

STRUCTURING

A NEW IMAGE

Academy White Paper
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I. MISSION STATEMENT

Over the past few years much has been said about what can be done to improve Warsaw and the Kosciusko County area; committees have been formed, studies undertaken, statements, drafts and models built. A lot of time has been invested. Yet, progress has been painfully slow. Why?

Earlier this year, the Warsaw Chamber of Commerce identified eleven key goals. Number four on that list is "Positive Public Relations and Communications." Our committee agrees with the high priority ranking of this goal; and believe that perhaps the lack of such positive communications efforts in the past may have been retarding the efforts made by so many sincere groups.

This then shall be the thrust of this paper: to analyze the current situation and then outline a county-wide PR/communications program. Our principal concentration shall be on structuring a new image for the community, not only because we believe that a more positive image will help attract new business and more people, but because it will bolster the attitudes of those people and businesses already residing in Kosciusko County. This is the real crux of our project: to recommend a program of public relations and communications that will put the area's best foot forward, to make the people who live here now proud of the area. We feel that public relations and good communications must be started now. An effort must be undertaken to develop a feeling of purpose, a sense of communityhood, before any real action can be galvanized.

II. SITUATION ANALYSIS

Warsaw, Indiana, founded 1854--the current population of Warsaw is approximately 10,000; Kosciusko County counts nearly 58,000. Unemployment for the county (as of March, 1982) was 10.1%. The state average is 13.3

and the national average is 9.6.

At first blush, the area appears to be typical of so many counties across the Midwest. In Warsaw, there's the courthouse on its well-tended square. Surrounding it, is a collection of shops and businesses catering to the needs of the citizenry--banks, hardware stores, a bakery. Further out, light industry, fast food restaurants and a large foundry operating a literal stone's throw from a large residential area. However, the other major employers are a printing company, the orthopedic industry and a telephone company.

The outskirts of town blend into the countryside. Farms and smaller communities dot Kosciusko County. Poultry raising and grain crops predominate.

It's on the observer's second look that the lakes are noticed, not only in Warsaw itself, but throughout the county. Lake Tippecanoe, the Barbee Chain, Winona Lake, Wawasee. Big lakes, small lakes--103 of them scooped out by the Wisconsin Glacier. Many are ringed with summer cottages and year-round homes and crisscrossed with water skiers and bass boats. Kosciusko County hums with a different sort of industry during the summer months. Tourism also bolsters the tax base.

So after two looks, it's apparent that Kosciusko County is not typical. It's a unique amalgam of business, agriculture and tourism. But yet, something's amiss.

As mentioned earlier, unemployment's slightly higher than the national average. The economic malaise that plagued most of the frost-belt states was a few years late in arriving. But now it's here. And Kosciusko County is feeling it.

Back downtown, there's eighteen empty storefronts. In the residential areas, some homes languish on the real estate market for years. A number of small businesses and light industries have folded their tents. Big shopping malls an hour away in two directions continue to suck consumer dollars away

from the county.

What do the people think of the area? We feel this was an important part of the analysis and developed a telephone and person-to-person survey to obtain a sketch of the area from the people who live here.

III. THE SURVEY

The survey consisted of 70 interviews with a random selection of county residents. It should be noted here that a proper, comprehensive survey takes considerable time and expertise; this attempt to obtain a sketch of Kosciusko County should not be construed as the perfect answer. We recommend that a larger sampling be taken by questionnaires in the newspapers or perhaps a mailing effort.

Further, we would recommend that, if possible, local industry provide "on loan" a high-level marketing person to develop, coordinate and assist the local chamber with the program. In discussion with the St. Joe (Michigan) Today coordinators, this factor was stressed as a most important point in their success.

Survey Results

1. WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT KOSCIUSKO COUNTY?

Most participants felt our county was friendly, liked the lakes, business diversity, small rural area but close to larger cities.

2. WHAT DON'T YOU LIKE ABOUT KOSCIUSKO COUNTY?

Most participants felt our roads were a major problem, run down appearance in several areas and small towns, attitude of small business, lack of unity between various progressional building programs and the weather.

3. HAVE YOU BEEN TO A CULTURAL EVENT IN KOSCIUSKO COUNTY?

Most participants said no to this question.

4. HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF KOSCIUSKO COUNTY'S ECONOMIC PLAN?

Most participants responded yes, but didn't know much about it. Several mentioned reading briefly about it in the local newspapers.

5. WHAT IS THE GREATEST PROBLEM, IN YOUR OPINION, OF KOSCIUSKO COUNTY'S ECONOMIC PLAN?

Most participants couldn't answer due to lack of detailed knowledge on this subject.

6. WHERE WOULD YOU GO TO BUY A NEW CAR OR APPLIANCE?

Participants were about evenly split on this issue. Further questioning on those shopping out of town felt price, service and variety were the most important issues.

7. ARE THERE ENOUGH THINGS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO DO IN KOSCIUSKO COUNTY?

Participants almost unanimously agreed there were enough things for young people, if they would do them. However, there were some concerns expressed on additional things for teenagers.

8. RATE THE "QUALITY OF LIFE" IN KOSCIUSKO COUNTY ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS FROM ONE TO TEN. (NOTE: ONE BEING THE WORST OR LOWEST RATING ON THAT SUBJECT.)

A. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Average rating - 6

B. LOCAL POLITICS

Average rating - 6

C. ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS CLIMATE

Average rating - 6

D. EDUCATION

Average rating - 6

E. HIGHER EDUCATION (College or Ivy Tech)

Average rating - 5

F. HEALTH CARE/HUMAN SERVICES

Average rating - 8

G. COMMUNICATIONS AND THE MEDIA

Average rating - 7

H. CHURCHES

Average rating - 8

I. CRIME/LAW ENFORCEMENT

Average rating - 6

J. SOCIAL/CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Average rating - 8

(This high rating was primarily based on lake availability.)

K. SHOPPING

Average rating - 6

L. VOLUNTEERISM

Average rating - 6

Summary

Based on the information we researched, we believe Kosciusko County has a variety of strengths. They include:

- a) our scenic lakes and recreational opportunities
- b) our small town "quality of life"
- c) our churches
- d) our health/medical facilities
- e) our diversity of business and generally low unemployment

The weaknesses which we believe must be addressed if we are to be successful in developing our Kosciusko County Economic Plan are to:

- a) improve our roads to help develop our tourism and resident morale.
- b) improve our college and higher education facilities and offerings

- c) develop our cultural opportunities
- d) improve shopping variety

The survey further indicates that in order to succeed with the Kosciusko County's Economic Development Plan, we believe a serious effort should be given to improve the "Quality of Life" for local residents in Kosciusko County first. Without their support and effort this plan cannot succeed.

If the values are not real or perceived by our local residents it could be difficult to sell to outside tourists or businesses.

IV. THE STRATEGY

Although the survey conducted did not reach as many people as we would have liked, it still affords us a quick look at the area's image, providing us with a logical approach to the image problem. The image is bifurcated; insiders hold one view and outsiders have another concept of what the area is like.

Our committee took the best of both viewpoints and started building, dividing the task into two areas: Communicating and The Image.

Communicating - Two-way communications is probably the most critical of the two areas at this point; and it is the one we feel needs the most improvement. The program we recommend represents a viable economical approach that should foster and enhance the flow of communications between businesses, organized groups and the people. The community is limited by its resources and understanding, but not by its ambition. The plan begins in several sectors:

- A. Identify key publics
- B. Formulate messages
- C. Deliver messages to publics

We feel there are three key publics that must always be addressed:

the business public, the residential public and opinion leaders.

The names and addresses of opinion leaders should be compiled into a "VIP" mailing list. This core group can be very instrumental in accomplishing our goals. By keeping this group updated, we can effectively establish a grid of informed people across the county. We recommend a personal letter approach be used initially with subsequent mailings on an as needed basis.

To provide a communications channel for the business group, we recommend the establishment of "Taskforce '80." This is a collection of spokespeople trained for public exposure and under the guidance of the chamber of commerce. This group can be used to address service clubs, outlying chambers, citizen groups, business organizations, etc. to carry the messages to this large important public.

"Taskforce '80" easily seques into the residential sector also. By expanding their speaking efforts to schools, fraternal clubs and other such organizations, we can once again carry the message to a large piece of our target groups.

Traditional methods should not be ignored of course; the media has done an excellent job of reporting activities, open chamber meetings have provided forums for airing these matters and its monthly newsletter is a good source of information. We do feel that the addition of the VIP mailing list and "Taskforce '80" will significantly increase the flow of communications between the development groups and the public.

Before moving to the image problem, we feel it important to once again stress the need for good communications. It is easy to talk of good communications but much more difficult to really implement a program. We feel the effort should be coordinated by a committee under the direction of the Warsaw Chamber of Commerce.

The Image - Again we start by defining our primary goals:

- A. To build a good image
- B. To attract new business

As stated earlier, the main function of this effort is to "sell" the area to those who already live here. We believe this is important and will provide an excellent foundation upon which item B can start.

The following program is a modest seed program that will research needs, test media responsiveness and prepare the community for serious usage of publicity and advertising as a tool for marketing Kosciusko County. But perhaps most importantly, it designates a defined period to establish long range objectives while making positive contributions toward future communication.

A central theme is recommended to tie all these efforts together, providing a thread of continuity for the image program. That theme is "Warsaw. Our Kind of Town." It's short, memorable and works well with the media we recommend. A back-up slogan could be "Come Grow With Us."

The program we suggest is a six month test utilizing 3 main media: radio, newspaper and billboards. The messages for all three are similar and all have a grass roots approach, using real, live Kosciusko County people for the endorsements.

Each ad runs concurrent in all media for one month. We have selected six different areas to focus on for each month:

- 1. The courthouse
- 2. The residential areas
- 3. The lakes
- 4. The industries
- 5. The schools
- 6. Agriculture

Because the courthouse is a unique and attractive focal point in the county, it serves as the kick-off ad. Radio ads will feature Jean Northenor talking about the feeling of community that emerged as the renovation drew to a close. The newspapers ads will concentrate on the same type of approach. The billboard, by necessity, will be much simpler, illustrating the courthouse in the background, Ms. Northenor in the foreground and the "Warsaw...." tag on top.

Similarly, the other ads will focus on discussing the good life in Kosciusko County--the homes, the schools, the land. The ads are low key...and eminently believable.

The "our kind of town" theme could also work well for the merchant group. By unifying under the "our town" banner for specialty advertising, such as Pioneer Days, they can stress the quality and convenience of shopping in Warsaw. They can position themselves as a shopping alternative when compared to a trip to "Fort Bend." The shopowners are your neighbors--they care if you're happy.

We think the six month media program can be paid for by selling corporate sponsorships, a company could elect to buy a board, radio spots, a newspaper ad or all three. Costs would be low and would allow area businesses to become actively involved in the promotion. Another financing alternative is to enact an innkeeper's tax to raise promotional funds.

After the six month test, the message can be refined and expanded, carrying over into attracting new business if necessary.

Other promotional channels that might be considered include an art show (Kosciusko residents only), band concerts and other entertainment on the square during the summer months. Every effort should be taken to highlight local talent. This allows us to continue to build local pride and develop a true sense of community-bond. Pioneer Days again affords

the area an excellent forum for these things.

By implementing the outlined program we think that the area will be taking positive steps to initiating a good program of public realtions and communications.