

## **Executive Summary**

URSI 653 Management Seminar/Community Based Problem Solving  
Urban & Regional Studies Institute  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Janesville Branding/Marketing Campaign  
May 2005  
by Dr. Janet Cherrington

Janesville is a small town located in south central Minnesota, with a population of slightly over 2,100. Like most small towns in this region, it has been tied to a shrinking agricultural base and dwindling local government aid.<sup>1</sup> The town is 20 miles from the campus of Minnesota State University, Mankato, which is forging town-gown partnerships between university student research teams and business, industry, and government.

The desired outcome of an Urban Management/Community Based Problem Solving class in the spring of 2005 was to develop a marketing brochure for Janesville. Using principles of strategic market planning, students from the Urban and Regional Studies department at Minnesota State University (MSU) and the South Central Technical College (SCTC) collaborated on writing, designing, and printing this community promotional tool. This applied learning educational experience engaged URSI students in the components of strategic marketing, which they in turn used to develop the first phase of a citywide branding and marketing campaign for Janesville, Minnesota.

### **Introduction**

The economic stability and livability of any place requires the community to ask itself why anyone wants to live, relocate, visit, invest, start or expand a business there. In other words, what does the community or "place" have that people need or want?

Because these questions all too often go unasked, communities and their leaders mostly react to and resist changes in their external environment. In contrast, others respond to place competition without analyzing the real problem. At the first signs of distress communities panic, desperately trying to fill the space left behind by a closed factory or retail store, rarely considering what changes in the place, product or market have occurred and why. Instead, to combat job loss, places seek to lure companies from one place to another. To stem downtown blight, places beautify downtowns and create pedestrian malls. To retain shrinking businesses and /or businesses in shrinking industries, they offer tax incentives to forestall further job loss. To attract tourists, they subsidize convention centers and hotels. To curb population loss, they run expensive campaigns to attract people.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Aid is a subsidy that the state of Minnesota provides to cities.

These actions are not necessarily misguided. Some efforts have been successful. Many have failed, however, and most fell short of meeting the community's expectations and goals. More often than not, these responses lead to disappointment when the company lured from another state folded or relocated to consolidate its operations in another region or country. The pedestrian mall is now open to traffic. The "build and they will come" construction boom resulted in a glut of empty commercial office buildings and excess retail space. The new convention center now requires deeper operating subsidies.

Now more than ever, places must think, plan, and act on their futures, or be left behind in the new era of place wars. The durable lesson of the last 20 years of places seeking to improve themselves is that all places are in trouble, or will be in the foreseeable future. Previously self-contained local, regional, and national economies are being transformed into interdependent parts of an integrated world economy. As a result, global economic competition is combining with vast improvements in global communication, transportation, and finance to accelerate the pace, intensity, and scope of economic change, even in the smallest and most remote places (Kotler *et al.*, 1993).

To win the competition, communities must be excellent or superior in some way and they must think strategically. The infrastructure, industries, attractions, and people skills that they build today will affect their market position tomorrow. Communities must develop and operate a planning methodology. They must not turn to planning to avoid hard times. Rather they should engage in "strategic market planning."

Strategic market planning is a proactive method for places to respond to the challenge of intensifying place competition. It can be a guiding force in helping to develop a place's future by maximizing the efficient social and economic functioning of an area in accordance with the wider goals established. As sellers of products, places can use this planning method to better understand who they are and what they can be.

A strategic market plan consists of four components: place identity, place products, place buyers and place selling (Kotler *et al.*, 1993). The "place selling" component of a strategic market plan for the City of Janesville, Minnesota was the focus of the Urban and Regional Studies Urban Management Seminar and Community-Based Problem Solving (hereafter referred to as URSI) class during the spring semester of 2005 at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The class found that in order to develop a marketing brochure promoting tourism and growth for the city, they first had to examine the city's economy, design, quality of life, people, public services, recreational amenities and market attractions. In other words, to do "place selling," the class had to first address the "place identity," "place products," and "place buyers."

## **The Project**

### **Project Description**

The desired outcome of the Urban Management Seminar project was a marketing brochure for the City of Janesville to promote tourism and growth. The brochure was developed and written by the URSI class at Minnesota State University (MSU) and was printed by the Applied Production class at South Central Technical College (SCTC).

The author engaged students in another component of the class which included presentations and assignments on working with the media, differentiating between public relations and marketing, the elements of a marketing campaign and tips for effectively engaging media in community events and initiatives. The SCTC instructor guided students through the technical aspects of producing a brochure which included elements of design, color, set-up and printing.

### **Project Process**

The URSI class first met with the city administrator, Clinton Rogers, to discuss what goals and/or objectives the brochure was to achieve. In addition, the administrator described to the class what the city had to offer: public services, recreational facilities, quality schools, varied housing choices and economic opportunity. The city administrator identified the brochure audience or targeted place buyers as prospective families, visitors and employers.

### ***Place Identity***

Subsequent to the initial meeting with the city administrator, the class prepared a place audit or systematic examination of Janesville's economy, design, physical assets, quality of life and people. To maximize efficiency, a Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) chart was developed which assigned student teams to place themes: community, schools, housing, employment, recreation, tourist attractions and events. In addition, contact information for the city, county and other public, private and non-profit organizations was compiled in a four-page brochure insert along with a city street map.

The methodology used in the research on place identity and place products consisted primarily of Internet and publication resources, field work and interviews. The city, county, school and state web sites were viewed for basic community information as well as individual and organizational contact information. Field diaries documented local events and festivals, descriptions of recreational areas and historical buildings, observations of community involvement and interaction in public meetings. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the city administrator, city economic development director, chamber of commerce president and school district superintendent. In addition, citizens and businesses at random and as available were informally

asked for input about their attitudes and levels of satisfaction with the city's governmental, social, economic, natural and built environment.

### ***Place Products, Place Image***

After each team had researched their specific topic, they prepared a narrative identifying what the city had to offer to the targeted audience. In order to deliver benefits to the targeted place buyers, a range of strategies and product strengths must be developed (Aaker, 1995). To facilitate this process, URSI students identified and prioritized Janesville's product strengths that provide a tangible experience or primary motivation to move to or visit the city. These products included the Prairie Ridge Golf Course; Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton School District; new residential subdivisions; Park Road Plaza senior apartment complex; Amberfield Apartments; Lake Elysian; Reinbold Sportsmen Campground; historic places; attractions and community events. All of these products were place specific to the City of Janesville or, in the case of the school district and Lake Elysian, a defined regional geography. The identified place products were considered valuable tangible experiences or motivations that would encourage tourism, relocation or investment.

Each team shared the information they had gathered with the class and the thoughts and ideas generated from the discussion were posted around the classroom. In finding commonalities in each place theme, the class began brainstorming a branding or place image for the City of Janesville that was credible, simple, distinctive, and appealing. The result of this brainstorming session was a theme clearly appropriate for Janesville, Minnesota—"Preserving the Past, Building for the Future."

### ***Place Buyers***

A challenge for the class was understanding the changing universe of place buyers: those who decide where to build a plant, locate a regional office, hold a convention, plan a vacation, invest, or buy a business. The city administrator identified a target market—tourists and families—although indicated additional private investment and employment growth would be optimal. The URSI class had to determine Janesville's competitive niche, who makes the place buying decisions and how best to reach them.

### ***Place Selling***

One important aspect of its competitive niche was the favorable commuting time from Janesville to regional shopping and the metropolitan area. For example, Mankato is a regional shopping area that is 15 minutes away. The commute time to the world renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester Minnesota, the Mall of America, and the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MSP) airport is one hour and thirty minutes. The class determined that other competitive advantages included its life-cycle housing stock, recreation opportunities, rich historic character, attractive small town character and friendly citizens. Once the niche was determined, the class

was ready to write the final draft narratives and finalize picture selection of the city's built, natural, social and economic environment. After completing the final brochure draft, artwork was delivered to the Applied Production teams at SCTC for printing.

While SCTC was working with the brochure for final production, the URSI class began identifying locations for brochure distribution; preparing a PowerPoint presentation for the Janesville City Council; identifying media contacts; and preparing public service announcements and press releases. Teams for these parts of the project process were once again organized and a PERT chart to coordinate project tasks was developed to maintain the critical timeline.

Once the brochures were proofed, approved by the city administrator, and printed by the SCTC class, a distribution list was assembled including government offices, chambers of commerce and businesses south of the Twin Cities Metropolitan area as well as throughout south central Minnesota. The brochures were to be delivered after they were officially presented to the Janesville city council. The public service announcements and press releases were prepared by the URSI class which forwarded them for broadcasting and publication. The cable television station and MSU's radio station broadcasted the public service announcements. The Mankato and Janesville newspapers printed the press releases, and MSU devoted five paragraphs to the project in its online newsletter. At the state level, the "Explore Minnesota Tourism Program" approved using of its logo in the brochure.

At the May 9th, 2005, city council meeting, a team of students presented a PowerPoint presentation that explained the process, research, revisions, graphics and printing that were needed to complete the project. Several of the actual brochure pages and a list of distribution places were also included. Up until now the council members had not seen the 12-page color brochure. They were extremely impressed. Mayor Alvin Grams added, "With a brochure like this, I'm sure it will create more interest in Janesville." After the meeting, students distributed copies of the brochures to a full-house audience who complimented the students on their hard work. The fact that there were no empty seats in the meeting room and other residents standing confirmed that the marketing campaign had made the citizens feel good about their community. The cable television station also ran the video tape of the student's presentation for the following two months so others would learn about the project.

Finally the long awaited day arrived and a team of URSI students delivered the brochures to both local and regional locations as far away as the southern metropolitan area. A copy was also sent to Mr. Bob Erler, the Advertising/Public Relations Manager of the state's "Explore Minnesota Tourism Program" who said it was "... a great project for the students and a valuable tool for the community."

## **Findings**

### ***Students***

The URSI students learned the technical aspect of developing an effective, attractive marketing brochure including the elements of design, color, set-up and printing. The SCTC students learned how to apply their skills to a “real-world” project that included research, writing, and preparing press releases, and public service announcements.

During this process, both groups of students gained new or strengthened skills used to promote a community. For example, students learned to identify and understand audiences they wanted to reach and to “tell the story” of Janesville. They also learned how to create and implement effective communications strategies using materials based on existing, changing or projected new community assets. Because three groups of students—technical college, undergraduates, and graduates—had the unique opportunity to be part of a “learn-by-doing” educational experience, this was a “win-win” for all.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Community***

Janesville received the marketing brochure promotional tool for a few hundred dollars--the cost of the printing plates. Namely this is because the URSI students donated their research, writing, and media campaign time as part of a Management Seminar/Community Based Problem Solving class and the SCTC graphics students donated time as part of their Applied Production class. Various industries also donated the paper to SCTC.

When the students made their presentation before city council, an audience of “standing room” only confirmed a strong sense of civic pride. Upon distribution of the brochure, the prominent way in which merchants and the chamber of commerce displayed it was invigorating and demonstrated an awakening of community cohesion. Calls from area hospitals seeking good housing for newly hired staff identified another target market. The Minnesota Department of Tourism advertising manager’s endorsement of the brochure demonstrated its effectiveness for the tourist target market.

### ***The University***

Minnesota State University can provide an excellent framework for communities to follow in improving their infrastructure and services, and promoting themselves to the outside world. By following the basic strategies to respond to rural

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<sup>2</sup> Participating USI students included: Roshan Bhandari, Suzanne Couillard, Kelly Deter, Jacob Helton Lisa Hughes, Jamie Lind, Steven Scheurer, Kimberly Thompson, Patrick Waletzko and Jeanne Zwart. Participating SCTC students included Nick Beckendorf, Katie Domeier, Dorothy Knish, Matt Rush, Lindsay Wieland.

Instructors were Dr. Janet Cherrington , URSI and Mr. Neil Nurre, SCTC.

challenges, students and faculty can work with cities, counties and regions to create sustainable, vibrant, competitive, successful communities.

This is the second collaborative URSI/SCTC applied learning project focusing on small communities in south central Minnesota. In 2003 a brochure for the city of Saint Peter was created under the direction of the author and SCTC graphics instructors Gale Bigbee and Liz Madsen. This brochure entitled "Building Communities...It's No Small Chore," however, was quite different. It specifically highlighted the importance of professional city management with color photos of sites within the city before and after a 1998 tornado hit it. Narrative described the significant strides made by Saint Peter in the five years following the disaster.

The Management Seminar/Community Based Problem Solving class has a special topics focus so a joint SCTC/URSI applied learning project is dependent on the URSI faculty member teaching the course. However, at present there are no plans to repeat another strategic marketing project.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This project demonstrates that the key priority for a local government is to create a place where people want to live and promote the opportunity for a better quality of life for all. Sustainable communities require an environment of good governance, public participation, partnership working and civic pride. Marketing a community can play a vital role in creating, invigorating and awakening community cohesion, innovation, a sense of place and civic pride. The 12-page color brochure that was researched and written by the URSI students and designed and printed by the SCTC students is the first step in a citywide branding and marketing campaign. Its effectiveness has been recognized at the state, regional, and local levels.

This project demonstrates that strategic marketing planning can be adapted by places to meet their own cultural, political, and organizational needs. It can also be an effective means for out-state Minnesota communities to compete in the new economy. The central tenet of strategic market planning for places is that, in spite powerful external and internal forces that buffet almost all places, they have within their collective resources and people the capacity to improve their relative competitive position.

The City of Janesville already has an important component of a strategic marketing plan—a 12-page full color brochure to promote tourism and growth. A possible next step would be to incorporate the information contained in the brochure in its web site. Annual updates should be scheduled to keep this information up to date. One way the city could do this is to issue an annual report, much like the type companies do, to highlight their accomplishments for the year as well as discuss their failures to achieve certain goals. The report should contain various statistical indicators describing where the community stands on jobs, income, housing, health and crime in relation to where it planned to be.

In order to strategically market a place, Janesville's community leaders must understand the needs, wants, and behavior choices of specific internal and external constituencies. Armed with this knowledge, they can create an actionable plan to complement the visions of what the community wants to be (Hall and Richards, 2000). Lastly, the community's strategic market planning should be done in conjunction with a comprehensive plan that recognizes the values, and goals of key internal stakeholders and aims to design the built and natural environment around those community aspirations.

## References

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