First Impressions

Compiled Report Form

Community Visited: Lebanon Date(s) Visited: June 12, 2015

**Pre-visit web search: How easy was it to get information on the community you were visiting? Did it accurately reflect what you saw? Did you have difficulties obtaining information on the community through a web search?**

Upon running a “Google” searching looking for hits with the terms “Lebanon, KS”, several results could be seen. The first two stemmed from Wikipedia, which is a site that although can contain interesting information, is known for not always being accurate. The third return was from city-data.com which is a common website for any community in the United States that lists random facts.

The best website for information came in 5th and that was: <http://lebanon.mykansaslibrary.org/>. Due to the name of the URL (containing the word “library”), it seems to be a valid point that most people may not click on it if trying to get information from the whole community. However, this website actually did contain great information for the city of Lebanon. Not only did it list the businesses, parks, history, housing, schools, clubs/organizations, churches, the community building and more but it even had pictures that accompanied some of these listings. The downfall would be that the website shows it has not been updated since January of 2013. This leads me to wonder about some of the accuracy of the information.

We were surprised that the Center of the United States was not promoted more on the website. We believe that this is something that could be a celebrated tourist destination yet it doesn’t seem to be marketed as such. The website also appeared to have been created long ago and needed a modernized look and feel. However, we will say that we were pleasantly surprised at all of the great information that was available for such a small town.

1. **The “Five-Minute” Impression: After taking a five-minute drive through the community without stopping, the following reactions were noted. The following observations were noted when entering the community from major entrances (signs, streetscapes, buildings, etc.)**

The community definitely has its positives and drawbacks. It was evident that the community has done some good work in recent years as it appeared that buildings had been torn down along their business district (by the legion) and that a beautiful community building was constructed recently. However, it was also evident that there are a number of dilapidated houses that appeared to be unlivable and need torn down. It was also a bit confusing driving around looking at possible businesses to stop at and visit with as it was difficult to tell what was open and what wasn’t.

When entering the community from the south, there was a white and black Welcome to Lebanon sign that was a nice touch at one time but now looks dated. The rock welcome sign that also mentions the center of the United States is also nice but it needs cleaned. In fact, it was difficult to read. The town also appeared to need some TLC as we entered from the south. There was an area with piled up tires and other junk/tall grass and also quite a few run down houses along the west side of the street. The highway was in okay condition.

Entering the community from the north was much of the same experience. Again, the rock sign was a nice touch and could be read easier than the other. However, there were also some dilapidated buildings/houses when entering from that side as well. We did think it was nice that there is a service station available right on the highway to those passing through.

2. **Downtown Business Area**

**Describe the buildings, signs, infrastructure, etc. Explain what type of businesses you observed and give a description of the variety and quality of merchandise displayed. Describe the customer service received when you entered those retail businesses. (Were you greeted? Did you have to ask for assistance?)**

The downtown area of Lebanon resembled most small towns their size in western Kansas. Although the jewel that clearly stood out was the community building. Not only did the building look great with its brick and picture on the front of it, but whomever does the landscaping does a really nice job. It really brightened up the town. The street was in okay condition. However, the curb and sidewalks appeared to need some help. There were several sections of the curbside that appeared to be crumbling. There were also quite a few places that grass was growing up in the sidewalk.

We spent time in two businesses: the Public Library and the Ladow’s Market. The Public Library not only had the books that one would expect but also had several historical items. Although the current librarian shared she did not know a lot about the town’s history, she shared of people that could inform us. We were able to look at pictures and other items. We also learned of the library’s summer reading program.

Ladow’s Market was also a gem of the community. We did not expect them to have a butcher in the back cutting their meat! We also did not expect there to be a place to eat inside. Not only could one find grocery items but there were a few other household items one may be trying to find that were available as well. Ladow’s Market also contained souvenirs and some information about the Center of the United States. Though it was great that there was this type of merchandise available, the souvenirs and pamphlets advertising this tourist destination were dated. It was also difficult to find the brochure for the Center of the US as it was covered up by other items.

One could not ask for better customer service than what was received in Lebanon! Our first stop was the library and the head Librarian spent around 15 minutes just chatting with us about the community and reading programs their library offers. Though it was clear she was injured and probably not feeling well, she was cheerful, friendly, and just overall, a nice person to talk to and represent Lebanon.

We also received great customer service at Ladow’s Market. The woman working behind the counter shared that she was there helping out her family and was very helpful, pleasant, and even humorous. She talked easily with us and after we mentioned we were passing through and interested in Lebanon, she showed us the area with information on the Center of the United States. We even bought some post cards from her ☺.

**What public amenities were available (drinking fountains, benches, public restrooms, etc.) Comment on appealing landscaping and streetscaping. Did you have difficulty finding parking? Could you access multiple services from where you parked?**

The business district of the community had several benches available for sitting. Not only were they functional but neat to look at as well. We did not see any drinking fountains and as we were leaving we spotted some restrooms in their park. Unfortunately, it had started to rain so we did not venture over to them to see if they were unlocked and available for everyone. They were difficult to find if one did not know where they were. That park also had nice benches available for sitting.

There is no doubt that the best landscaping/streetscaping was located at the Community Building. It was quite lovely and if that were able to be carried out through the rest of downtown, it would be quite spectacular. The park was also maintained fairly well as the grass was cut short and it looked to be fun for any kids/family to play at. The churches’ yards also looked well maintained and taken care of.

1. **Other Retail Shopping Areas**

**Describe other retail shopping areas. Were the areas attractive and easy to access?**

There were really not other retail shopping areas that one could see. However, we were told at the library that there was some antique dealers in town but that they may not be at their shops. She also told us of a museum/antique dealer in the old high school. We had seen a sign that advertised this but did so in such a way that we thought the museum had been closed for years. Lastly, there was a gun shop but again it did not appear to be open.

4. **Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas**

**Is there a defined area where manufacturing industries could easily locate/expand? If so, describe.**

N/A

5. **Health Care Services**

**Comment on the availability and apparent quality of hospitals and emergency medical services. Comment on the availability and condition of facilities for physicians, dentists, optometrists, public health and other healthcare providers. What long-term care services, assisted living or nursing facilities exist in the community?**

None available

6. **Housing**

**Give a brief description of the existing mix of housing stock. Does the local market have housing that would appeal to all income wages? What challenges do you see in regards to finding acceptable housing? (Neighborhoods, size, properties for sale, etc.)**

As we drove around the community, it seemed to us that housing in Lebanon is probably the biggest problem. Though there definitely was some really nice houses that were taken care of well, there were many houses that were literally falling down. It appears that the biggest challenge would be having any housing available for any income wage. The neighborhoods are a bit hard to comment on as all of these houses were mixed. There may be one nice house next to another that is unlivable. We did not see any properties as listed for sale on flyers or with signage by the house.

**What kind of rental properties did you observe for persons interested in building or simply living in the community prior to buying housing?**

The only available rental properties we saw were what we assumed to be low income housing. They appeared to be very well taken care of and had a very nice rock sign out front.

7. **Schools**

**Do the following schools appear to be adequate in size or do you see the use of temporary classrooms? Are the buildings and grounds well-maintained?**

Though it’s obvious that the schools are not used as schools anymore, they are being used. However, one would not realize for what from just passing by. As aforementioned, we were told the high school is a museum. It did appear to need some TLC but we actually saw someone outside doing just that. It will be a work in progress.

The grade school was the same. We were also told that it houses antiques that one could look at if they’d like. However, the yard is full of chickens and it did not seem welcoming to visitors.

**Were you able to find print information in the community that helped assess the quality of the educational system?**

We were told from the Librarian that many kids go to school in Smith Center but quality of education was not shared.

1. **Childcare**

**Were you able to determine if childcare was affordable and available?**

We were told by the Librarian that childcare is not available in Lebanon. This is also a drawback for the community.

1. **Faith/Religion**

**Comment on the number of denominations and the physical appearances of the churches represented in the community. Did you observe any evidence of church-sponsored community services?**

We did not see any signage or information available that shared what denominations are present in Lebanon. However, by driving around, we did see a few churches. From the outside, they looked magnificent and well kept. We did not see any evidence of church sponsored community services.

1. **Civic**

**Tell about the variety of nonprofit organizations and clubs within the community.**

It seemed that everywhere we went we saw something the Hub Club had done. This was present on the Center of the US pamphlets to the actual location of the attraction where we saw a plaque and other information. It seems that they are an organization that is very active in the community.

We saw signage about two events occurring within the county: one was for a blood drive and the other for “meet in the middle” although it appeared that both were not happening in Lebanon. However, it was nice that there was information available if Lebanon residents wanted to attend.

There was also mention of the Lebanon Summer Bash that occurs later in the summer. That sounded like a fun event to be a part of.

Lastly, we saw signage put up by the Sarah Steward Chapter- DAR about an activity for kids taking place in the library.

Though the website lists other organizations/clubs in the community, we did not see other evidence of that.

1. **Public Infrastructure**

**Comment in general on the streets, street signage, sidewalks, parking, lighting, restrooms, landscaping, and streetscapes in areas other than downtown. Did you observe land-use planning?**

Most of the streets seemed to be in fairly good condition although some were just dirt. However, that is not uncommon in a small town. There were some exceptions to this as there were a few streets that needed to be fixed. One example is Railway Avenue.

We did not see problems with street signs.

There seems to be quite a few sidewalks that need better maintained as grass and weeds were growing up in the cracks. You could see this is business and residential areas.

Parking was not a problem.

There were street lights on one side of main street but not the other. We wondered why this was?

There appeared to be restrooms available at the city park but due to that being our last stop and the fact that it had started to rain, we did not get out of the car to see if they were unlocked and available for public use. The bathrooms may be hard to find if a person is not from that community. Signage could be an added plus.

It also appeared that some attention could be given to curbing as there were parts of curbs that were crumbling in the business district.

**Comment on city/town hall (How were you received? Was there information about the town available?)**

Unfortunately, we arrived on a Friday and the city office has a sign displayed that they are closed on Fridays. However, the building was clearly marked and hours were shown. It appeared to be taken care of. We did stop and look at the outside of the old City Hall building. Have there been any thoughts of fixing that up?

**Police/fire protection:**

There was no evidence of police in Lebanon. We did see the Fire Department building and it appeared nice and well-marked.

**Library:**

As aforementioned, the Library was a fantastic stop. The building appeared well taken care of and had an outside seating area which was nice. The librarian was very friendly and was well prepared to share about the town of Lebanon. We also enjoyed that the Library is including some of their community history pieces as part of their décor.

**City parks (walking tracks, ballparks, playgrounds, sportsplex)**

We loved the Lebanon Park! It looked like it would be a lot of fun for kids and families to play at. The equipment appeared new and well taken care of. The grounds were maintained well. However, it did appear that there could be some attention placed on the basketball court/goals. We did not see a walking track or other recreational area.

1. **Recreation/Tourism**

**Is the community well-known for any particular attraction or event? Do they have a community slogan that capitalizes on that asset?**

Yes, the Center of the United States! Very cool!

We saw “Center of It All” listed on some souvenirs available at Ladow’s Market. The pamphlet for the attraction said “Simple Life in the Middle of the USA”.

**Did you see any indication of significant events taking place in the community that would be of interest to both visitors and residents?**

Yes, there was a Save-the-Date card in the window of the Community Building advertising for the Lebanon Summer Bash. It was cute, attention grabbing, and made me want to check out more about the event. As mentioned above, we also saw flyers about a Meet in the Middle event in Smith Center, blood drive in Smith Center, and a kid’s event at the library.

**Elaborate on any significant natural or manmade features that have the potential of drawing people to the community.**

Again, this would the Center of the US attraction. This could definitely be a tourist destination! Has the community thought about doing more to promote this?

**Is there an obvious visitor’s center, chamber of commerce office, main street office, or other facility that serves the needs of visitors? Comment on the staff, facilities, signage, visibility, etc.**

We would assume this would be the city office. However, since it is not open on Fridays or weekends, it may be nice if there was a better way for visitors to figure out how to get interesting information.

**Are there any restaurants, specialty shops or attractions that would bring you back to this community in the near future?**

Again, this would be the Center of the US attraction. It would be neat to bring my children back to it so they can say they’ve been in the middle of the 48 states. My pre-teen would love a souvenir for the occasion but I didn’t see anything that she would want (most items looked dated).

1. **Wrap-up**

**What are the most positive things you observed about the community?**

The people! What friendly people you have in Lebanon! It only took a smile and a hello to start up a conversation with anyone in a business or on the street.

The park was so nice and was definitely an added bonus to your community.

We loved the community building. It is the gem on Main Street. Whoever maintains the landscaping does a great job.

What a great attraction you have if you can figure out how to capitalize more on it: Center of the US. Though we live less than two hours from your community, some people this direction don’t even know it’s there. There has to be a way to promote it more so and bring people to your town.

**What are the biggest obstacles/challenges facing this community?**

It appears that the biggest obstacles that Lebanon faces is the run-down housing. There were also a few commercial buildings that need some attention as well. Personally, when we see that, it gives me the impression of a dying community. It’s unfortunate that there are so many of these houses right on the highway that passed through the side of your community.

**What will you remember most about this community six month from now (positive or negative)?**

We will remember that it is the Center of the US! We cannot forget all the friendly people. However, unfortunately, we will remember the dilapidated housing as well.

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