

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

of LANCASTER, WI

by RICHLAND CENTER, WI

JUNE 2, 1992

A program for community improvement

Developed by:

Andy Lewis

Grant County UW-Extension Resource Agent

James L. Schneider

Executive Director

Grant County Economic Development Corp.

SUMMARY
RICHLAND CENTER VISIT TO LANCASTER
TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 1992

On Tuesday, June 2, four Richland County residents spent a day in Lancaster. Persons visiting the area were a retired, professional couple and two working women. The weather was mild and sunny.

We are impressed with Lancaster's attractive courthouse square and the wonderful park system. The residential district is, for the most part, well maintained and looks like an inviting place in which to live. Lancaster's schools are in good shape and the new high school is a plus for the community and demonstrates a progressive spirit. Signs giving directions around town are very well done.

Lancaster would benefit by having someone available to answer questions about the area. We found helpful brochures at the visitor's center in the courthouse, but when directed to the visitor's center we expected to find someone to talk with. The Chamber office was closed when we stopped for information. The list on the door giving phone numbers to contact is helpful for persons who want to take the extra time and the effort to do so, but will the average visitor want to take that extra effort?

The museum in town should be open on a regular basis. It is advertised as an attraction and as such must be available to visitors. The sign on the door giving a phone number to call for information is a poor substitute for regular visiting hours.

Lancaster needs to do some sprucing up. Some of the trailers are run down and cluttered, both in the residential section and in the trailer park. Most of the sidewalks are in good shape but some do need replacing; one of us tripped on a sidewalk downtown while looking for the Chamber office.

Lancaster needs some good restaurants. Several of us planned to eat at a local restaurant but the restaurant in town was full at lunchtime so we had to settle for fast food.

Landscaping in the industrial park can be improved. Many of the businesses are attractively landscaped but some need sprucing up - perhaps some shrubs could be planted and the grass kept cut.

The first thing you see coming into the north side of town are billboards and they detract from the beauty of the area.

Many of the retail clerks were less than helpful and gave the impression we were disturbing them by coming into the stores. People in recreational areas such as the golf course did an excellent job of welcoming visitors to the area.

We enjoyed our visit to Lancaster - the people are pleasant, the parks are beautiful, the residential area attractive and there are few empty storefronts. Lancaster's industrial park certainly provides easy highway access to businesses located in the park. The courthouse square is well cared for and inviting. Lancaster is a charming small town.

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

I thought of Lancaster as a farm community with retired people.

I assumed that Lancaster would be a relatively small farming community with a good thriving business center since it is a county seat. I also expected a lot of agri-business, a lot of lawyers, a courthouse and square and a progressive yet conservative town.

I expected a small, rural community reliant upon the farm economy. Probably trying to attract as much tourism as possible to bring extra dollars into the community.

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

Hwy 61 north - welcome sign was informative

County Trunk A, east - adequate signs, nice entrance

Positive: Hwy 61 south - signs for recreation area excellent

Hwy 35 - good signs, pleasant entrance

County Trunk A, west - adequate signs

Lincoln Ave. from east - adequate signs, pleasant entrance

Negatives:

County Trunk A - junk yard is unsightly

Hwy 61 north - the industrial park was the first thing I saw; clean, newer buildings but set too close to the road

Too many billboards detract from country scenery

Landscaping in industrial park is spotty, some well done, some need improvement

Industrial park too close to the road - it hits your eye as you come into town

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

A. Appearance

1. Downtown

Courthouse square area very nice
Average blend of stores - few specialty shops
Few empty stores
Appears to still be an active shopping area but few people in stores
Sane flags dirty and tattered
Sane sidewalks need repair

2. Residential

Typical old rural community with a mixture of large older homes and smaller blue collar houses. One very nice subdivision on edge of town near Schreiner Park.
Not all areas of town have sidewalks.
Most hanes well maintained - sane need paint/repairs.
Zoning not uniform; run down trailers in residential area.

3. Industrial park

Plenty of room to expand. Appeared to have a variety of business.

Sane buildings nicely landscaped, others look unkempt.

I prefer seeing employee parking in the rear of buildings and more attractive use of grounds seen by visitors.

4. Parks

Excellent recreation area - very attractive, clean, well maintained, good signage

Very nice, clean, well-kept and attractive. They seemed to provide all the recreation facilities needed.

Nice - golf course, pool, park and picnic areas together. Large park could use additional play equipment for children.

5. Schools

Beautiful new high school being built to compliment the old high and middle schools
They seem adequate. God elementary and parochial schools.

Lack of sidewalks near Lancaster middle school. Could benefit fr m safety fencing around play areas.

Buildings seem neat, clean and well maintained.

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

Streets appear rough. Old but adequate infrastructure.

Sane areas lacked sidewalks, curb and gutter.

Main streets well maintained, side streets bumpy.

7. Other

Excellent fairgrounds and buildings

Some hanes being nicely restored

Nice, well cared for monuments

Neat library on a tree shaded space - inviting!

Trailer park has sane poorly maintained sections

Sane sidewalks need repair/replacing

B. Signing

1. Community entrance/exit signs

Nice to see so many welcome signs

No exit signs

Excellent entrance signs on Hwy 61 and 81/35

Very good signs on County Trunk A - both entrances, and on incoming Lincoln Ave.

2. Streets

Mostly well marked although we had trouble finding the street signs on two different corners.

Most streets adequately signed.

3. Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.

Excellent - all entrances had signs.

Big enough and easy to see. Directions were clear, and helpful.

4. Storefront signs

OK. Some flowers, banners or theme might be attractive to tourists.

Mostly easy to read: nothing special.

Not adequate. Could be coordinated and enhanced.

5. Industrial Park

Adequate.

6. City Hall, police, etc.

Well marked and easily found.

7. Billboards/advertising, etc.

Too much of this coming into town.

Too many billboards.

Billboards ~~make~~ landscape ~~look~~ cluttered.

4. Visitor/community information

A. City/Village Hall

1. Is there a street map?

Wee given a district map, not a tourist map.

Yes. We found it excellent and used it to find our way around.

City had a map - not very informative to anyone not already familiar with the city. Room for improvement.

2. Community brochure/directory

A number of brochures answered all of our questions. We picked them up at the courthouse (easily found)

Not very much available and no one to assist you at the courthouse

Yes, but not offered to us at city hall. Useful information at tourist information center at courthouse, but only brochure racks, no person to talk to.

3. Community profile (including business and industrial opportunities)

WP&L brochure available at courthouse provided us with most of the information we were seeking.

Not offered at city hall; W&L brochure at courthouse is excellent.

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

Very few places to eat (except for fast food). We were referred to Fennimore for a supper club.

Most people did give recommendations but few seemed very enthusiastic about their town. Everyone was polite and friendly.

Nice motel with central location.

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

Yes, posted on Chamber door.

Yes, numbers were posted on Chamber window.

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

Postcards were available

None

None

B. Chamber office/visitor info center

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

I was referred to the Chamber but was given the wrong directions. No visitor information center.

~~Most~~ people did not refer me to the Chamber office. Office located with a realtor and only open in the morning.

Noone referred me to the Chamber; fairly easy to locate but off on a side street.

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

A sign on the Chamber door referred me to the court house where I found a very good supply of brochures.

Need to expand street map and brochures. If anything was going on you had to find it yourself.

Visitor center in courthouse had street map, several brochures and a very nice WP&L community profile, but no person to ask questions of.

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

~~Most~~ people were friendly and offered recommendations we sought. One exception was our noon lunch waitress. She grew up in Lancaster but wasn't happy about it.

Most people in town gave good instructions to specific questions.

Some recommendations on places to eat. Noone mentioned places to stay or visit. The museum, listed as an attraction, was closed.

4. How prepared/helpful were they.

Most people could answer most if not all our questions.

People seemed friendly but not enthused enough to suggest things.

Townpeople mostly helpful, all were pleasant except the pickup driver who blasted his horn at me for driving too slowly on a side street.

5. Convenient hours?

No!

NO.

No.

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

1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?

- a. Kwik-Trip - adequate
bank - good
restaurant - poor
- b. stores - average
golf course - good
thrift shop - fair
variety store - poor
- c. Gasser Hardware (Plant section) - excellent

Could definitely use a full time Chamber office or tourist info. center staffed with people who really know what's going on.

Lacks a feeling of "Come in - you're welcome"

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

- a. No
- b. Usually ~~some~~ referral to the courthouse, but at the courthouse there ~~was~~ no one to help - just of rack of flyers.
- c. Everyone referred ~~me~~ to the visitors center at the Courthouse. Inadequate - there is ~~no~~ one to talk with - only two brochure racks with very little information about Lancaster in them. ~~What~~ information ~~was~~ there was very well done.

3. Attitude, appearance, etc.

- a. Good - except restaurant menus were torn and dirty.
- b. Casual, unenthusiastic as a rule.
- c. Average attitude, appearance. People mostly pleasant.

3. Other comments

- a. ~~Seemed~~ to be very few people on the streets.
There is a nice variety of stores downtown but need specialty shopping.
Historical museum only tourist attraction in town and it ~~was~~ closed. Not much else to do in Lancaster except to visit the courthouse ~~dom~~ and monuments.
Nice little town.
- b. Excellent recreation area for spending a day outdoors.
- c. ~~Where~~ do teenagers gather ~~for~~ fun?

5. General

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

Did as well as could be expected. Events were very well advertised. Most gave good directions.

Everyone gave good directions. Local history buffs were scarce.

Most people did an average job of giving directions. Several directed me to someone else who did give directions.

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

Lodging was above average for a small town. Retail stores, although there was a good variety, were not impressive. Merchandise in craft store dusty and dated. Good range of services/retail/lodging, but no outstanding stores. Good lodging - clean. Nice nursing home. Nothing out of the ordinary in retail and business was very slow on this Tuesday.

C. Are there public restrooms.

Yes, at city hall. Mens - clean. Womens - not open.

Yes, at the city hall building.

Yes, at ground level at the city building.

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

Yes, on courthouse square.

Yes, on courthosue square, was out of order.

Yes, on courthouse square, no pnone book, phone was gummy and sticky, sign said out of order

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

Yes, but I would prefer not to drive through it coming into town.

I didn't like the lack of landscaping and all the parking lots in front of buildings. Looked like some businesses could use landscaping, not an attractive sight when first caning into town.

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

Very poor assortment of restaurants, most were fast fod.

Bakery average (poor clerk).

Bakery was fair - nothing wonderful or local specialty.

Bakery had good cookies, -nothing else special

G. What does community SMELL like?

Like a clean rural town.

Clean on the whole.

Average small town, nothing noxious.

H. What SOUNDS did you hear?

Typical small town with a highway going through it.

Mostly quiet - local traffic noise.

Traffic, dogs barking, kids playing - typical small town.

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

Warm, quiet, inviting, pleasant, uncrowded, but busy.

Sleepy, quiet, downtown felt empty, deserted and if one were passing through for the first time, would do just that - pass through!

Everyone nice, but no enthusiasm, town square inviting, fairly deserted.

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

Most were friendly and willing to help.

Most were friendly and helpful although noone seemed to expand on anything.

Most were friendly and did try to help, but noone seemed very enthused about directing people around town. Noone at a visitors center or chamber office to talk with visitors.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS: .

A small town that seemed to be busy yet quiet. A town that appears to be progressive with new schools, new entrances, refurbished courthouse and lawn and well kept and established amenities .

Wondered about job opportunities?! Most everything seemed clean, in order, and the usual small town. However, I didn't see anything that said "stay with us, shop or enjoy dinner" - very casual.

Hard to pull into Hwy 61 traffic from side streets; had to pull almost into the traffic lane to see traffic caning on Hwy 61.

Courthouse area is attractive. Needs specialty stores and restaurants. The museum should have regular hours for visitors.- Chamber should be open in the afternoons as well as morning and it would be nice to have a person to talk to at the visitors center in the courthouse.

In general, a nice small town.

**WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY
SIX MONTHS FROM NOW**

Friendly person selling pizza on the square - it was his first day at work driving a pizzamobile - very enthusiastic young man, the only outgoing person I met in town.

Beautiful recreation area with fishing pond.

Probably the park/recreations system.

It looks like a good place to live. Also:
courthouse and lawn
parks
fairgrounds
Nelson Dewey's historical marker and grave

6. *Doing it Right!*

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

- 1.) **EXCELLENT** park system, nice to have such a grouping of activities for every age group at one place
- 2.) Excellent courthouse and attractive square
- 3.) Library in a very nice setting; a variety of businesses
- 4.) New school and new roads being built
- 5.) Wide, tree **lined** streets, residential area is attractive with a few exceptions

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 !

I picked up a school report to the community that was being distributed around the town (grocery stores, banks, etc.). I think this is an excellent idea and will turn the report over to our school system.

Nothing.

Nothing.