

First Impressions

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Lancaster, WI

by Mauston, WI

Visit conducted 06/19/92

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.

Revised: 5/31/91

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

None. I'd never been there before.

A typical small town located in the country. Some deteriorating "inner city," i.e. closed stores, etc.

A county seat community struggling to make a go of it with limited creative and people resources. Knew about the wonderful courthouse.

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

Positive: The view and scenery, clean countryside. Entering the town from Fennimore, the welcome sign was large and displayed plaques of the various community organizations.

Good signage.

The "industrialization" on the north end was impressive. I think I saw three community entrance/welcome-type signs from the north entrance alone. The water tower with excellent logo stuck out (noticed logo on entrance sign, too).

Negative: A slight trend(?) / tendency toward billboard proliferation.

Not really a "negative" but you might want to consider placing the north community welcome sign north (outside) of all the "built-up" area since a visitor would consider that to be the start of "Lancaster" (whether it's the actual corporate limits or not) -- to more clearly define "community."

Seemed like some areas (grass on outskirts of town) were not as well taken care of as other areas.

Area could use a weed control/lawn mowing program, i.e. Wisconsin Dairies.

3. **As you drive around town your comments on:**

Appearance

1. **Downtown** The courthouse dominates visually and emotionally. You were right to use it in your logo.

You might want to consider authentic historic preservation activities around the Courthouse square and -- future planning -- a more restrictive historic sign ordinance. (When you have that wonderful courthouse, it's a shame to water down its effect with false-fronted buildings and plastic signs). You have some great second-stories (look-up!) but a lot of 1960-ish fiberglass and plastic "improvements" which should be removed. The overall effect would be stunning and a great marketing tool for visitors. ("The whole is greater than the sum of its parts"). Fairly clean and neat. Lots of good informational signage.

Clean, 3 auto dealers.

2 Residential Clean and impressive.

Some wonderful, large old homes. Have you ever considered a house tour? **A** residential historic district? **A** walking architectural tour?

Typical, not overly neat but looked good. Some places needed some serious paint jobs.

3. Industrial Park Nicely laid out.

New. Fronts look good. However, the fenced-in yards could be covered from the front blocking the view of the storage yard.

Good positive image of a thriving community as you come into town.

4. Parks Beautiful city park, very big. Needed some work, but overall was very nice.

Large. Provide for a variety of things to do. Impressive scenery. However, could use mowing and the pond looked stagnant. Needs aerating.

Nice park! **A** little "fix-up" needed to really make it first-class.

5. Schools Brand new high school addition. Great location.

Looked good. High school being added on to and location of high school and Youth **Ag** plus fair grounds is good. Middle school and grade school combination I thought was good.

Looks like there's some good educational planning going on and education is a community priority.

6. Infrastructure Clean.

Highway through town is in very nice shape. Main streets excellent for the most part.

Plenty of lighting.

7. **Other** There was a dumpy trailer court near the center of town. Looked really bad ...all the trailers were old and green!

B. Signing

1. **Community entrance/exit signs** Very good.

Fair. Only one entrance north was exceptional.

Liked the logo, but hard to see.

2 **streets**

Average

61 very good.

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

Didn't see many park signs at all -- found the city park by accident.

I thought the directional signage was very good from the north and south -- east-to-read and find and some clumped together so you didn't have an unsightly proliferation of poles and signs.

Hospital: excellent. Parks: fair.

4. **Storefront signs** Most of the store signs looked old.

Very good.

Good potential for really capitalizing on your historic Courthouse with a signage ordinance (colors, sizes, shapes, etc.) Right now you have "rugged individualism" run amok and there is no overall visual impact, i.e. some neon, some plastic, some wood. (A lot need replacement, so this is a good opportunity).

5. Industrial park

Didn't really see a sign **as** such. Should there be one from the south directing people/trucks/prospective industries to the north end of town?

Saw no **signs** -- just buildings so assumed it was an industrial park.

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

Easily found.

Good

Easy

7. **Billboards/advertising**, etc.

Always a danger of billboard proliferation. You should be particularly cautious since your number one asset has to do with historic preservation (don't want to send out a "mixed message" or appear to be hypocritical, i.e. preserving on one hand and "blighting" on the other).

Lots of signs all over.

Good, clean.

4. *Visitor/community information*

A. City/Village Hall

1. Is there a street map?

Yes.

2. **Community** brochure/directory

Lots of good information.

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

Not much information on businesses in town. Map of Industrial Park.

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

Best Western -- no restaurant. Historical places.

Got several recommendations. Easily given. Picked **up**

"between the lines" that a "nicer" restaurant would be an asset(?).

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

Yes on Historical Museum.

Yes.

6. Complimentary items (postcards, bookmarks, coupons, etc.)

Info...

Could be a few more perhaps.

B. Chamber office/visitor info center

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

Easy to find. ^Woman at City Hall directed me to it.

Visitor information (Court House) was nicely signed and -- obviously -- east to find.

2 Comments on info available street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)

O.K. selection. Lots of history brochures.

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

Lots. Very friendly and readily-given.

4. How prepared/helpful were they.

Lots of info.

Very friendly and helpful.

5. Convenient hours?

No one in Chamber Office ~~from~~ 10:30-11:00 AM

Like everywhere (including **us**), most visitors come on weekends when the chamber is closed. We still tend to have our chambers open during "typical business hours" which is nice for members to feel good, but doesn't cater to visitors needs. **Not** a criticism! (If you have an answer, let **us** know!)

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

1. **How knowledgeable about the community** were they?

City Hall good.

Historical Museum excellent.

Chamber good.

General citizens good, too.

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

a. Yes, City Hall to Chamber.

b. People on the street were O.K.

c. Yes. To Chamber.

3. Attitude, **appearance**, etc.

Variety store -- friendly;

Drug store -- friendly.

Crafts store -- unfriendly and totally ignored.

Very nice service and attitude at A&W.

Women's clothing store -- unfriendly. Waited around for someone to acknowledge me. Neither woman did.

I went in 4 stores. In 3 of them, I was the only customer and nobody ever acknowledged my presence. (People "on the street" were much friendlier). No wonder our small town merchants are dying off! These folks could use some hospitality training. (Why do they think their "competition"-- Wal-Mart -- has greeters?) This gives "small town friendliness" -- what should be one of their biggest assets -- a bad name. Seems unnecessarily dumb to me.

Attitude great.

4. Other Comments

Gentleman from Museum was terrific -- loved his job!

Everyone I met was friendly and courteous.

5. General

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

Yes, overall they seem to.

The people I talked to -- yes

I got a really great discourse on the Courthouse from a "citizen" on the street. Amazing!

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

Variety is O.K. for retail, only saw one hotel but it looked nice.

Good -- excellent.

Didn't notice a lot of tourism -- type businesses. Potential?

C. Are there public restrooms.

Yes, but were they hard to get to! In the basement of City Hall. Accessible from the outside, but you have to go through a maze of old furniture.

Yes.

Are these open on weekends for visitors?

D. Payphones...are they working, phone books intact..

Yes.

Yes, good working order.

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

Active.

Attractive. Only reservation: storage yards could use covering.

Definitely an asset, but a little paint, mowing, etc. would capitalize even further.

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

Ate at A&W. Good.

Good.

G. What does community SMELL like?

Clean

No bad odors.

Nothing noticeable.

H. What SOUNDS did you hear?

No trains, some trucks -- not many...

Nature, people.

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

I thought Lancaster felt "larger" than what it actually was. I also felt a "schizophrenia" in not coordinating/theming downtown area around such an obvious historical attraction/marketing lure: the Courthouse. Heritage tourism a definite potential growth area.

Felt rather deserted, not totally unfriendly but they could work on customer service.

Lots of street traffic, but not too much foot traffic. Have you considered community/downtown strategies to enhance foot traffic?

I "felt" a little "defensiveness" on the part of some merchants; also, a little "identity" problem in defining who/what Lancaster is.

Very nice people. However, merchants need to host some hospitality training for employees and managers!

Warm and friendly.

Describe the people you met (Friendly, helpful, etc.)

The worst place was a clothing store -- no one even looked at me. The best was the curator for the local museum. He was terrific.

Ben Franklin -- Friendly and helpful.

Men's clothing store -- friendly, courteous, a pleasant good-bye when I left.

Kwik-Trip -- No hello, no acknowledgement. Just took my money. No thank you, either.

Cunningham Museum -- The curator was **very** accommodating -- Friendly and knowledgeable.

I did not meet an unfriendly person.

Nice people, willing to help.

Additional Comments/Observations

The Fair Ground, drivers' license place, Ag Building and High School were all located together. Very impressive --

Really hated the way that run-down trailer park looked...very tacky.

What will **you** remember about **this community six months from now**

Not much except the Museum. It was terrific.

The courthouse...and the potential just sitting there around it for a "historic shopping district", maybe a downtown b&b, a courthouse square festival, a walking architectural tour, etc. etc.

The industry.

Very impressive scenery and Courthouse. **An** exceptional number of war memorials. Nice library (I am a Mauston library board member).

4 Doing it Right!

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

Good planning of industrial park.

Wonderful local museum.

Good directional signage.

Beautiful domed Court House.

Courthouse!

Museum!

Friendly "men **and** women on the streets"

Park.

Great Potential.

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**.

None.