

Assessments, Findings
and Suggestions
June 2007



Granum and Stavely, Alberta



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Ideas to increase tourism spending

In June of 2007, Community Tourism Assessments of Granum and Stavely, Alberta were conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-hour workshop. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the community – how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public restrooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the “Community Assessment,” we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were “secretly shopped.”

There are two primary elements to the assessment process: First is the “Marketing Effectiveness Assessment.”

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community or area? Once they find information, are your marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They did not know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might do in planning a trip to a “new” area or destination.

The community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, state tourism websites, read travel articles, and looked at AAA Tour Book reviews and suggested activities.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the community would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or further away. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can't get closer

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to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities fail is when they merely provide a “list” of what the community has, whether it’s truly “unique” or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, unique shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation (bird watching, hiking, biking, boating, etc., etc.), historic downtowns, scenic vistas, and so on. Of course, nearly every visitor can do this closer to home. So, what makes your community worth a special trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip, THEN your diversionary activities. Would you go to Anaheim, California if Disneyland wasn’t there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm get upset that Disneyland gets all the glory? That they are diversions? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with diversionary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities ride on those coattails.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for things that make you worth a special trip and an overnight stay. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. To be successful you must provide itineraries and specifics - not just generalities. Are your marketing efforts good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the community, looking at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The community benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost “suggestion,” where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed “recommendations,” as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the community, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It’s important to note that to increase the community’s tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community’s ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not community-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are painfully aware of but can’t mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can’t get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won’t come back. It’s much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. “Been there, done that” communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don’t have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as “leakage.” Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive “balance of trade.” Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them

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leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your city park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these – but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it – you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as the attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do local residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio's River Walk, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four

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times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. Visitors, by the millions, head to Disneyland, DisneyWorld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience
- THEN the location.

LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "some-



thing for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or a

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vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote “outdoor recreation” as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The



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Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you’ll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.



Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing),

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souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., supporting millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community’s downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report can provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation. A detailed “Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan”

builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the “development” portion of the plan or the “how to get there” program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with it’s own “to do list.”

Finally, there’s the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an “action plan” as opposed to a “strategic plan.” You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented
4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications) and then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment to live, work, and visit.

First Impressions Really Are Lasting Impressions

The Rule of Perceived Value

Suggestion:

We all make judgments about restaurants, shops, attractions, and communities based on our first impressions. We form our expectations based on what we see from the exterior. We have no other basis on which to base an opinion on whether or not a restaurant might be a good place to eat. Or whether a town is worth stopping to look at.

The entryway to your community gives visitors their first impression. They will begin to judge the character and quality of your town by the gateways.

Would you eat at the restaurant shown in the top right photo? Probably not. It doesn't look inviting, comfortable, clean, or even very safe. And yet this little barbecue in Texas has been written up in Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine as one of the best places to fly for dinner - in the world.

What is your first impression of Lakeport (bottom right) from their entryway signage along the highway? Probably not very favorable with the trash, cluttered sign, and dead trees in the background.



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Suggestion:

Although the first impression of Lakeport wasn't favorable, the bottom two photos show what an attractive community Lakeport really is. The entry sign sells the community short.

Many communities make the mistake of creating sign clutter at their entryways with auxiliary organization signs, listings of events, etc. Sign clutter creates a less-than-desirable impression, as in the photo (top right) of Ellensburg, WA. In the case of Ellensburg, they are going to take this sign down and will erect a new one that will say "Historic Shopping District - Ahead 2 Miles." This, in essence, tells the customer "don't judge us yet - you still have two miles to go."

Quality entries state that you are a quality community, thereby increasing the perceived value of the area and increasing the chance of getting passers-by to stop and spend money. The greater the perceived value, the more visitors will spend, and the longer they will stay.



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Suggestion:

Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression. This entry sign (top right) is very attractive and in a good location just off the highway.

The sign (bottom left) should be made a directional sign instead of an advertising billboard. It should read "Lodging, dining, services - Third Right." Also restrict your signage to no more than eight words. The average visitor has between four and six seconds to read a sign while passing by.

Granview Park's gateway sign is very good. (bottom right) We were, however, expecting a community park, not an RV park.



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Suggestion:

Centennial Park's gateway sign is very nice, and the park is beautiful as well. (top right)

Stavely's gateway sign is also very attractive (top left). The location is also good. Be sure to keep it clean - this is the introduction to the community. Consider having a local Boy Scout troop or other local organization clean, repaint when necessary, and maintain your gateway signs at least once every six months. Visitors will likely judge the entire community by their first impressions.

In the case of Oroville, Washington, at the city limits they placed signage that says "Downtown Oroville - Ahead 1 mile" and when you get to the downtown core area they've placed these signs (bottom right) at each end of the downtown street, which is just two blocks long.

Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression.



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Suggestion:

Would you eat at the restaurant in the top right photo? How about the bakery in the top left photo? Attractive signs and beautification efforts (or the lack of them) can make a huge difference in pulling customers in. The bakery looks like it might be a great place to eat, even though you haven't seen the actual business.

When visitors look for a good place to eat, or stay, or a great shop to visit they make a decision in a few seconds based on:

1. Signage
2. Curb appeal
3. Invitation (open door, "open" sign)

Would you eat at Magoo's Family Dining if all you saw was the sign? (bottom left) However, the front of the restaurant is attractive (bottom right two photos.) The sign is so dated and out-of-character with the restaurant itself, that it gives an overall negative impression.

Signs need to be kept clean and up-to-date to be good sales pieces. Keep the design of your sign consistent with the image you want to portray. It's the first image you give to potential customers.



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Suggestion:

Curb appeal can account for 70% of sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, and golf courses. Curb appeal includes signs, cleanliness, wear and tear, weeds, landscaping, building facades.

Is there an operating hotel in this building? (top, right) If so, where is it? Make it look like a nice place to stay. I could not see any hotel rooms or even a front door to a hotel. Secondly, I'm not too sure I'd want to stay in a hotel room at a saloon or next to the liquor store. Add hanging baskets, planters, give the building some color. Make the customer want to come in. Make it inviting.

This motel in Pincher Creek (bottom photos) is a good example of how to make this type of low structure warm and attractive with benches, some hanging baskets, landscaping, and a sidewalk to separate the building entries from the parking lot.



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Suggestion:

Start with a weed abatement program, then add a few pots of shrubs and flowers - so people can tell which businesses are operating. (all photos this page) It was very difficult to tell which businesses were still operating and which ones weren't.

We weren't sure what the Drop-In Center was. A social service agency? (bottom left) Always promote what the business is, not just the name.

Instead of saying "Closed," replace with a sign that states WHEN the diner will be open (bottom right.) "Open every day at 5:00." Consider some paint and take down the holiday lights. In the case of the diner, we assumed that it had gone out of business. It certainly doesn't "look" like it's still in business. All businesses should replace "Closed" signs with signs that tell people when to come back. Make it an invitation instead of statement.

These little shops could be really charming if repainted, landscaping added, some new signage put in place, and window displays used to pull customers in.



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Suggestion:

The Granum Town Office looked very nice. The private sector should take note and emulate this. It would increase your sales.

The grain elevator (bottom right) seems to be Stavely's icon, which is fine. It makes a nice backdrop to downtown and is visible from the highway.

The General Store seems to be the “happening” place in Granum. It has beautification, chairs, and is obviously open and in business. Suggestion: Create a lure to pull visitors in. Perhaps “Ice cream cones - \$1.” When businesses put out hanging baskets or planters, and if the plants are alive we assume it must be an operating business. Sometimes that's the only thing we can go on.



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Suggestion:

As in Granum, Stavely's Town Office looks good. Very nice building. (top left) Adding the flags tells us it is an operating entity.

We could see there is a restaurant in this building (top right) by seeing people sitting in the windows, but nothing made it very obvious. Is the hotel still operating as a hotel? Don't make people have to guess - make it obvious you're open for business with potted plants, flowers, hanging baskets, etc. Make it inviting.

This is a very cute store (bottom left). Instead of just saying "Closed," tell the customer WHEN you'll be open. Add three or four landscape barrels along the front of the store.



Invest in Beautification

Nothing sells like beautiful places

Suggestion:

Beautification is an investment with a tremendous return - it attracts customers, makes them want to linger, and builds customer loyalty.

Note the street scene in the photo below left. It's attractive and clean, but see how the addition of planters overflowing with flowers and street trees make it even more appealing. (bottom right)

Planters, trees and awnings help soften the harsh lines of the concrete sidewalks and building walls.

Suggestion:

This is another cute store. (top right) Add a couple of chairs outside, some additional planters, and a teaser to pull customers in - perhaps ice cream.



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Suggestion:

A research study had four towns plant street trees every 30 feet along one block, and then surveyed sales in that block for a year, comparing them to sales in the rest of the town. Sales in the block with street trees increased 18% - three to four times that of the rest of the town.

Successful shopping districts understand the importance of creating beautiful places - LaRua in Whistler, BC (top left) defines its outdoor dining area with carts and pots filled with colorful flowers, and Sisters, OR (top right) utilizes the local garden club to keep its downtown gorgeous. Sisters boasts the highest per capita retail sales of any town in Oregon.

This antique shop (bottom left) has mastered the art of attractive outdoor displays. The flowers and sign almost pull customers into the store. Yes, it takes the owner about 20 minutes each day to set these displays up, but when interviewed, noted that doing this resulted in a dramatic increase in her business.

Washrooms attract more than flies and other notes of convenience

The Rule of Visitor Amenities

Suggestion:

The number one reason people stop is to use washroom facilities. Take advantage of that, and provide washrooms downtown, and promote them in your signage. Make sure they are located where people can spend time and money.

Never just say “No.” Let visitors know where they can find public washrooms, as this shop in Wickford, RI has done. (bottom)

Develop 24 hour visitor information - visitors don't always travel during business hours. Make it easy for visitors to find your attractions and amenities. (top right) as in this example near Driggs, Idaho.



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Suggestion:

Create a LURE to get people to stop. Little America Travel Center (two far left photos) promotes their 24-hour washrooms and 35¢ ice cream cones on billboards, and they have seen tremendous success in getting people to stop.

Suggestion:

Work with the other communities in Southwest Alberta to develop visitor information kiosks throughout the area. Cross-sell attractions and amenities. The more there is for visitors to see and do, the longer they will stay and the more they will spend.



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Suggestion:

Create and promote a lure to get visitors to stop. Huntsville, Texas has created the largest statue of an American hero, and placed it right along the highway at its visitor center. Visitors love to stop for a photo, and, while they've stopped, they visit the information center and learn about all there is to do in Huntsville. The statue can be seen from six miles (10 kilometers) away and is one of the most photographed sites in Texas. Imagine the world's largest buffalo (or some type of photo opportunity) near Granum or Stavelly. The first rule in tourism is being able to get people to stop. Once you get them to stop, then the next item would be to get them to stay a little longer, translating to increased sales.

Be sure to provide visitor information and public washrooms in locations where visitors can spend money. Once visitors get out of the car, you have a four-times greater chance of getting them to spend money.

One town built the display (bottom left) that got people to stop for the photo opportunity, but while there, they also purchased ice cream, drinks, snacks and refueled the car.



Other Notes and First Impressions

Suggestion:

Add directional signage that states “Shops, dining, gas, washrooms.” (top right) Give travelers a reason to stop. Once we made the turn off the highway we had no idea if there were any places in town to spend time and money.

Consider an interpretive sign downtown that explains who Agrium is and perhaps note some business opportunities locally. (bottom left)

Tell me more. Is the golf course open to the public? (bottom right) Is it nine or eighteen holes? What are the green fees? Are there cart and club rentals?



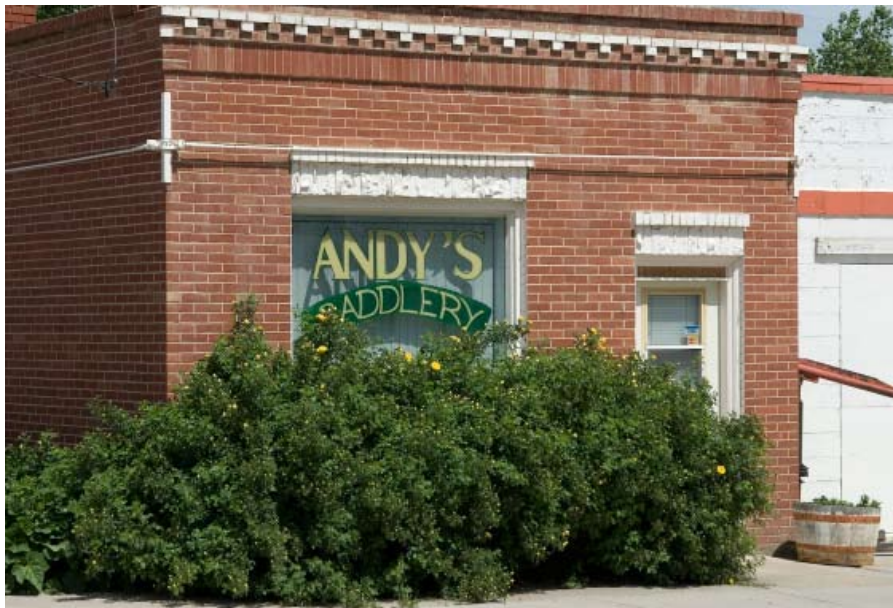
ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Granum seems to be a nice close-knit community with people who really care. That's a good impression.

Andy's Saddlery (bottom left) is an attractive store. Perhaps it could be a primary lure? Like Frontier in Clare-sholm? We weren't sure if it's still in business, only open on occasion, or what Andy really does.

The residences in Granum (both right photos) look nice and well-cared for. It seems to be a nice bedroom community. A very pleasant town.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

Glen Dale is a cute store with generally good curb appeal. Add a couple of barrels with flowers outside. (top right)

The museum could use some curb appeal improvements. Murals on the outside walls would be a great start. Have a central focus, or theme, and promote that. (bottom) What does the museum focus on? Agriculture? Equestrian? Local history?

Remove the weeds, and add plants to the planters. Add operating hours in large letters. Once again, we weren't sure if the museum still operated.



The average museum visit lasts between 20 and 40 minutes. If you can captivate the visitor for two hours, spending in town will increase - a snack, a meal, a souvenir.

Displays of artifacts, with facts and figures, are usually not very interesting to museum-goers. However, if you can tell stories about those artifacts, either orally or written, those artifacts will come alive, becoming real and memorable. Stories keep visitors interested longer, which translates to more spending in town.

Consider being open Fridays, and maybe Sundays from 11 to 6 or so, when many people are traveling and out to visit museums.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

We finally found the Stavelly Arena - by accident. (bottom left) Consider developing wayfinding signs to help guide visitors.

Some examples of wayfinding signs (bottom right three photos). Make wayfinding signs decorative, in keeping with the theme, or ambiance of the community.

Something big seemed to be going on in town (top right). But we didn't know where or what it was - there wasn't any information we could find about it. Not knowing whether or not the event was open to the public, we left.

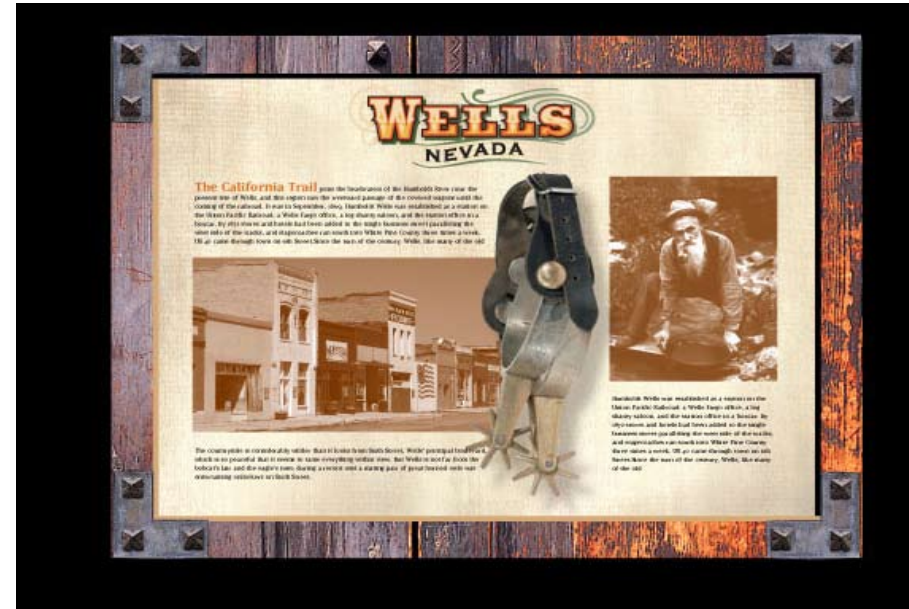


ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestion:

We saw some great old buildings that seemed to have potential for becoming attractions. (bottom photos) There must be an interesting story here. Tell it. Add interpretive signage at various locations in town. People love reading about interesting stories that have happened. (top right)

Possibly, create a little walking tour. For example, Wells, Nevada, a rural town of less than 1,500, is developing visitor information kiosks (top right) that will tell a number of stories of the town.



ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Notes:

Our impression was that this is a quite, relaxed town with a feeling of yester-year. A great place for kids and family. There are nice, well maintained homes creating a positive first impression of the town.

In fact, it seems to be a growing town. We noticed the new construction. That's always good news in terms of tax base and business opportunities.

