

First Impressions

of

Merrill, WI
by Antigo, WI
Visit Conducted 8/3/93

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.

REPORT ON THE FIRST IMPRESSIONS VISIT TO MERRILL

Dear Folks:

The Antigo First Impressions Visitation team is pleased to present the report on their visit to Merrill. We are very pleased to be part of this cooperative venture with Merrill. The Antigo team was composed of the following: a long time female resident of Antigo, someone somewhat familiar with Merrill; a male business owner who moved to Antigo several years ago; a female high school senior; and a female community public official who was recently appointed to her position.

These individuals represent a cross section of our community, who, with one exception, have had little contact with Merrill. The familiarity of the one person is based on time spent years ago, with little or no recent contact. We believe this diversity in backgrounds and perspectives provided a broad base of analysis and a diversity of opinion.

The team visited Merrill on Tuesday, August 3, on a very pleasant summer day. The team arrived at about 9:30 a.m. and departed about 2:30 p.m. From the reports I received, the trip was enjoyable, educational, and informative.

We would like to thank all of you who have participated in this project. We appreciate the comments and observations you made concerning our community, and hope our comments are useful to you. If you should desire additional information concerning our visit, please feel free to contact me at the Extension Office, P.O. Box 460, 1575 Neva Road, Antigo, WI 54409 (715) 627-6236. Once again, thank you for your assistance in this most interesting project.

Norm Sonderman
Langlade County Resource Agent

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

The perception was that it would be a nice, quiet town set off of the main drag.

11. Five Minute Impression:

My impression was that there was too many weeds and tall grass along the side of the road coming from the west entrance. Some of the billboards had trees blocking them. **Also** in the downtown, around and in front of the buildings had weeds growing, even by the parking meters. I still got my perception that it was a nice, quiet town.

Need bigger signs saying Merrill. The river is excellent on the west edge of town. Buildings are in good condition.

Entering Merrill on **64** from the east gives you the impression of a city that is really on the go. The east side of town has a lot of new buildings and businesses. **A** very sprawling community. Banners on the street poles are a nice idea, but they need replacing. Most were faded and worn.

111. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance:

Hwy. 64 and 51

There are no signs other than the ordinary green ones announcing the city. Weeds need trimming.

On all the entrances, there were really no big attention getting signs. The one sign I did see was a "M" but it was hard to notice. The town itself was easy to get in and out of.

There were no welcome signs. Seventh and Sixth ward welcome signs.

IV. Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:

A great variety of businesses.

The billboards were easily read and understandable but in some areas the trees blocked them. The businesses were noticeable. The city was a nice size and well spread out.

Nice flowers. The river is nice. The downtown is dirty and needs some help. There were no "Welcome to Merrill" signs and no information signs.

IV. Driving...evaluate other business area:

The industrial park was well represented by factories and the sign was noticeable. Most of the businesses were well kept, but the ones that were empty were very noticeable.

The ditch by McDonald's was a mess.

V. Driving...comments on residential:

The houses were well kept and nice to look at. The area was well groomed and clean.

The residential area is very nice.

Beautiful old homes--many of them restored. Power lines run down the middle of most blocks, a definite plus.

VI. Driving...comments on:

a. Street signs

They were really noticeable.

They were O.K.

There were no downtown welcome signs.

b. Traffic patterns/street conditions

The town looked like it was easy to get around in when it was busy, but I really didn't get to see the town when it was busy.

No rhyme or reason to the street pattern, Makes finding things very difficult. City divided by the river--very pretty--but cuts the city up.

The street system is very confusing.

c. Welcome signs

There were really no welcome signs besides the population signs.

There were none.

There were no downtown welcome signs.

d. Direction signs

There really wasn't very many direction signs. The one I noticed was "H" for the hospital but that was one block before it.

There really wasn't any direction signs.

There were no signs to the airport. We ended up in the industrial park. Couldn't find banks. There was no signage.

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

The industrial park was well defined, well kept and growing.

Nice developing industrial park. Nice sign. Seemed to be bustling with activity. New roads.

Signed only from the west side. Route **51** has much growth.

VIII. Driving...comments on schools:

They were well kept, attractive and well located.

Older high school but kept up very nice. Grounds were well maintained.

The schools looked good. The locals were proud.

IX. Driving...comments on parks, etc.:

I never really saw any baseball diamonds or other sport related parks. The park we did see was well kept.

Saw several parks. **All** parks seemed to be well taken care of.

Couldn't find most places.

X. Driving...comments on other:

a. Hospital/clinics

Hospital grounds well maintained.

The hospital was easily accessible.

Hospital is very attractive. It needs signage.

b. Billboards/advertisina

They were easy to read and well maintained except for one where a tree was covering it.

West side billboards of note. Most other billboards are neutral.

XI. Walking around...comments on businesses:

Would make a pretty Main Street Community.

The appearance was good, they were kept up, but there were weeds growing on the sidewalks and by the buildings.

Sidewalks are in poor shape. Weeds, etc. are growing along the roads downtown.

XII. Walking around...comments on people:

When we went into Snyder Drug Store and asked where the Chamber of Commerce was located, two people tried to help us.

Most stores had very friendly people, a couple of stores no one even looked our way, much less talked to us. People in Snyder Drug didn't know where the Chamber of Commerce was located even though it was basically across the street. They were very helpful in trying to find it.

Most of the people were very friendly. People said they never eat in Merrill--they all go to Wausau. The Mayor was very helpful. While in Thelma's, no one helped us.

XIII. Community information:

a. Community brochure (tourist type)

Good.

The community was well represented.

Did not have a packet.

b. Businesses/attractions brochures or directory

They had very informative brochures.

Great.

Historical museum had no map.

c. Community profile

Great.

We talked to the Mayor and she really recommended her community.

d. Map

They had a map of the city that was easy to follow.

Great.

e. Other (i.e. bulletin/notice boards, kiosks, etc.)

XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:

a. Appearance of facility

Nice looking building. Handicapped ramp, while a necessity, could maybe be made to look a little nicer.

Very nice building. Nice mayor. Register of Deeds was helpful.

The City Hall was well kept up and nice to look at.

b. Helpfulness of staff

N/A.

The Mayor was very helpful and talked up the community. She explained the referendum for their school system.

Very nice staff at City Hall.

XV. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit:

a. Did people know where it was

Some clerks had to look it up and they said that it moved around a lot.

No. It was very hard to find. It was even hard to find in the phone book.

Asked at Snyder Drug where Chamber office was and no one knew.

b. Comment on information available

Great variety of information.

They had excellent information on everything in Merrill.

c. Comment on staff

Carrie was very, very helpful. She went out of her way to help us. She knew all the answers to our questions. A great person to have on staff.

The lady that we talked to was very, very helpful. She gave me information on what there is for teenagers to do in Merrill and job information. She was very helpful.

The secretary was great. She knew a lot about kid's activities.

d. Other (hours, appearance, location, etc.)

The appearance wasn't too good and it was hard to see. The location wasn't central.

Stuck on side street. There was no place to park large vehicles. It was very hard to find. It also has moved so much that not many people know where they are located.

The Chamber office needs to stay open during lunch hour. The signage for the Chamber office is very poor.

XVI. Other stuff:

a. Public restrooms

Could only find the one in the Chamber office. It was old but very clean.

I never really used any restrooms except for the one in Walmart.

We found no public restrooms.

b. Payphones

The two payphones downtown both had phone books intact.

All phones were working and had phone books attached.

The phones were all O.K.

c. Parking

The parking was along the streets and there was plenty.

Parking seemed adequate.

Parking is O.K., but why pay downtown?

d. Water fountains, benches, etc

Found only one bench located near Chamber office. No garbage containers in downtown area. It made it very hard not to litter!!

Downtown there were no benches, water fountains, or garbage cans.

There were no benches, garbage cans, or water fountains.

Wrap Up

A. Using your "senses"

1. Taste like?

When we went to the restaurant it smelled good and tasted good, but the soda didn't taste good.

Tastes like bakery--It was great!!

2. Smell like?

Bakery on the Main Street had a very strange odor. Not an ideal situation for a bakery.

You could smell the restaurants.

Smelled like Hardee's.

3. What sounds did you hear?

Water!! Nice and soothing.

Construction was about it.

Sounds like construction.

4. Feel like?

The streets were rough and the city was not crowded at all.

The people were very nice.

B. Five most positive things observed about the community:

- *** It was clean.
- *** There was a lot of information available in Merrill.
- *** The people were helpful.
- *** There wasn't much traffic.
- *** The town was easy to get in and out of.
- *** Growth.
- *** Carrie at the Chamber office is a real asset.
- *** WPS is very attractive.
- *** Well maintained courthouse.
- *** Merrill City Hall loft residences.

C. ONE idea to steal for use in your community:

They had a "J" club which was only open on Saturday and Sunday for Junior High students one night and Senior High students the other. It was run by a non-profit group and they had games and dances.

The "J" Club.

D. What will you remember about the community in six months?

All the flower beds that were all around the town.

We **will** remember all the flowers and the river.

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