FIRST IMPRESSIONS

OF

ALBANY, WISCONSIN

Polo, Illinois

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A PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT
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Initiated As A Cooperative Project Of The
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and
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As you approach the community.....

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

♦ I'm not sure I knew what to expect other than I thought it would be a town the size of Polo and we would get ideas for the work we are doing.

♦ I was excited about visiting a town where we could compare what Polo has done to improve the community with what our "mystery town" had done. I didn't expect to find a dead town.

♦ I expected the community that we were going to visit would be large enough to give us some impact - at least the same size, not smaller.

♦ A small town with shops to attract tourists.

♦ A small rural community somewhere in Wisconsin. Probably older business district buildings with limited retail business.

♦ Good, better town.

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 others in your group for this part.

♦ Small quiet community. Overall clean yards and homes (natural exceptions as in all small towns. We did not drive through the business district.

♦ Nice mix of new and older homes; there were a few small unit apartment houses that were attractive; we passed an industrial park where employees had apparently parked while at their jobs; the Sugar River flows through the town and the business district appeared to be historic and needed exploring.

♦ Looked like a ghost town. There were some nice homes with shade trees, the Sugar River running through the town, friendly people. Two nice apartment houses with a "for rent" sign in both.

♦ Clean town. Well-kept, bedroom community.

♦ Minimal signage other than the normal "welcome to" signs. Older buildings downtown. The river looks inviting.

♦ Depressing.
III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.
   Go about 1/2 - 1 mile out each road and return. List each road and list positives and negatives for each.

   ♦ The entrances to town were well kept. One soon was in the country, after passing mostly well-kept residences. (west side, I believe)

   ♦ No comment.

   ♦ East and west entrances look most used.

   ♦ All poor...not very inviting.

IV. (a) Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:
   (signs, appearance, size, etc.)
   ♦ Bad.

   ♦ Limited retail businesses with very little signage. I didn't realize where the business district was until we passed it!

   ♦ Many vacant buildings.

   ♦ All stores were closed. Only had 1 restaurant and 1 tavern open.

   ♦ Plenty of parking available. The river flows along one entire side of town. Pretty with lots of trees. Flowers and trees planted along the sidewalks were very attractive.

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

   ♦ Drove past a factory that looked like it had about 60 cars.

   ♦ Nice industrial park with good signs for businesses there.

   ♦ Sporadic business development with the newest development on the East edge of town by the bike path and industrial park.

   ♦ Better, but not good.

V. Driving...comments on residential:

   ♦ Well kept.

   ♦ As in most older towns there was a mixture of housing - New, remodeled and those in need of tender, loving care.

   ♦ Streets in good condition. Homes well cared for.

   ♦ Nice mix. There are 3 bed and breakfasts in attractive large homes. No special area of blighted homes, but an occasional house in need of attention, as in all towns. Friendly people. Many waved to us as we passed by in the motor home.
♦ Apartment buildings (2); Duplexes (24); Bed and Breakfast Homes (3); All appeared well constructed and well maintained. These are positives.

VI. Driving... comments on:

a. street signs

♦ Okay

♦ Didn’t notice any special signage.

♦ Nothing unique about street signs.

♦ Good.

b. traffic patterns/street conditions

♦ Poor.

♦ Street conditions were very good and traffic pattern will be improved after bridge construction is completed.

♦ Streets in good condition; some construction obstacles.

♦ Adequate.

c. welcome signs (at entrances)


♦ Noticeable signs.

♦ Previously commented "nothing unique". Same old "Welcome To".

♦ Poor.

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

♦ Poor.

♦ Lacking.

♦ Inadequate.

♦ Nice wooden sign to village park.
VII. Driving...comments on industrial park/area:
   Sign well defined...busy...growing...new...etc.
   ◦ Signs well defined. Growing (???). Since we lack an industrial park, I was impressed with this.
   ◦ Sits just off the highway (#59) with an informative sign. Appeared to be 50-60 cars parked near the buildings - probably the cars of employees.
   ◦ Yes, the industrial park was well defined by the sign and listed the businesses but not what they do.
   ◦ Good; signs well defined.

VIII. Driving...comments on schools:
   ◦ Didn’t notice.
   ◦ School looks aged, however remodeling appears to be in progress. Construction should enhance the facility.
   ◦ The brick school complex appeared to be fairly new. Once building for elementary, Jr. High and high school students. Approximately 2 blocks off of highway, mid-town.

IX. Driving...comments on parks, play grounds, athletic facilities, etc.
   ◦ Nice parks.
   ◦ Parks seemed clean and well groomed. The baseball diamond was attractive and well groomed.
   ◦ Poor.
   ◦ Very nice park.

X. Driving...comments on other:
   a. hospitals/clinics.
   ◦ No comment.
   ◦ Clinic was closed when we were there but hopefully is normally open.
   ◦ So - so!
   ◦ Saw only a Monroe Clinic branch office located on one corner of the business district. Not very impressive, but we have no knowledge of it’s real function.
Medical clinic downtown was closed.

b. billboards/advertising

Nothing I remember.

None.

Lack of.

None.

c.

3 very nice bed and breakfast homes.

XI. Walking around...comments on businesses (physical part):

Appearance, displays, signs, etc.

Most buildings empty. The few that are occupied were closed the day we visited or during the hours (10 - 3) we were in town.

A DEAD town. Mostly vacant stores. Christmas decorations still up in some store windows. Buildings are old and need attention. Depressing!

Terrible

Older buildings downtown and the rear of downtown buildings were deteriorating and very visible from the bridge and main traffic pattern.

Most of business district gone.

XII. Walking around...comments on people:

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

Yes, they were friendly and answered questions. They told us everyone works out of town.

Very friendly and knew answers to questions.

All people seemed friendly and tried to help as much as possible. Did not see a lot of children.

Yes. Friendly, good people.

The few people we saw were friendly and willing to visit. Mostly a bedroom
community with people working in Monroe, Janesville and Madison.

♦ People I met were very friendly.

XIII. Community information: comments on...

a. community brochure (tourist type)

♦ None??

♦ Only 1 copy was available at City Hall. Couldn't give out a 2nd one without giving up his only copy. Asked in restaurant for a brochure and waitress didn't know of any.

♦ Not available.

♦ None.

♦ Didn't see any.

♦ One brochure was all they had unless they gave up their copy.

b. business/attractions brochures or directory

♦ None available

c. community profile (demographic, industrial type information for prospective business people, etc.)

♦ None.

d. map

♦ None.

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

♦ None other than some hand-made signs/posters in local restaurant.

XIV. City Hall...describe your visit:

a. appearance of facility, including signing

♦ Didn't go there.

♦ Facility was well taken care of and was signed.

♦ Fairly new wooden structure at north edge of town with a nice wooden sign. Houses village hall and police and/or fire station. Nice sign.
b. helpfulness of staff

- Didn’t go to City Hall. Another team was assigned to gather information there.
- Staff was very courteous and helpful when we asked about the industrial park. Roger gave us information and an additional contact if needed. He was very polite and helpful.

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

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

- No Chamber of Commerce

b. comment on information available

- N/A

c. comment on staff

- N/A

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

- N/A

XVI. Other stuff...

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

- Used restroom in one tavern and it was very clean, neat and impressive. Did not see any other public facilities.
- Didn’t find or see any.

b. pay phones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)

- The only one found was at the telephone company near the park.

c. Parking

- Plenty

- Plenty available for limited retail businesses.

- Adequate.

- Good.

- Plenty. No reason to come downtown
♦ No problem. No parking meters
d. water fountains, benches, etc.

♦ No water fountain

♦ Benches available.

♦ Pretty flowers.

♦ Nice park by dam area. Interesting history feature.

♦ No water fountain. Nice picnic tables.

♦ No water fountain, but nice benches and tables.

WRAP UP

A. Using your "senses"…

1. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/restaurant, etc.)

   ♦ Downtown like a "stale roll". Residential - "fresh morning roll".

   ♦ We were routed by friendly man to eat at the Edgewater Restaurant. It was nearly full at 12:15. Food was ok but nothing to excite your tastebuds.

   ♦ 2 intermediate restaurants.

   ♦ Friendly rural community lacking retail businesses.

   ♦ Restaurant food was good; service was good; unattractive building inside and out.

   ♦ No stores. Couldn’t even spend money to buy peppermints.

2. What does the community SMELL like?

   ♦ A "dying" community.

   ♦ No unusual odors

   ♦ Clean, fresh Wisconsin air.

   ♦ Good.

   ♦ Lots of trees along river. I didn’t notice any unpleasant odors.

   ♦ Downtown "musty"; Residential "flowers".
3. What SOUNDS did you hear?

- None
- Water rushing over the dam and spillway. Heavy equipment in use to build new bridge over the Sugar River.
- Water. Pleasant.
- The river.
- Peaceful running water. Construction.
- Construction of the bridge of Sugar River and the natives said there was nothing wrong with it, but it is probably better that they are building it now.

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.)

- Friendly people; deserted town
- The community seemed deserted until lunch hour and then very friendly people.
- Warm. Felt good, but deserted.
- Deserted...beyond dying - it's dead!
- People are very warm and friendly.

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

1. Sign entering town...."Village With A Vision"
   - Overall appearance. Neat lawns, flowers, well-kept homes.
   - River. Needs to be accented, cleaned and landscaped.
   - Distance to major cities.
   - 3 bed and breakfast establishments. Good for tourism.

2. The Sugar River
   - Unusually nice park with large shelter for picnics, ball park, playground equipment, gazebo.
   - Friendly people
   - 3 nice bed and breakfasts. People must travel here for some reason.
   - Industrial park providing employment.

3. Water
   - Friendly people
4. 
- River
- Bike Path
- Bed and Breakfasts
- Good roads.
- Clean

5. 
- Friendly people
- Attractive downtown flower beds
- Nice downtown park
- Well-kept city park
- Attractive bed and breakfast establishments

6. 
- Friendly people
- Nice apartments
- Sugar River
- Nice bed and breakfast establishments
- Good park

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.

- Recreational bike path. Will begin looking for bike path areas.

- Greet strangers. Be more friendly to customers.

- Nothing that stands out. Just glad Polo worked to improve itself. We were close to dying too!

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

- Downtown was a "ghost town."

- How disappointing it was to visit Albany. There was literally nothing to bring back. I'll remember that Albany is a place to avoid and I felt that our day was a waste of time.

- Too small.

- The possible growth the town could see from the river and bike path through tourism.

- How desperately they need help for downtown.

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

- Not utilizing natural resources (river and bike path) to attract tourists.

- Concentrate on the natural beauty of the Sugar River. Hide the back of those old downtown buildings with trees or something.
 WHY WOULD YOU SEND A CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TO A TOWN THAT DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A CHAMBER?

SOME TOWNS ARE TOO SMALL TO SURVIVE AND MAKE IT. THEY MUST FOLD. MOST TOWNS UNDER 3000 MAY BE IN TROUBLE.

I FEEL SORRY FOR THE PEOPLE OF ALBANY. PERHAPS THEY WORK AND SHOP OUT OF TOWN AND WHETHER THERE ARE STORES IN DOWNTOWN OR NOT, IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE TO THEM. TOO BAD SOMEONE DOESN'T UTILIZE THE RIVER WITH AN OUTDOOR CAFE, CANOE RENTAL, WATER SPORTS, FISHING DERBY, ETC. POLO WOULD LOVE TO HAVE A RIVER RUNNING THROUGH!

WERE TOLD THEY HAVE A VERY POORLY RUN "PRO-ALBANY" INSTEAD OF A CHAMBER. RESIDENTS WORK OUT OF TOWN AND DO NOT SUPPORT DOWNTOWN ALBANY.