that they had a very enjoyable time visiting Lancaster. All stated that they would return for a visit on their own. All members left with a very favorable "first impression". Thanks to the City of Lancaster for a great day and for all that was learned.

The four member Darlington team profile:

Three men, one woman -- An educator, two bankers, and a retired person. Three are life-long residents of Lafayette County; one is a transplant from another Midwestern state. Two members are actively involved in tourism development activities.

The weather was gorgeous, a beautiful, fall morning and afternoon. We toured the community from 10:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. We toured in pairs. All "visitors" had the opportunity to view the community on foot and by auto.

The following report is a compilation of all of the individual reports. If further explanation is required, contact Dan Hill, at the University of Wisconsin-Extension office in Darlington (608-776-4820).

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

* Expected a smaller town -- but found it was more populated and had nice variety of shops, lodging, and food places than I had expected.

* I had expected a typical, rural county seat. It was not much different from my expectations, although I had expected more vacant storefronts in the downtown area.

* A clean, progressive city.

* I expected a smaller town. I did not realize the extent of the business district, nor the extent of development in the outlying areas.

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

Positive:

* New highways, new elderly housing from the South. Neat areas both from North and West sides. Clean homes and yards.

* Good roads. Very nice sign at the Industrial Park. I think that routing trucks to the bypass is a great idea. Overall, a very favorable impression as you enter the city.

* The new development near Orchard Manor looks very nice. New blacktop and sidewalks.

* Orchard Manor--very impressive, Nice entrance. City streets are nicely laid out with good signs.

Negatives:

* No sidewalks. The welcome sign coming in from the northeast on Hwy. 61 needs a paint job. (And why do community welcome signs list the names of every community organization? It seems like a waste of space. It is not very inviting.)

* Not too well-marked from South. Had trouble finding city park. Bath house at pool could be neater.

* I thought that some of the business on the other side (north) could have done a better job of identification and landscaping.

3. As you drive around town your comments on:

A. Appearance

*** 1. Downtown**

Very attractive. Storefronts, at first glance, look full. Plentiful parking around the square. Parking lot on south side of courthouse is a detriment. It's too bad that this is not open space with lawn, shrubs, flowers, and trees like the other three sides.

Signage on one block off (north?) of main square is very attractive, coordinated.

* Clean, open, pleasant.

* Seems busy -- many cars on main square. Storefronts are neat. No empty shells at first glance--buildings not occupied appeared neat. More stores than I expected. Dick's supermarket very nice.

* I liked the square and central focus of the courthouse.

*** 2. Residential**

Neat homes.

* Well-kept. Nice to see the city has adopted curbside recycling. The homes, lawns, and yards seemed well-maintained. I did not notice any homes in disrepair.

* Nice subdivisions with new homes. Excellent expansion capabilities. Houses/yards cared for. Trailer lots could use grooming.

* Very attractive. Very few homes in poor condition. Sidewalks are decent. Lawns well-maintained.

*** 3. Industrial park**

Seemed well-organized. Did not drive through, only past.

Fortunate to have diversified industry. Plenty of room for expansion. Buildings appear in good condition.

* Looks successful. The sign really helps. It gives you the impression, "Hey, if they take this much pride in their industrial park, the city must really be attractive."

* Nicely developed, with room for growth.

4. Parks

- * Lots of trees. Groomed very well. Shelter houses are abundant and nice. Good signs indicating location.
- * Hard to find.
- * Excellent park. The memorial park is very attractive and seems to have something for everyone. Very well kept. congratulations to the city's park department.
- * OK. Well-maintained.

5. Schools

- * Did not visit.
- * Did not visit, but the expansion to the high schools leaves the impression that the community is concerned about their kids and their future.
- * New, spacious, nice location.
- * New school is impressive.

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

- * Very well-maintained.
- * Near main street sidewalks and streets new and in very good condition. Off main square they are showing signs of wear. Some in severe need of replacing. **Grass** and weeds growing between cracks in places.
- * Roads are in very good condition.

7. Other

- * Friendly people.
- * Thought the Ag Forum Building was a great concept.

B. Signing

1. Community entrance/exit signs

- * Some signs are in need of a paint job. Again, the welcome signs with all the organizations' logos are unattractive, and the space could be better used to invite visitors to stay in your community.

* Good signage. Not elaborate, but neat and friendly. Nice that it stated where tourist information was available.

* Good.

* **2. Streets**

In good shape. Pretty good signage. A little bit confusing to follow the highway signs through town. Maybe that's the idea--people have to get out of their cars and ask directions! Signs were good enough to allow us to easily find the park after we were given directions.

* **Off** main street, near mill area, in need **of** attention.

* Good.

* **3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.**

* Both could be better.

* Excellent

* Clear and well-marked.

* **4. Storefront signs**

Nice--but lacks uniformity, some don't get your attention. Small block **of** buildings just **off** main with coordinated paint and signage -- very impressive, quaint and inviting.

* There is one small section just north of the square where the businesses have coordinated their signage. This looks really nice. Why didn't the whole square area do something like this? The existing signs are not unattractive; they are just your typical hodge-podge carrying no message about the community.

* Attractive, but not gaudy.

* **5. Industrial park**

* Great sign. It looks like you really take pride in your industrial park.

* Fair.

* More attention should be dedicated to this area.

* **6. City Hall, police, etc.**

Well-marked, easy to find.

- * Good directions at town entrances for these and chamber info.
- * Adequate.
- * **7. Billboards/advertising, etc.**
- * The chamber of commerce's calendar of events is a nice concise publication.
- * I don't like any billboards.

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

A. City/Village Hall

1. Is there a street map?

- * Excellent street map. Very clear.
- * The chamber recommended that we tour the courthouse to learn about the history of the area and to see the architecture. During our visit there several people passed by **us** without offering any help or even acknowledging our presence, despite our best efforts to look obviously confused. The courthouse is a very nice attraction. The renovation work was well worth the effort. Beautiful building with a very nice display case.

2. Community brochure/directory

- * Good brochures. A very wide selection available.
- * Well-stocked. Many and easy to see.
- * Very nice brochure stand in the courthouse. Not only with information about Lancaster, but the surrounding area as well.

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

- * Business people were all very nice, good impressions of the city.
- * Never saw one.

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

- * Well-directed and helpful.
- * Wide variety. Restaurant (Arrow Inn) that we ate in had excellent service--very personable waitress.

* Our stop at the Chamber of Commerce was a highlight of the day. You couldn't help but get a good impression of Lancaster after talking with Becky Vaasen. She firmly believes and convinced us that Lancaster is a great place to live, work, raise children, shop, or just visit. What a great asset to your community and downtown!

* Storekeepers were very helpful. Information given was clear and concise.

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

* Yes.

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

* Did not see a lot of this. I don't know if complimentary items are that big of a deal anyway.

B. Chamber office/visitor info center

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

* Easy to find and we were referred to it.

* Yes, easy to locate.

* It didn't seem to be well-marked, just a small sign in the window.

* Yes.

2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)
Great selection of brochures and community information.

* Many well-stocked racks with helpful information. Info on buildings for rent and for sale, tax rates, etc.

* It seemed like they had everything that you could possibly need. Very well-organized.

* Excellent.

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

* Told of good places to eat, stay.

* Wide variety.

* Gave **us** a number of recommendations and then let **us** choose. Very good.

* Excellent.

4. How prepared/helpful were they.

* Excellent.

* Well prepared. Helpful. Easy to talk to. "A+".

* Very enthusiastic promoter of the city. I think that she could convince anyone that a stay in Lancaster would be worthwhile. The Chamber Exec. is a real find for you community.

* Excellent

5. Convenient hours?

* Yes.

* *Sorry*, didn't notice the hours.

* Yes. Becky at the Chamber office--wonderful person. They are **so** lucky to have her. Great personality--made you feel welcome--very informative and helpful.

* **As** a visitor to the town, the chamber office was one of the **best** features that I saw. The Chamber rep was courteous, well-informed, and seemed genuinely interested in helping. (Four stars * * * *)

C. Info from general community (servicestation/motel/bars/ restaurants/shop employees/etc.)

1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?

a. Walkers--Good promoter; demonstrated community pride.

Walkers--Seemed like he was very proud of the community. Had good things to say about a variety of topics related to community.

b. Hardware Store - good.

Hardware Store - Helpful, positive attitude.

c. Library - We went in looking for information about employment opportunities. The librarian was very helpful. She helped us as much as she could and then directed

us to the Job Center.

d. Dick's -- Not Applicable

e. IGA -- Not Applicable

*

Everyone seems well-informed.

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

a. Yes.

b. Yes

c. Yes

d. Not applicable

e. Not applicable

*

If they did not know, they all seemed able to steer us in the right direction.

3. Attitude, appearance, etc.

a. Very friendly staff, pride in business.

b. Neat, clean

c. Very helpful. Looked like a user-friendly library.

d. Employees willing to serve--put customer first, before task at hand. Whenever we looked around with a confused look, someone asked if there was any way that we could be helped. Modern conveniences all under one roof.

e. Could use a facelift on the inside.

*

Nice, neat and orderly.

4. Other comments

a. Very nice store. This store probably brings people to Lancaster. Are other businesses aware of the draw that a business like this can have for the downtown retail sector?

b.

c.

d. Great asset to the community--a very wide variety.

* Did not see or meet anyone that gave the town a bad image.

5. General

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

* Yes

* The ones we talked to seemed pretty up to date.

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

* Stores are well-stocked, outstanding mens clothing store. "Dick's"--very fine; pleasant help.

* Appears to have a wide variety.

* Impressed with the number of specialty shops in downtown service area. **Also,** there appears to be plenty of lodging available.

* Good.

C. Are there public rest rooms?

* Yes, and clean, easy to find.

* Unsure

* Do not know, did not notice any.

* Yes, by City Hall and in Courthouse

D. Pay phones...are they working, phone books intact.

* Main Street--yes.

* N/A -- Did not pay attention to this area.

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

* Very attractive.

* Yes

* Yes

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

* Good selection

* Excellent food at the Arrow Inn

G. What does community SMELL like?

* Rural America.

H. What SOUNDS did you hear?

* People going about their jobs.

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

* Warm, inviting, prideful

* Warm feeling--good business activity--friendly people. Overall a very nice community. I enjoyed the day. I left with good feelings.

* Very warm. This is a community that cares. People of Lancaster appear to be concerned about more than just themselves and their own businesses, as evidenced by the library, the beautiful parks, well-maintained roads and sidewalks, and the new school.

* Comfortable

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

* Seemed proud of community. Friendly, professional, a good feeling. Restaurant waitress was outstanding. Courthouse employees need a course in acknowledging people who enter their offices. Had to ask one person, "What time do you open?" to be helped. Circuit Judge took time to show us new work on courthouse; fine man.

* Overall people were very friendly--willing to give directions--refer you to places for additional information. When asking about job availability the responses were not very optimistic, but encouraged us to register at Job Service.

* Very warm and friendly. The people I met and talked with epitomized what you would expect people to be like on a beautiful, warm early fall afternoon.

* Everyone I met was very friendly and more than willing to take a few minutes to talk to a “confused stranger“.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:

* It would be a nice idea to develop parking off of the main square and replace the small lot by the courthouse with some landscaping, instead of the cement of the parking lot.

WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

* Beautiful square, courthouse renovation inside, brochure stands well-stocked. I would live in Lancaster.

* Becky at Chamber of Commerce--I would go to her first to find out what events are taking place--things to do. She made you feel welcome.

* The excellent job that Becky does **for** the Chamber of Commerce. The courthouse square, minus the parking lot on the south side. The courthouse renovation. Walkers’ mens clothing store.

* The good food at the Arrow and the great selection of clothes at the men’s store. I came away from Lancaster with a better respect for the town than I had when I first went there.

6. Doing it Right!

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

1.
 - * Expansion Industry-Capabilities
 - * Clean
 - * Commitment to major community projects--new school, courthouse renovation, housing development, etc.
 - * Good business development -- wide base.
2.
 - * Housing development sites
 - * Friendly
 - * Mens clothing store

- * Courthouse and square
- 3.
 - * Parks, trees, courthouse lawn
 - * Pride
 - * Courthouse and courthouse lawn (lose the parking lot!!)
 - * Clean and neat
- 4.
 - * New business commitments to town (Dick's, Orchard Manor)
 - * Progressive
 - * Variety of retail businesses
 - * Good people
- 5.
 - * Friendly people
 - * Executive Director of Chamber of Commerce
 - * Hospital/Schools and Parks

B. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe the steps you will take to implement it within the NEXT 72 HOURS!

- * Brochure stands
- * Approach Chamber and other city groups, officials on better brochures and info about Darlington. Need these marketing tools if we are going to attract new industry, business, people, and tourists to our area. I liked some of the materials they had. Wish we had a better city map/signs.
- * Information racks in key places around town.
- * We'd like to steal the chamber exec.
- * A staffed chamber booth. I will talk to one of our chamber directors about this.