

First Impressions

Florence, Kansas

K-State Research and Extension in Partnership
with

The Dane G. Hansen Foundation



- 2000 Census Population 671
- 2010 Census Population 465 (Down 31% since 2000)
- 2015 Estimate 415 (Down 38% since 2000)
(2015 KS Estimate= 7.6%)
- 11.7% college educated, 90.3% high school or GED
– KS 31% college education, 90.2% HS or equivalency
- 68.8% family households, 31.2% non-family
- Poverty rate is 25.1% (KS=13.6%)
- Median Age 49.6 years (36)
- Median household income is \$26,458 (\$52,205)

- **Web Presence:** <http://www.florenceks.com>
- **Chamber of Commerce**
<http://local-chamberofcommerce.com/FlorenceKansaschamberofcommerce>
- **FaceBook (None)**
 - Others: Florence Kansas Celebrate Recovery

Easy to find online. Official city website was the first one on Google, Yahoo, Bing and AOL. City map and business directory were very useful in planning our trip... However when we got there we discovered that the website was outdated. Several of the highlighted businesses were closed. (Aunt Em's, Mercantile, Antique Store) and the Flint Hills Bakery was not on the website's list.

The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Wide Main Street, some brick streets.
- From the west, signs welcomed us to Florence, with a stone marker at the round-about.
- One sign on Hwy 50 had a lot of information, but it was not readable in a car driving by.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Multiple churches, a tree farm near the river and some nice stone houses in and near town. A very pretty house near 5th & Doyle caught our eye.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- There were some really nice houses and some not so nice.
- A lot of empty businesses on Main Street.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- A nursing home in the south part of town and the old school that detracted from this town and its rich history.
- Homes where the porches were overflowing with “stuff.”
- Entrance by the closed motel was not very appealing– didn’t entice someone to stop.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- Near Robinson’s Trucks there was a sign advertising the Harvey House, but weather had taken a toll on the sign.
- Unique older buildings with quite a few limestone buildings all built around the same time frame.
- We were very interested in the tree farm and wanted to know more about that project.



Beautiful stone houses! Thank you
for preserving them.



The “Five-Minute” Impression

- We also found the cemetery and it was neat! Historical, well-maintained and informative. I liked the gazebo with the documented “residents.” We think others would be interested if they knew it was there.



Photos from Google Earth, Photo taken 9/2012
Retrieved April 28, 2017



Downtown Business Area

- The downtown buildings have some great architecture, it looked like many were unused.
- There was a nice park with a covered area and a mural of an eagle and flag.
- Some sidewalks were in bad shape.





Downtown Business Area

- The customer service was helpful and friendly and we learned a bit more about the town after visiting the Flint Hills Bakery and Market. We were greeted once we made our way to the back of the store.
- Service was outstanding. We ate lunch here and were very pleased with the selection.
- Small town honesty and friendliness evident.
- We were concerned about the lack of community support.

I saw the same empty Flint Hills Market and thought– “if only those thousands of cars driving by knew how close they were to heaven.”





- There were benches along Main Street.
- Water and Electricity at Veteran's Park.
- Public restrooms in City Hall, park restrooms were closed for winter.

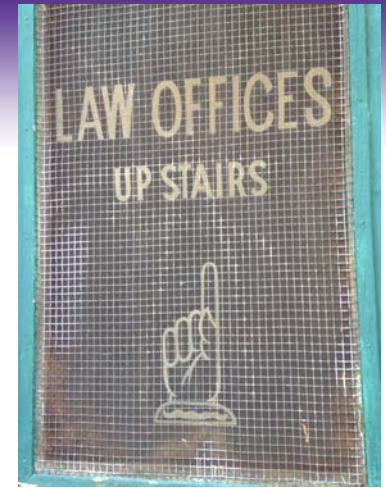
Downtown Business Area

- Sparse traffic and few cars parked on Main Street.
- Liked the brick Main Street; it gave the town a sense of history.



Downtown Business Area Amenities

- We noticed large cement cowboy boots, inside and outside of buildings.
- There were wooden flower boxes placed in areas of downtown along the sidewalks.
- There were water pumps in various places around town that advertised the spring water— could have signs updated.



Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Town and Country Restaurant and the convenience store were easy to access, clean and well-maintained.
- Noticed a small attractive home being used as a hair dresser's salon.



Industrial Parks/Commercial Areas

- Your leadership team tells me that you have a designated Industrial Park– Great!
- Visitors were unclear whether an industrial park exists.
- I did not find it on the website; primarily looked at Eco-Dev.
- One visitor thought there should be a way to contact Eco Devo Board members. The page says it was last updated in 2007, which makes you wonder if it is current.

Health Care Services

- Volunteer Emergency Medical Service.
- The County provides home health and there are individual care providers.
- Hospitals are located within 30 minutes in Newton or El Dorado or 50 minutes away from Emporia and Wichita.
- There is no assisted living, the former home is abandoned and in disrepair.



Housing

- There are 273 housing units (2015)
- 215 are occupied (79%) (KS= 89.5%)
- 58 are vacant (21%) (KS= 10.5%)
- Owner Occupied: 148 (69%) (KS=66.7%)
- Renter Occupied: 67 (31%) (KS= 33.3%)
- Unlike some towns, 10% of homes have been built in the last 25 years.
- “In discussion with residents, we were asked if we planned to move to Florence, and that those we spoke to hoped so, which is very nice. A friendly, welcoming group of citizens.”

Housing

- A mix of really nice houses- many older stone, 2+ story, and some more modern.
- Some appear to be abandoned, or just in need of repair or landscaping.
- There was no area that could be designated as a good or bad area for housing.



Housing

- We were told there were lots of houses for sale, but few for rent.
- None of the visitors commented about whether there was a list of rental or “for Sale” homes at City Hall.
- Saw the brick homes in the north part of town. We were told they were popular and always seemed to be full. It sounds like a nice place to live.



I didn't find any "for sale" signs to photograph.

Housing observations



- Need for clean-up/demolition of older properties



Schools

- Students go to Marion to school.
- A prominent link to the USD 408 Schools is on City page.
- The former gymnasium for the high school is used by the community for different functions. The parking lot was full, but the building's purpose wasn't clear to a visitor.

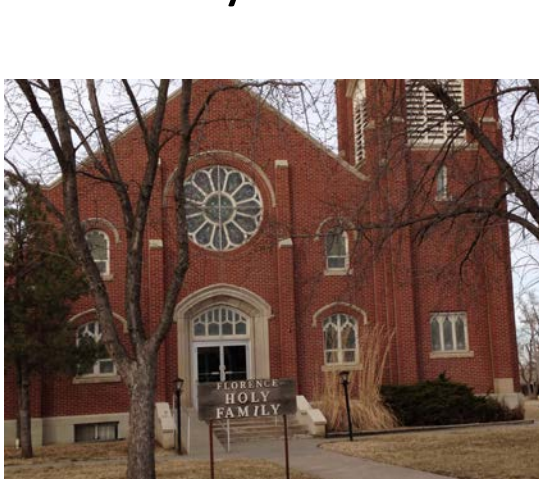


Childcare

- According to the city clerk there is no licensed child care, but some baby sitters are in the area.
- Your team told me that most people take their children for care in the community where they work.

Faith/Religion

- There are 3 Churches: Methodist, Christian and Catholic.
- All are very well maintained.
- The only church-sponsored activity that was evident was the after-school program. Visitors commented positively on this activity more than once.
- There was a Lenten Study listed in the Crossroads newsletter by the Methodist Church.



Civic

- We saw a Masonic Lodge.
- There were Lions Club pamphlets at the City building, but we couldn't tell if there was a club in town.
- PRIDE is mentioned in a community newsletter, but we didn't see any Kansas PRIDE signs at the entrances or otherwise.
- A community bulletin board showed commodities delivery.
- Benches donated by Florence PRIDE.
- PRIDE is listed in the community newsletter as having fertilizer available for people buying plants.



Civic

- A brochure listed these organizations:
 - Alumni Association,
 - American Legion,
 - 4-H Club,
 - Boy & Girl Scouts,
 - Chamber of Commerce,
 - Advance Lodge 114,
 - Florence Labor Day Committee,
 - Kids Club,
 - PRIDE
- That's a lot of clubs for a town of 500. We were told that the same people serve on all the committees.



Civic

- Saw a brochure in City Hall with all the civic organizations.

The website has a great list of Civic groups that offer ways to get involved.

The website needs to be reviewed for new information and dated items. A photo of the PRIDE Float is cool, but when it says “2007 Labor Day parade,” you wonder “is this still going on?”

Aspire to make your documents “Evergreen” when the info doesn’t change, and current when necessary—e.g. The Labor Day brochure link is labeled “2014.”

Civic

- **Harvey House—**

- City clerk made a phone call and we were able to tour.
- Florence people are so accommodating.
- On the brochure there was “for dinner reservations call” & “For Museum tour call” ... but there was no phone number.
- We didn’t see the phone number in any signs out front.



Public Infrastructure (other than downtown)

- Brick streets gave the town character.
- A nice community garden near the Harvey House Museum.
- Sidewalks outside of downtown were rough.



City Hall

- Town hall is easy to access on Main Street. Plenty of information about regional attractions, some local newspapers available to read, a large map of the city, more cement boots inside.



Fire and Police Services

- There is a police station in the same complex as town hall.
 - Your leadership team told me that there are no local police; this needs to be taken off the website.
 - County Sheriff provides support.
- There was a fire department near the library.



Library

- The library is a nice facility with computers, internet access, a good selection of books and a rotating collection from the North Central Kansas Library.
- An active book club.
- One visitor wished for more activity while there, another was surprised by the short hours.



Library

- They will be installing a kitchen soon and a store to sell items to fund the library.
- There is a tiny museum and some history of the building as a bank.
- I saw the word “safe” used several times in the library pamphlet and wondered if this was a big concern.



City Parks

- Disc Golf course at the old football field, a city pool, baseball diamonds, veteran's park, Moses Shane Park, Grandview Park, and Unity Park.
- The old gymnasium is also available for use.
- The parks were being tended even when we were there.



City Parks

- *I thought the history and locations of your limestone houses was a cool addition in Moses Shane Park.*
- *Is it current? Are these still open to the public?*
- *It would be a nice addition to the website.*



Recreation/Tourism

- Known for the Harvey House Museum.
- It should be known for its Labor Day Celebration and The Market.
- Florence is proud of their pure water. One car of visitors was given a tour of the water plant when they recognized a former Arlington resident who showed them around.

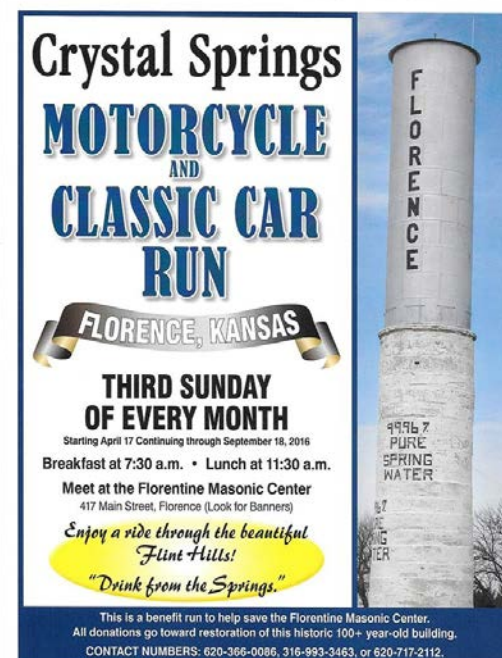
Significant Events

- Harvey House has events from time to time and can be booked by groups.
- There is an annual pancake feed to benefit the fire department
- Labor Day Celebration.



Significant Events

- *Visitors were not aware of other events that you hold: Easter Egg Hunt, Santa, Vintage Baseball games.*
- *The events page on the website is strong– I loved the (undated & timeless) active photos of people having fun together. This is the small town community that people long for.*
 - *Spring Fling is an exception– shows this event in 2008. Was it the last?*
- *I heard about a Crystal Springs Motorcycle Rally the 3rd Saturday of April, but it wasn't on the City site.*
 - *Jack's Habit website shows April –October.*
 - *A great way to expose people to Florence!*



Natural or Manmade Features

- The Cottonwood River goes through Florence. Visitors were curious about options for developing recreation at the river.
- At the edge of town is a bridge and a tree farm. Visitors saw signs to the tree farm, but no one seemed to know the history, so it was a curiosity.
- The bridge over the Cottonwood River could use some repair, but would be a great walking area since it's not a high traffic spot.



Natural or Manmade Features

- The town's railroad history is interesting, it would be interesting to renovate the train station.
- Pure Spring Water

No visitors commented on your 5 sites on the National Historic Register



Everyone took for granted– and shouldn't– your Flint Hills advantage. Location. Location. Location.

What would bring you back?

- The food was good at the Town and Country Restaurant.
- I would come back to the Flint Hills Bakery and Market to try for lunch.
- Harvey House Museum— in fact, I've jotted it down as a place to host a gathering. Wish it was open on a scheduled basis.
- Have driven this road many times to Emporia and I never knew to stop. I would bring friends back.
- It would be neat to come to the Labor Day Celebration.



Most Positive Observations

- The Harvey House museum, the community garden, the Flint Hills Bakery and Market, the parks, the cemetery had some great history about the town's history (interesting to read!)
- Veteran's Park is a nice addition to downtown.

I heard wonderful things from your team about the Villa on the Prairie Herb workshops. When I searched online, I found only a 2014 Peabody Gazette article and a July 2013 Florence Crossroads article.

Most Positive Observations

- It's nice to see a pool and ball diamonds in a town this size.
- Beautiful homes.
- Crossroads newsletter is a good resource— is it online?
- Neat old buildings, dedicated people, and room to bring in new people and grow.



Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- While there are nice homes, there are quite a few that are in need of repair or removal.
- Main street is mostly vacant.
- The City Website has a lot of information, but it isn't current.
- The Flint Hills Bakery and Market is a great attraction, but the community would benefit from a grocery store that sold brand names and store brand foods– or having the Market carry them.
- Getting younger people involved in their community.
- City-Wide Clean-up Day– some houses bring all houses down.
- Marketing your assets to all those cars and trucks on two major highways!

What will you remember 6 months from now?

- I love history, so I'll definitely remember the cemetery, the old storefronts on Main Street, and the Harvey House Museum.
- I hope I'll remember to come back on Labor Day. (x2)
- The friendliness of the people I met. I made a new friend.
- The neat buildings, the huge main street, the scattered junk (in a few places) the Harvey House, Library, the falling-down school and unique water tower.



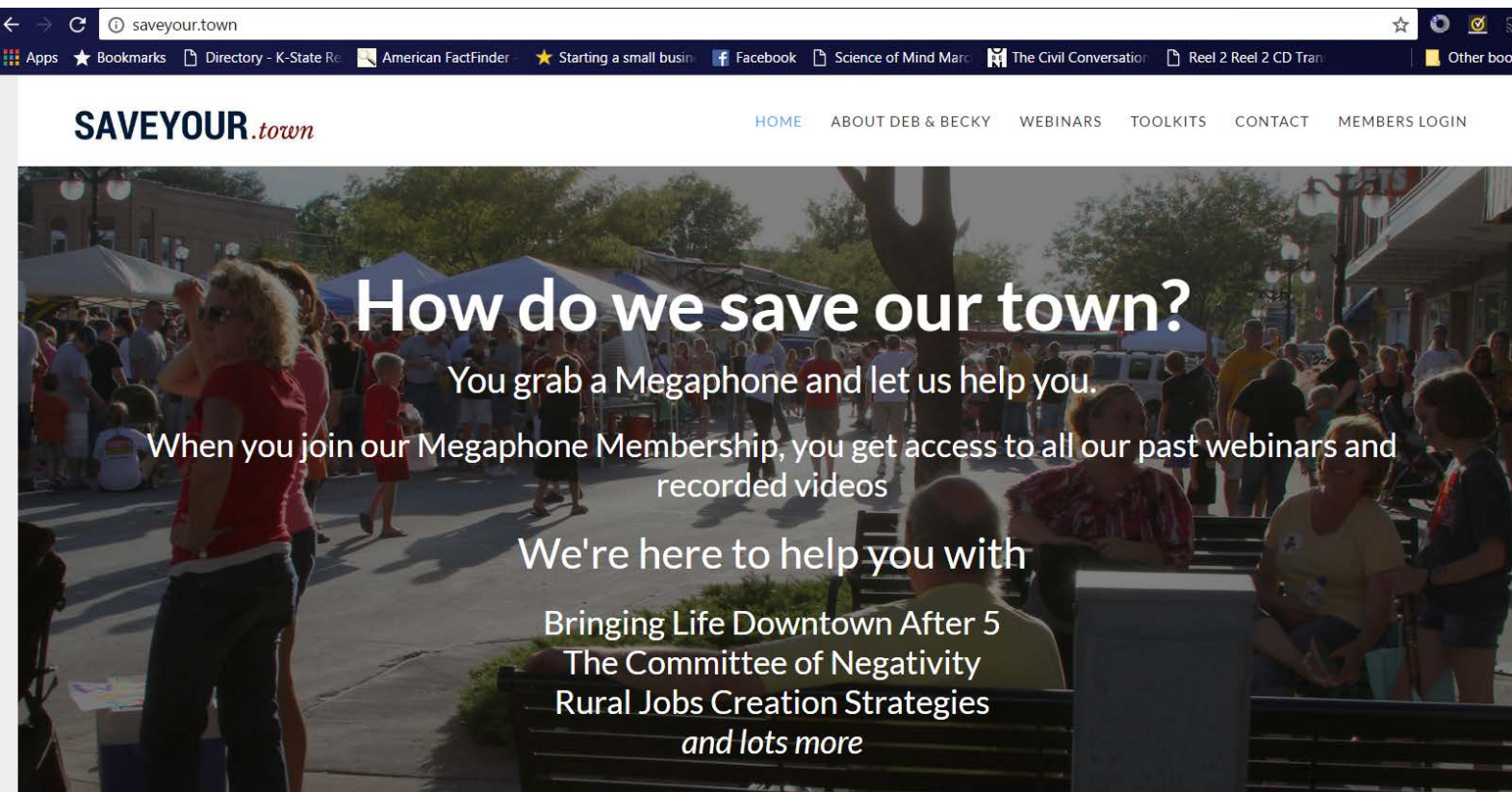
*Knowledge
for Life*



Thank our leadership team:

- *Scott Zogelman*
- *Rickey Roberts*
- *Judy Mills*
- *Janet Robinson*
- *Trayce Warner*
- *Karen Williams*
- **Discoveries? Ah Ha Moments? Next Steps?**
 - Which group will lead the discussion?
- *Contact me if you need resources or help:*
 - Nancy Daniels
 - Community Vitality Specialist, K-State Research and Extension
 - 785.410.6352
 - nkdaniels@ksu.edu

- SaveYour.Town
 - GREAT monthly webinars.
 - Good videos on YouTube
 - Becky McCray: Filling the Gaps Downtown: Empty lot ideas, Posted to PRIDE Facebook Page on April 26



Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOIMRJ-jc14>

- Brain Gain (30-49 year olds moving to rural) is a “new trend” that has been happening since the 70’s and no one is noticing or talking about it.
- Rural is in the middle of everywhere. You live one place, work another and play another. With transportation and internet, it’s all accessible to you.
- People research a number of places before they move to a rural town.
- Only 1/3 of the people who move rural have a previous connection with that area.

- If you bring 7 people to a 700 citizen town every year in 10 years you'll have a 10% increase. It matters! It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
- We are our own worst enemies. We have to monitor our customer service! It matters!
- The number of people who live in rural areas is increasing—from 54M to 60M from 1970-2010. The relative % of people who live rural is smaller (19% instead of 26%) but the real number has increased.
- Don't buy in to someone else's narrative.
- We lose our hardware store, our school, consolidate our churches, etc... but we are still here! In MN, they have only lost 3 towns in 50 years.

- Housing will be freed up as the baby boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
- Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.
- 1/5 of dollars come from transfer payments—not employers.

*- Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow,
University of Minnesota*

