

Assessment Findings and Suggestions Report

League City, Texas





Community Assessment

INTRODUCTION

In September of 2009, a Community Assessment of League City, Texas, was 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 washrooms, 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. The town and surrounding area were "secretly shopped." Any person looking to relocate their business, industry, or residence will come to your community as a visitor first. Tourism is the front door to all your economic development efforts.

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community? Once they find information, are the 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 didn't know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel books, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just

as you might in planning a trip to an unfamiliar 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, and read travel articles and guidebooks.

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 from further away. The question on most visitors' minds is: What do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities falter is when they merely provide "lists" 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, shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation, historic downtowns, scenic vistas, etc. Of course, nearly every visitor can do these things closer to home. So, what makes your community worth the trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip. THEN, promote your diversionary, or "complementary" activities. Would you go to Anaheim, California, if Disneyland wasn't there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knotts Berry Farm mind that Disneyland gets all the glory? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with those secondary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities benefit.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for what makes your community worth a special trip, or a great place to live, or to do business. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. Do you give a reason for visiting, and do you provide enough information to make it easy to plan a trip? Are the marketing materials 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 enticements 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 why 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 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 need to 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 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 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, and 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 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 your 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, Banff, 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 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, 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 don't care 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. People 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 "something 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 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 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), 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

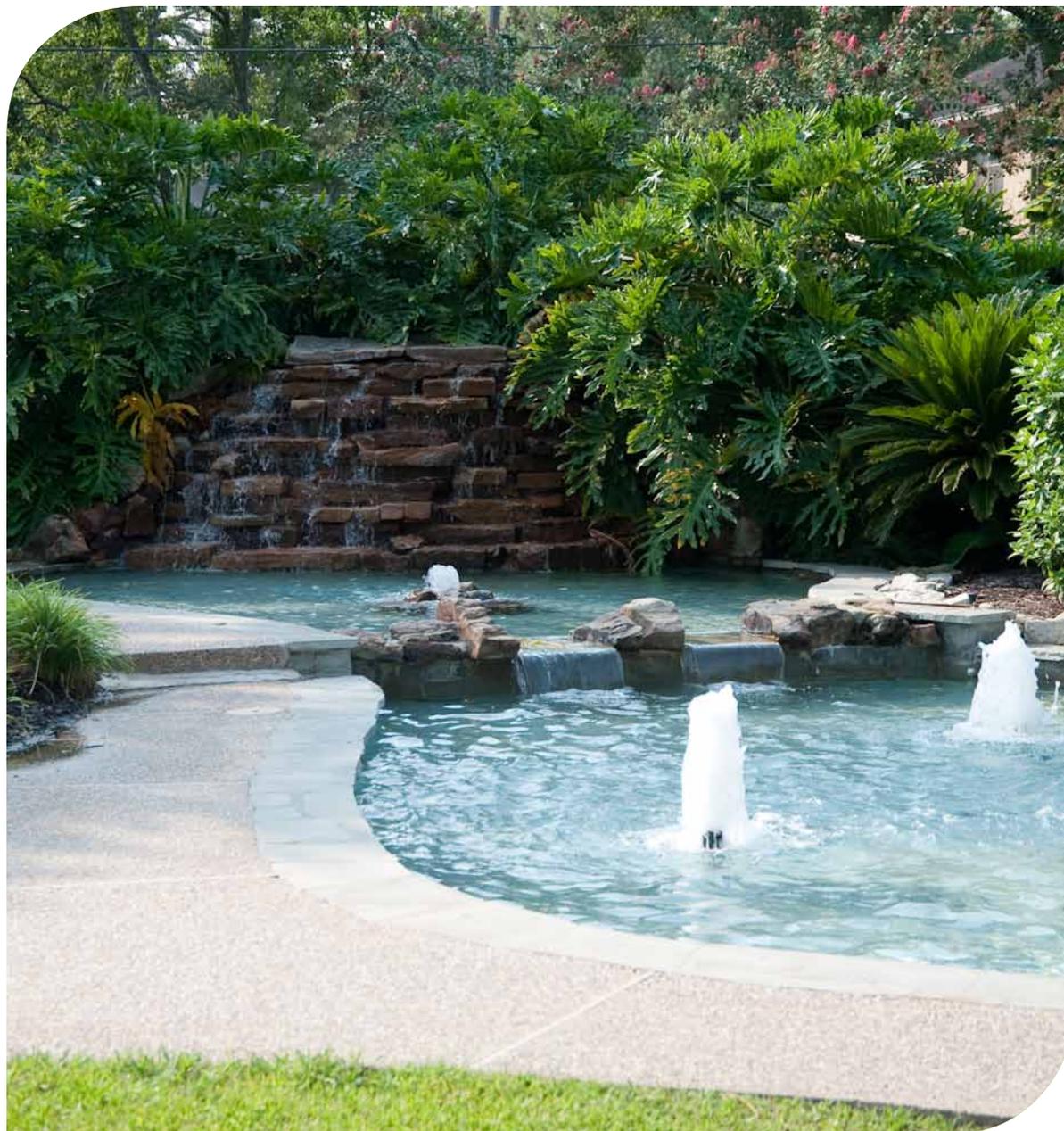


and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

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., nearly \$75 billion in Canada, and supports 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 will 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.

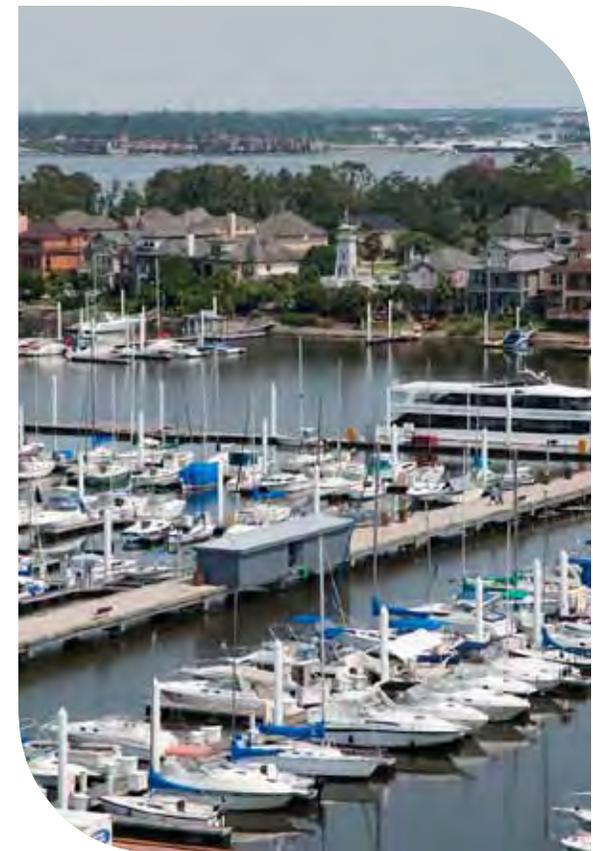
For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

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), 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 in which to live, work, and visit.





Findings & Suggestions

The primary goal of your tourism and economic development efforts is to increase the amount of cash that is “imported” into the community. Fortunately, many of the same ingredients that make a destination attractive to visitors, also make the community attractive to residents and new business development - and investment - making it a better place to live, work, and play.

This is not just about tourism, yet tourism is the front door to your non-tourism economic development efforts.

Industry creates jobs; jobs drive residential development, which drives retail, restaurant, and recreational development. Industry and residential drive tourism; tourism bolsters downtowns and creates more demand for attractions.

The Assessment Findings and Suggestions Report is a conversation starter; it isn't meant to provide all the answers.



After spending about 10 minutes in League City, it was obvious that that this is an upscale bedroom community to Houston, NASA.



It didn't take long before I was picking out homes - whether or not they were actually for sale.



League City has dozens of beautiful neighborhoods and subdivisions, nice homes, beautiful parks and open spaces, and trails. In short, League City looks like a wonderful place to live.

This kind of sums it all up. Welcome to League City.



But as is the case with bedroom communities...



...they drive demand for "convenience retail." What used to be the neighborhood store has now become "strip mall heaven."



And League City fits right in with the famous "Texas Sprawl." This phenomena was created with the state's feeder road system - the only place in the U.S. with them - thank goodness.



League City is already known as a nice bedroom community, with great quality of life.

But do visitors make League City their destination? Is it even on their itinerary, or do they just cruise past on the way to Galveston and other bayside communities? Do the residents "hang out" in your downtown? Visitors tend to go where the local residents go. What is there to do in League City that will attract visitors?

When family and friends come to visit, where do local residents take them for dinner or to spend an afternoon? Does League City benefit much from visitor spending?

Beyond great quality of life ...
Who are you, League City?

We did some research into
people's perceptions of the city:

Question #1: What do you know
of League City?

The most common answers
were:

- Close to NASA
- Near the coast
- Close to Kemah
- Close to Clear Lake
- On the way to Galveston

Question #2: Where do you go
to "hang out"?

The most common answers:

- Kemah Boardwalk
- Galveston
- Webster

Not one single person said
League City.

I decided to do a little non-scientific research to find the perception
of League City - in the area, around the state.



I also visited workers at the NASA Space Center - and via E-mail.



It seems that League
City doesn't have a
strong identity to the
outside world - as far
away as Houston.

Other than being a nice
bedroom community,
which is NOT a bad
thing at all.



The 20 ingredients of an
outstanding destination

League City, Texas





Ingredient #1:
A strong brand and community focus



Jefferson, Texas
Brand: The Antique Capital of Texas
Population: 2,500
Antique dealers: 125
Now the "B&B Capital of Texas."

Over several years, the DDI Team surveyed 400 successful, well-branded towns and downtown districts throughout the U.S. and Canada to find the common ingredients that make each a thriving, healthy community or downtown.

The first ingredient is a strong brand - something that sets the community apart from all the others. Some examples of successfully branded communities are Jefferson, TX, Jackson, WY, and Round Rock, TX., shown here.



Jackson, Wyoming
Brand: The Home of Western Living
Population: 12,000
Retail anchors: 110 galleries and western living shops.



Round Rock's claim to fame was being the home of Dell Computer. Their challenge was that all their economic "eggs" were in one "basket." They were simply known as being "next to Austin."

So Round Rock decided to differentiate themselves and take advantage of their sports facilities and tournaments, and develop those further. Their brand is now "The Sports Capital of Texas." The tag line: "Game On!"

Because of Round Rock's efforts at developing the product and marketing their new brand, they have seen terrific results: Tens of millions of dollars in sports tournaments; conferences and conventions are at an all-time high; and sports-oriented businesses are moving there.

Ottawa, Illinois is working at branding their city as the gardening hub of Illinois, beginning with a small demonstration block in their downtown core. The brand will grow from there. Most of the 160 gardening clubs in Illinois want to play a role in development of the brand.

What does League City want to be known for? Branding a community is the art of creating a strong perception, and then delivering on that "promise"-making sure the city lives up to the perception being promoted.

Ingredient #2 is an effective wayfinding system.



Ottawa, Illinois
 Brand: "Life Begins in the Garden"
 Population: 20,000
 Position: Found the one block "demonstration project."
 Just getting started. 160 gardening clubs in Illinois.



Halifax, Nova Scotia
 Brand: Argyle Street Restaurant Row
 Population: 350,000
 Position: 22 restaurants in just 2.5 blocks.
 Halifax's most popular destination. Just keeps growing. Now a regional draw (Atlantic provinces, the states)



Ingredient #2:
An effective wayfinding system

Real Men Don't Ask For Directions
The rule of wayfinding



The only exits to League City from I-45, both directions, are to FM518. No signs say downtown and no attractions are identified.



So why stop in League City?



Once you take the League City exit, signs state it's one mile up the road. Here we go! Off to discover League City.



Here I am! In the heart of League City! Now what? What's your first impression? Suggestion: Put 1.5 miles on the sign. Continue the job.



In performing the assessment, the first thing we did was try to navigate to downtown League City. If visitors end up frustrated while trying to find key attractions and amenities many visitors will simply say one word; "Next" - and they're gone. The top priority for ANY community is the development of a "Wayfinding System." Connecting the dots to your attractions, amenities, and local services through a professionally produced directional and gateway signage system.

The easier you make it for visitors, the more likely they are to spend additional time in the community and, as a result, spending will increase. Additionally, wayfinding not only educates visitors about what you have and where it's located, but will also educate your front-line employees about what you have and where attractions and amenities are located.

Developing a system is an investment, not an expense.

The process of wayfinding starts with local freeways and highways, then county and city surface streets, then pedestrian-oriented areas.

More and more communities are realizing the value of implementing a comprehensive wayfinding system.

Appleton, Wisconsin (bottom right) uses these decorative signs, which are anodized aluminum with stainless steel hardware mounted on existing power poles. They cost approximately \$550 each. With 18 of these in their downtown, retail sales increased by double digits over other areas around the town without wayfinding.

League City does a good job promoting residential subdivisions, but beyond that, good luck. Without a navigation system, I would have had a very difficult time finding the hotel I stayed at, let alone finding an actual downtown area.





Additional examples shown here:

- Oak Harbor, WA, (top left) with blue signs for community services and gray signs for visitor amenities and attractions. They have a nautical theme reflecting the harbor brand.

- Modesto, California (top right).

- The Woodlands, Texas (bottom left).

- Kalamazoo, Michigan (bottom right). Kalamazoo has given their downtown the name "Mall District" and besides providing wayfinding signs, they include these easy-to-read maps.



Your Wayfinding & Gateway System should include vehicular wayfinding, gateways into the community and secondary gateways into downtown districts, monument signs at attractions and local services, pedestrian wayfinding, pole banners, and freestanding visitor information kiosks in various areas; each cross-selling the immediate area and other areas in the county or city.

The wayfinding system in Covington, KY (top left) is both functional and decorative to add to the ambiance. It's obvious this must be an entertainment district.

This monument parking sign (top right) includes visitor information. What better location for visitor information than at public parking areas?

Be sure all your wayfinding signs continue to lead you to the destination. They must connect the dots.

Work with the county and neighboring cities on developing and implementing a wayfinding system. It should address gateways and entries, wayfinding for vehicles and pedestrians, attractions, amenities, and billboards and marketing displays.

Since less than 5% of visitors stop at visitor information centers (if they can find that), good wayfinding is essential!



Wayfinding is a science as much as an art. Some general rules:

- Upper and lower case lettering
- 1" height for every 12' of viewing distance
- Use arrows.
- Use a solid backing when in a "noisy" area.



Signs tell people a lot about a community - be sure your signs create the desired impression.

Private businesses should also be aware of the need for clear signage. Make it easy for people to locate you and your entrance! Welcome people - don't force them to wander around trying to find you.



I had a heck of a time finding the conference center and hotel. Wayfinding doesn't stop at the entrance. Suggestion: Add signs!



I had to call the hotel to see where they were located since there are no signs of any kind. I guess you go in the side entrance?





Ingredient #3:
A good first impression: Community gateways



Your gateway, or welcome signs, are a visitor’s introduction to the community. What they look like, and where they’re placed, gives visitors their first impression, which is a lasting impression. Be sure to place your gateway signs where they will make the first, best impression, and that is not necessarily at your city limits.

What impression does Borrego Springs’ welcome sign give? (bottom left) It doesn’t give an accurate impression of the community - the de Anza Country Club (top right) is in the city. It’s best to put community service organization signs in their own space, at a location where people can stop to read them. When placed on a welcome sign, they give a cluttered appearance.



Oroville, WA, a town of 1,650 residents, has placed these attractive monument signs (bottom right) at each end of its three-block long downtown. At the city limits are signs that say “Historic Downtown Oroville - ahead one mile.”

Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression. Always. That isn't necessarily at your city limits!

When visitors see the "welcome" signs (or the League City city limits signs) they assume they've arrived. They judge the community by the appearance - or first impression - of the sign and its surroundings. And remember, if you add "Downtown League City - ahead 2 miles (or whatever it is)" then you tell visitors not to judge you yet - there are still 2 miles to go.



- Sets an increased perceived value
- Creates pride of ownership
- Gets your attention
- Says something about the community
- Sells the real estate faster
- At an increased value

All these reasons apply to communities.



Ever wonder why developers create elaborate gateways at the entries to their high-end residential developments? They increase the perceived value of the community and create a spirit of community pride. They give a feeling of “arrival” - that you’ve reached a special destination. The same rules apply to community gateways. Beautiful community gateways achieve the same results.



What impression do these entries give you? (photos this page) They all look like great places to live.

Many private developments in League City have stunning entries. They create the initial impression that what is inside those gates, over that bridge, or down that road, is going to be very, very nice.

NASA (bottom left) creates a powerful first impression with its gateways.

But nearing downtown League City (bottom right) this type of "gateway" doesn't inspire a big desire to stop, look around and spend time in the area.



What is your first impression of League City?



Suggestions: Remove the weeds. Replace the median asphalt with river rock, or better yet, street trees. Make a statement!



If developers are required to add street trees, beautifications, the city should follow suit. Work with TXDOT on median trees.



'Nuff said.



But the impression that the League City gateway areas give is very poor - as if the city doesn't care how it looks. Take a look at the three photos on this page (top two, bottom right). Welcome to League City.

Take advantage of your medians. Not only should the medians be kept weed-free, they should be planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers! Make a statement that League City takes pride in itself as a city; that it's a good place to live; that residents care for their city.

Notice the street trees in this residential sub-division (bottom left). Consider these in the median areas. Work with TxDOT on a beautification plan for your gateway areas.

If that doesn't lead to results, just remove the "welcome to League City" gateway signs and put them in an area where people get a good first impression.

Gateways into a downtown district or an attraction provide a sense of arrival and increase the perceived value of the destination. They can turn a district into a destination in its own right.

Signs aren't the only way to mark an entrance - these pillars and span in Lodi, California (top right) make a stunning gateway into Lodi's shopping district.

Market Street in the Woodlands (just north of Houston) has one of these monument signs on each side of the street (bottom right), creating a grand entrance into their shopping district.

This sign, with its waterfall, in Fallon, Nevada (bottom left) sets the downtown shopping district apart from the rest of the town, and makes a stunning centerpiece.





Chula Vista, California's Third Avenue gateway helped revitalize their downtown. By simply adding these gateways, they found that the merchants developed a new sense of unity, collaborating more regarding operating hours, marketing, and beautification efforts. Shoppers were drawn to the newly defined district.

Decorative crosswalks are an excellent way to separate the district and increase pedestrian safety at the same time.



The crosswalks shown on this page are stamped into the asphalt - they are not paint. Created by Streetprint™, based in Vancouver, BC, these crosswalks can be done in any design and color, so they're ideal for promoting a town's brand or theme.

Consider starting with decorative crosswalks, then add posts at the gateway, and finally, finish with a decorative element that spans the street.

Always consider the surroundings when you determine where to place your signage. Be careful not to allow the setting to contradict what your signs say - when a sign indicates a historic district, the surroundings need to support that image.

Consider screening unsightly backdrops with a cedar fence or landscaping.

The photos on this page are at the gateways into League City's core downtown area and signature park.

What's your first impression? Would you stop?



Coming the other direction, the gateway should be placed at about Iowa street. The beginning of the tree line and after...



This, which does not fit in the historic district.



Define the gateway into downtown.

These decorative posts (bottom right) in Kalamazoo, MI define the downtown district and make a very attractive gateway.

As downtown developed, they physically moved the gateways out an additional block.

This is a beautiful and eye-catching shop.



Kalamazoo, MI



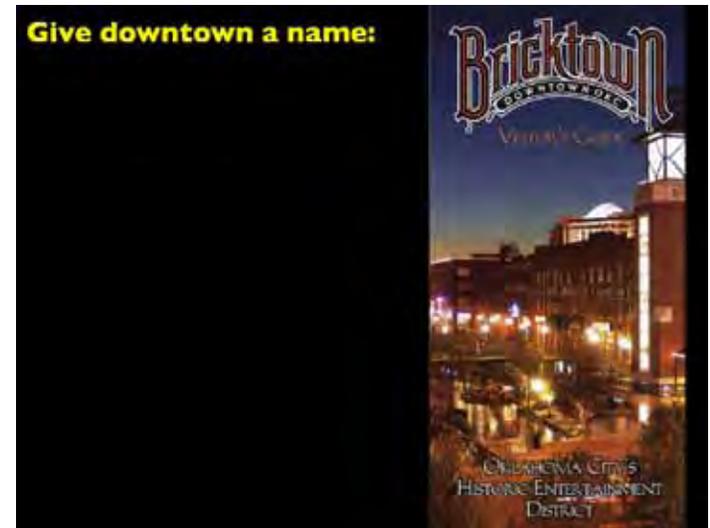
Giving downtown a name helps make it become a stand-alone destination in the minds of visitors, residents, and merchants. "Downtown" is a place. "Pearl Street" is a destination. A gathering place.

As you travel down a freeway and see signs for "business district" or even "downtown," does that pull you from the freeway? But if you saw "Pearl District - Downtown" you get a feeling that this is a destination, not just another business center.

Some popular downtowns:

- Vancouver, BC: Gastown
- Seattle, WA: Pioneer Square
- San Diego, CA: Gaslamp District
- San Antonio, TX: The Riverwalk
- Denver, CO: Larimer Square
- Boulder, CO: Pearl Street Mall
- Reading, OH: The Bridal District

Hundreds of downtowns are naming and identifying their districts, which makes them definitive destinations.





**Ingredient #6:
Third places**

The "First Place" is the place we live. Home.



Of the 400 towns DDI surveyed, one thing really stood out: The towns with "third places" were considerably more successful than those without.

One of the biggest challenges we found was that many people believe that beautiful streetscapes will revitalize a downtown. That's only half of the equation. At the end of the day, it's what's IN the buildings that really make an outstanding destination. The business mix.

The "Second Place" is the place we work



The "Third Place" is the place we go to hang out. Downtowns are back. Bring yours to life.



Successful "third places" attract people because, besides being beautiful spaces, they're full of life and activity. There's things to do.

A top priority should be to create "gathering spaces" in a pedestrian friendly setting - places where people like to congregate because they can be comfortable in attractive surroundings, there's a focal point and things to do.

The heart and soul of every community, besides its people, is its downtown. If locals won't "hang out" in your downtown, neither will visitors.

Take a look at these photos (this page) of Kemah's Boardwalk. They use gateways and wayfinding signs to create a real "sense of place." It makes the area "feel" welcoming and fun. Plus the wayfinding makes it easy to find attractions and amenities.

Even the Lighthouse District has a grand gateway. I just had to check it out.

This little community (Kemah) is probably importing a lot more cash than it exports (leakage). A "downtown" gateway!



A "community" gateway!



A district gateway!



And lots of it!



Pole banners creating a sense of place!



Places to hang out. Eat. Shop. Play!



Making your downtown become a "Third Place" requires planning on a pedestrian scale. Think about what people need and want when they're walking around. Sidewalks are one obvious requirement, and they need to be wide enough for several people to walk abreast.

Third Places are walkable places. Sidewalks should be no less than six feet wide. Preferable: 12'. This is in your historic district, which could, and should, become your third place.



This is the pedestrian side of the road and it doesn't have ANY sidewalks!

Recommendation (not a suggestion): Build one! How about behind the trees.

Sidewalks should have a buffer between the pedestrian and the street, if possible. Typically from 3 feet to 6 feet.

Crosswalks are also essential to provide a feeling of safety. Develop some!

In creating a Third Place, a park is a great place to start. To make it a great place to spend time, add additional outdoor furnishings - benches, tables and chairs.

Plaza areas are critical to any destination area.

What a showcase walkway this would be.



While you're at it, how about a couple of crosswalks!



The park is a great ingredient to third places, but are not third places in themselves.



It's a beautiful park with a focus on kids and families.



It would be good if it eventually had a single focus instead of a "something for everyone" mix of sports, playground...



Offices... Suggestion: Add a calendar of events readerboard here in this plaza area. Add tables and chairs. Make it a place to bring lunch.



Provide additional activities and events to keep it lively and make it attractive for people to hang out. How about a couple of tables with umbrellas? A great place to bring a lunch.

Keep up the maintenance too. (bottom right)

"League Park" is not exactly a sexy name for your signature park. Consider something that has some appeal. A name that makes it sound like a real destination, not just a municipal park.

Sports, recreation, kids activities, environment. Narrow the focus over time.



Suggestion: Can someone pick this up? The weeds are starting to overtake it. Eliminate the eyesores wherever possible.



Downtowns need to develop the Mall Mentality - where businesses work together to make the district more vibrant and successful. Some features of malls you should emulate:

- Like businesses grouped together (retail, restaurants, entertainment that fit the brand) - clustering.
- Businesses open consistent hours and days.
- Market the district as a whole, and promote the anchor businesses.



Successful downtowns need to have a "critical mass" of like businesses. This would include a minimum, in three lineal blocks:

- TEN places that sell food: soda fountain, coffee shop, bistro, cafe, fine dining, family restaurant, wine store, deli, bakery, confectionary
- TEN destination retail shops: galleries, antiques, home accents, outfitters, collectibles, books, kitchen supplies, garden, etc.
- TEN places open after 6:00 pm: entertainment, theater, performing arts, bars and bistros, specialty shops, dining, open air markets, etc.

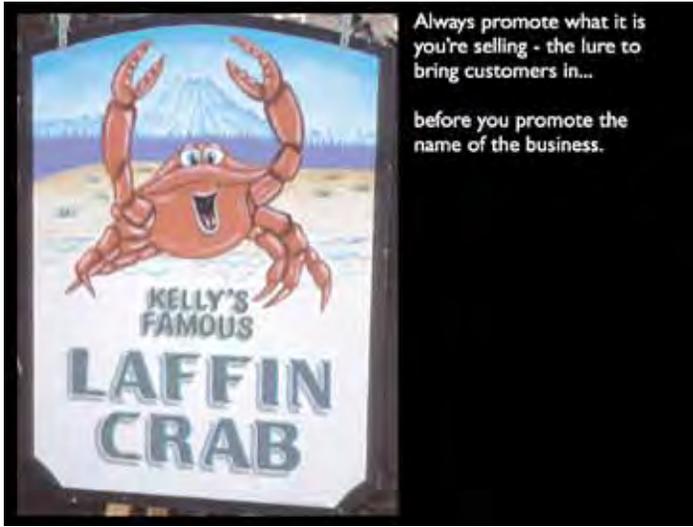
Founders Square suggestions: Remove the plant. Move the sign to the left. Use contrasting colors. Make it three times larger. Get attention!



As charming as Founders Square is, it doesn't provide enough critical mass to make it a stand-alone destination. Give them some help!



Suggestion: Promote what you sell before the name of the business. What is "It's All Good"?



Always promote what it is you're selling - the lure to bring customers in...

before you promote the name of the business.

- Think about the success of:
- Antique malls - 10 times the business when together.
 - Auto malls - 7 times the business when together.
 - Food courts, corner gas and fast food, lifestyle retail centers.

What attracts customers into your shop? Making it obvious that you offer something the customer wants or needs. Promoting what you sell is far more important than the name of your business.



Same here. Notice the owner added "jewelry" to the door.



Can you guess what kind of shop Kelly's Famous Laffin Crab is? (top right) Restaurant? Comedy club? They sold kites and windsocks. But who would know from the sign? Is it any wonder they're no longer in business?

Grizzly Ricks' Market (bottom left) in Jackson, Wyoming added the "Snacks, Sundries, Drinks" to his sign. He sold the "lure" instead of just the name of the store. Sales increased by 35%!

When like businesses are congregated together, the attraction can be powerful and dramatic.

Argyle Street in Halifax, Nova Scotia (photos top right and bottom two) is devoted almost entirely to dining. The 22 restaurants here (in just two blocks) have built decks over the sidewalks along one side of the street to accommodate tables and chairs.

During lunch and dinner hours every place is full. It has become the hotspot for dining in all of Nova Scotia. It proves the power of critical mass of like businesses grouped together - clustering.

Note the lush plantings that every restaurant has provided. Beautification is very important, and the restaurants all do their best to create an attractive setting. They've also used plants and planters as barriers to help create a feeling of intimacy for their dining patrons.

While the decks appear pretty "home made," they are nonetheless effective.

What is Nana's? Overall a charming development. Think Old Town Spring, and Salado.



Think Argyle Street in Halifax.

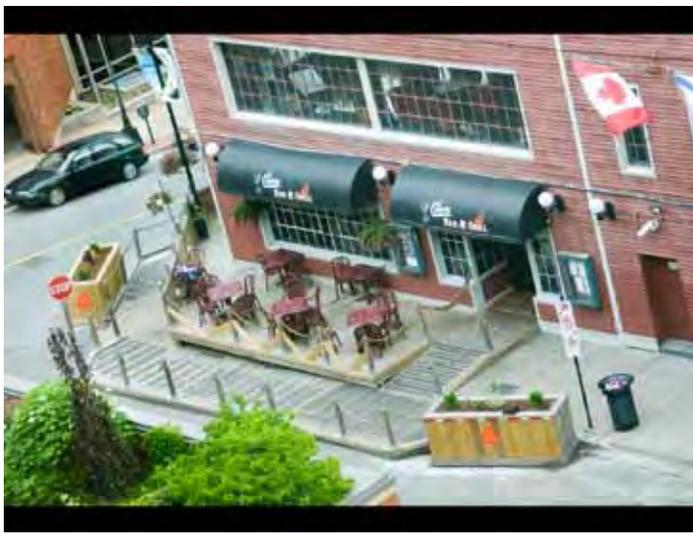




This page shows some additional restaurants on Argyle Street in Halifax. People congregate on the street in the evening for the many dining options available and the chance to eat outside. It's active year round.

The awnings create a sheltered feeling, and the planters with greenery and flowers make it beautiful.

People love to be able to dine outside, and seeing people sitting at their tables, eating, laughing, and having a good time is the best advertisement a restaurant can have.



You certainly aren't required to have so many restaurants, but this example illustrates the power of critical mass of like businesses grouped together.

The dining district in Halifax is now spilling down the side streets and neighboring blocks. The more you have to offer, the further people will come and the longer they will stay.

This development had a lot of potential, but never seemed to quite make it. Here are some suggestions for possible improvement:

- Make a visible connection between the park and the development, and make it easily accessible. The railroad tracks are like the Great Wall of China - a barrier rather than an invitation to connect the two areas.
- Remove as many of the barriers as possible (the hedge, the rail spur, the weeds.)
- Add sidewalks and patio areas.
- Recruit a critical mass of like businesses.
- Add a small stream or fountain. People are always drawn to water.

Someone had a great idea, but never pulled off what could have been a major destination for people throughout the county and beyond.



#1: It should be joined at the hip with the park. Get rid of the shrubs and put up picket fencing, with multiple crosswalks.



This is the Great Wall of China between the two. #2: Dress this up. Remove the vacated rail spur. Take care of the lawn area. Make it attractive, not an eyesore.



It's odd that it was built to face the park, yet it's totally disconnected from it.



And the street side is the back with absolutely no curb appeal of any kind, and no real pedestrian access to the front. Very strange.



With a critical mass of like businesses, this could be a real showcase and a real gathering place. #3: Add a row of street trees.



This development is very confusing. The "front" seems to be in the backyard. The gateway side (top left) is about as ugly as you can get. Perhaps this can be screened with street trees, fencing, or simple facade improvements.

It seems that someone had a good idea, but didn't know how to properly execute it, and never attracted the right mix of businesses. It's currently a hodge podge mix of professional services, empty spaces and a couple of retailers.

#4: Add a sidewalk! Patio areas! What happened here?

Add additional water features, or a small stream. People love water.



This COULD be a standout destination for locals - and visitors - if redeveloped with a strong focus and connections to the neighboring park.

Bring downtown to life with street entertainment. Musicians, performers, mimes, magicians, are all great draws for a downtown district.

Start with Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays during the peak season. Make it a place to attract locals from throughout the county, then visitors will follow.

Some cities have budgets for street entertainers, typically paying \$35 to each group or person. They make additional funds from tips.

People are attracted to vibrant places, and one way to help make downtown more active is to recruit street performers.

This magician is performing on the sidewalk in Cannon Beach, Oregon (top right).

Musicians in Asheville, NC (bottom right).

Musicians in Greenville, SC (bottom left).



There's no critical mass of like businesses here. Consignment shops are considered "neighborhood retail" as opposed to "destination retail."



It's a beautiful shop. Imagine if this was a home accents store. A garden and/or outdoor living shop.



Heading into Historic Main Street, one of the first things I notice is the charming ambiance. It was quite a surprise to find in this modern and very urban community.

I also noticed that there is no critical mass of like businesses, particularly destination retail. In order to become a destination shopping area, it's mandatory to have the critical mass of destination retail shops - consider home accents, garden shops, galleries, fashion boutiques, gifts and flowers, restaurants and coffee shops, wine shops and delis, bakeries.

This is very charming, but not inviting. Suggestion: Make it obvious you're open. Open the door. Books are a good fit for this area.



This shop in Grass Valley, CA (bottom right) does a great job enticing customers inside. Retailers need to do more than just unlock their doors. Create invitations - welcome customers into your shop with signs and beautification at your entry.

All in all, historic downtown League City has a lovely ambiance, but lacks the retail mix that will attract more locals and their visitors.

In order to bring a downtown to life, it's necessary to provide things for people to do. Ambiance alone won't do it.



This could be a great fit. Idea: Add more patio space instead of lawn area. Never did figure out what "Dinner Any Thyme" is.



Wrong fit. Great little place.



This could be an outstanding arts district. Or a dining district. Or a garden district with home accents, outdoor living shops, etc.

This little district has tremendous potential to become a great regional destination.

Very often, a downtown district ends up with many neighborhood services and retail, such as medical and dental clinics, insurance offices, attorneys, vacuum cleaner repair stores, and the like. These don't attract visitors, and generate very little foot traffic.

Not too sure what this is. Physical therapy practice? Yoga studio? If so: neighborhood retail. Great place though.



Private residence? A beautiful little place with lots of potential to fit into a destination retail district. Perhaps even a little B&B.



To attract residents and visitors, and give them a reason to spend time downtown, it's essential to offer "destination retail." Some communities have found that working with property owners to encourage them to lease to a destination retail business can gradually help turn the downtown into a more vibrant, successful place. Recruit those targeted businesses.

In a mall, the anchor tenant is the major store that attracts the most customers, i.e. Macy's or Bloomingdale's. While most people come to the mall for the anchor tenant, all the other shops benefit from the increased foot traffic. Downtowns must also have at least one anchor tenant. If League City doesn't yet have that anchor, one or two need to be recruited.

A good case of an anchor tenant is the Southern Baptist Texas Barbecue in Huntsville, Texas (bottom right). Would you eat there? The Barbecue was started as a fund raiser for the little church next door. You might not want to eat there unless you had heard about it - and many people have. Bus loads of visitors come from Houston and Dallas for lunch, and GQ Magazine listed it as one of their "top ten meals to fly for" in the world!

Be sure to promote your anchor businesses. Like every mall, every town relies on the anchor businesses to pull customers in. All the other businesses benefit by that.





Ottawa, Illinois, one and a half hours southwest of Chicago, produced a brochure to specifically promote their anchor tenants - "The Best of Ottawa" - each page includes one or two photos and descriptive text about a shop, and activity, or a restaurant, that visitors couldn't find closer to home (top left and right). They sent copies to each household in town to use when visitors came, plus they had a copy distributed to each car entering the nearby state park, which was very popular with Chicagoans.



Within six months, Ottawa's hotel occupancy rates increased by more than 30%, and their downtown shops were actually getting more business, not just from visitors, but from locals as well. Promoting your anchor tenants is a winning strategy.

Curb appeal can account for 70% of new sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, and golf courses.

Would you play golf at this club in Conroe, TX? (top left) How much would you pay to play a round of golf at the Jackpot, Nevada (top right) Golf Club? The Jackpot course is actually every bit as nice a course as the Wedgewood, but its sign reduces its perceived value.



Beautification is an investment with incredible returns.

The most successful downtowns have excellent curb appeal - the city and merchants jointly create beautiful streetscapes.

Note this storefront (bottom left) in Jonesborough, TN - all decked out in October's finest. Doesn't it make you want to linger?



This streetscape in Ellicottville, NY (bottom right) is also very inviting - the hanging baskets of flowers, tables and chairs, awnings and decorative signs create a stunning scene.





Blaine, Washington (top right) has revitalized downtown with gorgeous streetscapes. The merchants do their share too - this shop has brought some of their merchandise outdoors to make a very attractive display. The owner says the 20 minutes she spends every day doing so is easily worth the effort - it actually saved her business.



There are many ways merchants can attract customers into their shops. This shop owner in Omak, WA (bottom left) places the table and chairs outside, added the barrels with plants. She also sells ice cream, and regularly gives away ice cream cones to local kids, as long as they'll sit at the table outside. The sight of the kids eating ice cream cones pulls in dozens more customers, and they usually buy more than just ice cream.

Beautification doesn't have to be pots of flowers and shrubs. Look at Maggie Mae Mercantile's display (bottom right). Select store merchandise is artfully arranged, and the large "open" flag invites customers inside.

Neenah, Wisconsin (top photos) did a downtown makeover. Note the streetscape in the top left photo. Although it's clean and neat, compare it to the street just one block down, after the makeover (top right). Note how the planters soften the facades and create a fresher, more inviting sidewalk. Retail sales in the block with the beautification increased by more than 25% compared to that of the unbeautified block.

This restaurant in Fish Creek, Wisconsin attracts lots of customers with its inviting outdoor dining. The brightly painted building, Catalina umbrellas, and barrels of shrubs and flowers make the place stand out.



Suggestions: Add hanging baskets. Paint the building. Move the parking out 8' and put in an outdoor patio area. Develop a nicer sign.



This poor little sad business. This could be an absolute gem with some curb appeal. It's a fantastic fit to the district - if it gravitates to a destination retail focus.



Suggestion: Do a "best practices" trip to Fredericksburg. Get some ideas. It works!



Suggestion: Dig out the asphalt two feet all around the building (top left) and plant ivy on trellises. Put large pots with colorful flowers out front. Add outdoor tables and chairs with Catalina umbrellas. Paint some vines on the building as well. This Wine Bar & Bistro could be a showcase and attract customers from all over the region!

Fredericksburg, Texas (population 12,000) hosts nearly three million visitors annually and is the most visited small town in Texas. Visitors drive from Dallas, Houston and San Antonio - hours away - to spend weekends in this charming town (photos top right and bottom.)



The merchants have created a beautiful setting (three photos this page) with potted shrubs, planters, annual color, window boxes, decorative signage, beautiful lighting, benches, and covered sidewalks. These photos were taken in March - and the hill country has some wild temperature swings. Most of the plantings are evergreen.

Consider a "best practices" mission to Fredericksburg!

70% of all consumer spending takes place after 6:00 p.m. If you're not open evening hours, you're missing most of the shoppers! When downtown stores are open after 6:00, they attract more foot traffic and more activity. Visitors prefer to stay in places where there's something to do after 6:00. And, the stores need to be open consistent hours and days.

People are looking for activities - not just scenery. Provide activities and entertainment downtown.

Consider developing a permanent open-air market downtown. Open-air markets have been steadily growing in popularity for residents as well as visitors. People are drawn to the activity and vibrancy of that type of market place, as well as the opportunity to interact with the farmers and craftspeople who sell their wares. Open-air markets usually have the feeling of a festival, and people love it.



Ingredient #1:
Activities after 6:00



Ingredient #12:
Activities & entertainment
Experiences over architecture



70% of all consumer spending takes place after 6:00 pm. Are you open?



Fallbrook, California





Fallbrook, CA (photos this page) removed a dilapidated building from their downtown, and turned the space into this permanent open-air market, as part of their downtown revitalization strategy.

This open air market is on a corner lot - approximately 70 feet by 80 feet in size. The city leases it to a local business person who operates the market and earns a living from vendor space rentals.

These types of markets change by season from produce and food goods, to landscape goods, artists in action, to music shows, to seasonal holiday displays: a Christmas tree forest, for example.

One of the key ingredients for a successful downtown is providing “gathering places.” People love to be in active, vibrant, beautiful surroundings - with other people. These can be plaza areas, wide sidewalks, or “bump-outs” - sidewalks that bump out into the street in place of a parking space or two.

Kalamazoo, MI, has invested in several downtown gathering areas including Arcadia Creek Festival Place (top right) - after seeing the success of their first one, they went on to create additional plaza areas (bottom left). By developing these places, they became popular event venues and now Kalamazoo is a very popular weekend destination for visitors living in both Chicago and Detroit.

Granbury, Texas (bottom right) has encouraged restaurants to develop outdoor dining areas - with live music.



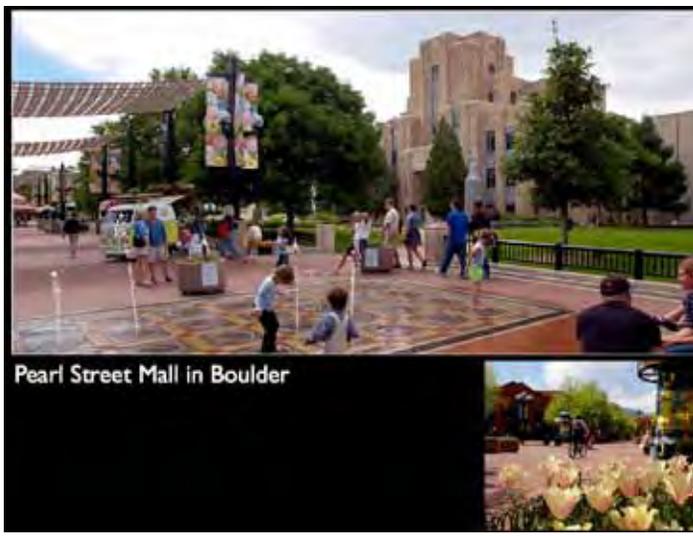


Pedestrian-friendly areas provide locations for outdoor dining and socializing. The pictures on these pages show several successful downtown districts that have become very popular destinations. Note the features they have in common: walkability, beautification, places to sit, places to dine, things to do.

Turn your downtown parks into plaza areas. It's worked in Italy and throughout Europe for centuries. We seem to be slow learners in the U.S. People now want out of their cars and away from asphalt.

Santa Barbara (top left) has done an excellent job making downtown a major gathering spot for both locals and visitors.

Encourage outdoor dining - even if you have to lose a couple of parking spots so you can extend sidewalks - and bring downtown to life.



A great example of turning downtowns into gathering places can be found in Asheville, North Carolina (top left and right), which has become THE destination along the entire 500 mile Blue Ridge Parkway. With lots of outdoor dining and entertainment, people love to visit.

Asheville might be another city to consider visiting. They have done an amazing transformation over the last ten years. Tourism in Asheville (population 70,000) is \$1.7 billion annually. That's right - "billion."

At Newport on the Levee (bottom right and left), across the river from Cincinnati, restaurants focus on exterior dining - even during the winter months.

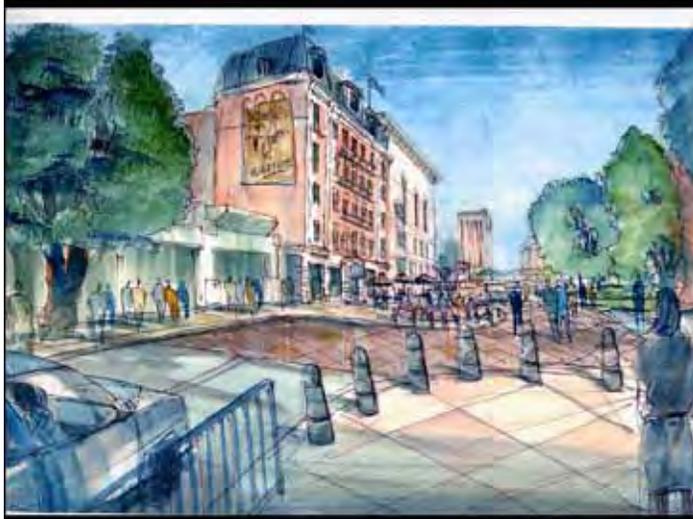


Think benches.



Be sure to add benches to your streetscapes! Provide places for weary spouses to rest during all that shopping.

Stockton, CA (top right) has been looking into creating gathering spaces downtown by narrowing this wide street and creating interesting bulb-outs. (bottom two conceptual drawings) They would define the pedestrian areas with bollards, add trees and shrubs, tables, chairs and benches.

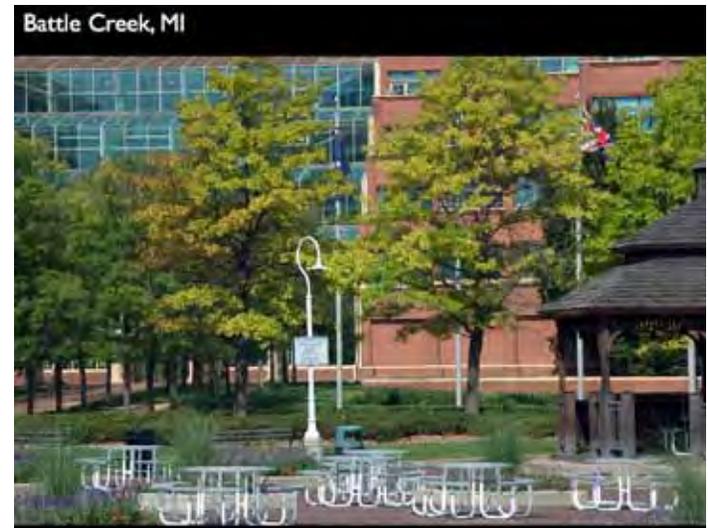


One of Stockton, CA's existing gathering spaces (top left). The tall arbors give a focus and architectural detail to the space, making it feel more sheltered.

Outdoor dining areas don't need to be fancy - these picnic tables with umbrellas in Sisters, OR (top right) attract lots of customers.

In Lodi, CA, this restaurant (bottom left) has sectioned off an outdoor dining space from the sidewalk with short wrought-iron fencing. Note how the large banners add a festive flair.

In Battle Creek, MI (bottom right) this open plaza is filled with light metal picnic tables and benches. During lunchtime, they are filled with office workers enjoying the sunshine.





Treat customers like guests.
Welcome them!

This restaurant in Banff, AB (top right) not only entices patrons in by posting their menu, they created a decorative display for the menus that tells customers how much they value their patronage.

A sign that just says "Closed" is like telling a visitor to go away. Instead of posting a "closed" sign, use signs like these (bottom photos). Tell the customer you want them to come back, and let them know when you'll be open.



Other notes and first impressions:

Your Visitor Information Center should be the easiest thing to find from the freeway. Make sure your wayfinding starts there, and continues all the way.

Consider using murals to disguise and beautify some buildings, especially in your historic district. Consider trompe l'oeil, (French for "fool the eye") to disguise blank walls with scenes and architectural details painted so they look real.

The variations of trompe l'oeil are endless. The photo bottom right shows a blank wall painted to look like the outside of an old-fashioned grocery store. The awnings, the windows and doors, even some of the shrubs, are painted.

I did find the Visitors Center - but wayfinding needs to start immediately after exiting the freeway.



A very nice spot and well maintained. Wish it was closer to Main Street!



Yuck! Can we add some color to this building? This is in your "historic" district. Suggestion: Muralize this building.





The photos on this page show murals in progress.

The blank wall, and the work in progress (bottom left), and the completed work of art. This wall was originally an entirely blank brick building - even the archway is painted.

The top photos show another work in process. The original wall was blank concrete. At left you can see the artist at work, and on the right is the finished wall.



In the photos bottom right, you again see a before and after glimpse of a wall.

This page shows four more examples of trompe l'oeil. The top left photo shows a concrete block wall in Virginia City, Nevada. With the town's gold rush heritage and historic theme, a blank concrete wall was unsightly and out-of-place. This mural makes the building look like it belongs and it easily fits the town's brand. All the brick, the railing, the windows, and even trim are all part of the mural.



A famous mural in Winslow, Arizona (top right) depicts a famous Eagles song. This wall is entirely painted as well - the bricks, all the windows, even the reflections in the windows are painted. This mural attracts nearly 1.5 million visitors a year, who also spend money in downtown Winslow.



Huntsville, Texas did a "Facade Easement" program.



Bottom left and right photos are in Huntsville, TX, which used a facade easement program to assist property and business owners in getting their buildings painted.



And while you're at it, do this one across the street.



Thank goodness. A wayfinding sign.



This building (top left) is a good candidate for a mural.

I found the children's museum - it is very nice looking. It was closed, and no hours were posted, so I didn't know when I could return, or if it might be closed permanently. Always let visitors know what your open hours are - invite them back!



It's a children's museum? Very charming. When is it open?



What makes a museum successful is its ability to tell stories. Stories captivate people, educating and entertaining them at the same time. Stories make the artifacts come alive, and they endear visitors to your city. Displays of artifacts without stories are frequently boring to most people and make it a “been there, done that” attraction.

The average museum visit lasts between 20 and 40 minutes. But, if you can captivate the visitor for two hours, spending will increase, because the visitors will be in town longer, and want to get another meal, do some more shopping, etc.

Children’s museums are usually full of activities, and that is excellent, keeping them involved and excited.

Is this a different museum or part of the same one? Suggestion: Put out a sandwich board with your hours. Make sure you tell stories.



There are some beautiful homes in this area. Too bad they put up the Christmas lights so early. Suggestion: Walking tour of the homes?



Yes, I eventually found Big League Dreams. A nice community asset.



I also saw the two new hotels being built across the freeway. Looks like the retail, shopping, and sporting facilities are moving south.



League City actually has a lot it can offer visitors, as well as its residents.



This is a beautiful park.



This beautiful park was one of my favorite things in League City.

If there isn't a place to rent kayaks and canoes already, look into the feasibility of starting a small rental facility. New small business opportunities such as this can provide more for visitors to do, keeping them in town longer.

Could this be part of an incredible trail system that includes land and water? It was a pleasure to see this in a predominately urban setting.

The interpretive displays and walkways are terrific.



Can a person rent kayaks in League City? Perhaps a vendor opportunity at the park.



Consider adding an amphitheater to this stunning park! It would provide a wonderful place to present plays, hold concerts, have puppet shows, etc.

This small amphitheater in Greenville, SC (bottom right) has proven very successful.





These amphitheaters in Carson City, NV and Lethbridge, AB (top photos) provide a location for events as well as performances.

The other five ingredients to an outstanding destination include:

16. Convenient long term parking. Two hour parking is a spending killer. Always provide places for four-hour or all-day parking.

17. Public restrooms are an economic development tool.

18. 24 hour visitor information using free standing or building mounted kiosks.

19. People living in downtown, or within walking distance. Downtown lodging is a very fast-growing trend.

20. Start with one or two blocks - make it a demonstration project.



Ingredient #15:
Pioneers with patient money



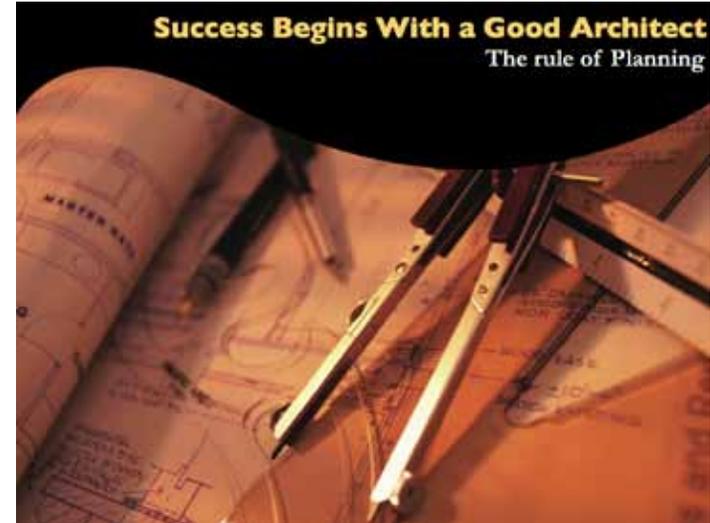
Start with an action plan - a to-do list of actions to achieve your goals.

Remember that history isn't a point in time. Today is the day you start creating new history for League City.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." -Margaret Mead

"If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room." -Unknown

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." -Ralph Waldo Emerson



...nice neighborhoods.



Thanks for the "room with a view" at the South Shore Harbor Resort.



League City is a beautiful city that totally surprised me. After working in Texas for the last 15 years, NASA, the Kemah Boardwalk, Galveston and other places in the immediate area were places I knew about, but League City was just a place you passed through.

I had no idea that the city has so much to offer. This is why you must move beyond just being a bedroom community.

What a beautiful area.



Yes, I had a blast on my too-short-of-a-stay in League City.



League City, Texas Distance Marketing Assessments

The following pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Distance Marketing Assessment #1 Part 1

From South Houston, where are the top three places you would move to? Why?

Based on website information and phone calls to a number of southern Texas communities, my top three choices for a place to move are:

Friendswood; 2) Alvin; and 3) Sante Fe. Here's why...All three of these towns are smaller towns, but are close enough to Houston and/or Galveston that anything you could want is available within a short drive. All three are a slight distance from the coast. I asked every city I phoned about hurricane frequency, and these three gave me the most assurance that their natural disasters are relatively infrequent (about every 20 years).

Friendswood, all around, provided the most inviting and appealing portrayal of their community. Their website masthead shows a large photo with parks, lots of trees, nicely landscaped areas. This smaller town of 34,000 would be just right for feeling like you were in a somewhat rural setting, but would still give you the "best of both worlds." Friendswood is just 24 miles from Houston and only 29 miles from the coast at Galveston. A fairly quick trip would land you in a large city if you wanted to

find bigger name entertainment and culture as well as being able to enjoy a greater diversity of restaurants.

Alvin, TX – I chose Alvin, TX as my #2 choice because Alvin is a small town (22,000) and still maintains its small town atmosphere despite its close proximity to Houston and Galveston. The city is self-contained with shopping and everyday needs all available right here. Alvin's activities and attractions provide a number of things to keep you busy if you don't feel like venturing out onto the highways and into traffic.

Sante Fe is my #3 choice, slightly behind Friendswood and Alvin. Santa Fe with a population of only 10,500 is a little small for my liking but would still closely fit the criteria I set for my search. A larger community would provide better business opportunity, however with the close proximity of Sante Fe to Texas City (41,000 pop.) you could easily open a business there and commute the 10 miles.

Part 2

In my initial research to find the top three southern Texas cities I would move to, I chose Friendswood, Alvin and Sante Fe. Even though League City was not among these choices, yes, I definitely did look at League City early in the process. League City fit my basic criteria of being a smaller town a slight distance from the coast. Here's why I continued looking at other cities without making League City one of my top consideration.

One of my first searches was "Houston suburbs."

Here I came upon a link to www.city-data.com/ where I began searching for the various cities on the designated corridor from Pasadena to Galveston. When I typed in League City, I was shocked to see how drastically the population has changed! From 1990 to 2000 the population more than doubled.

Then I did a search just for League City, TX and landed on the official website at www.leaguecity.com/. The overlapping photos on the masthead were difficult to distinguish. The basic idea to portray trees, gardens, etc. is good but simplifying and choosing one or two good photos might be a better idea. And, make the photos larger so viewers can tell what they are.

Then below that, the majority of this home page was a downer for me as far as thinking of League City as a possible new home. The largest item on the page talks about water rationing (I'm thinking— is there enough water there?), and the photo of the water droplet is green (is there quality water?). The second item talks about bridge demolitions (I'm thinking are the roads safe? Is there constant road construction to keep up with increased traffic from the population growth?). The third item is Hurricane Awareness—definitely not something I am drawn to think about for my new residence.

These items could still be mentioned on the website as they are newsworthy and important, but could be downplayed considerably. Find ways to make the home page more inviting, welcoming, mention positive events or attractions about the

town instead of putting only the problems out there in front. Replace the center of the page with inviting photos of the town, even if it means hiring a professional photographer for a time to record the best of the best in League City. Then include some of these shots on your home page—and not just little thumbnails! Make them captivating shots, some with people too. Also, try to clean up the page by organizing topics a little better. Menus and text on three sides of the page are pretty overwhelming.

After receiving the Part 2 questions, I continued my research of League City. I clicked on the League City relocation link listed on Google Maps www.league-city-tx-relocation.com/. This site is definitely more inviting, but it says 65,000 residents currently live here. Yikes—this means that the population has actually tripled since 1990! With growth this substantial, I question how well the community planners have kept up, is the infrastructure adequate? How bad is the traffic? Road conditions, adequate sewers, health care availability? Is there some way to alleviate these fears of potential new residents and assure them that all is well?

This site has some OK photos though they could be much larger, and then I noticed that the same photos are in the masthead, laced amongst the text below, again, the same three photos under the link “Pictures of League City,” and again under the Lifestyle and Culture link. I would bet League City has more beautiful public areas rather than using these same three private homes over and over again. Find your diversity, then show the

beauty of every type of park, terrain, vegetation, water—pictures tell a thousand words—professional photographs would be money well spent to show the world what you have! Another repetition on this page was that the left menu bar has three different links to order a relocation guide. One prominent button for this would be enough.

Digging a little deeper on this website I found a link three clicks deep under Links of Interest to www.visitleaguecity.com/. This is a pretty good website for finding what you need to visit and enjoy the sites and events. But it didn’t even come up on the search for League City.

I stumbled on the League City Chamber website www.leaguecitychamber.com/ by accident, and was surprised it is not included on the relocation website (that I could find), not even in the League City Hotlinks. This website is finally giving me a taste of what League City is about—marinas, sailing, events that really distinguish your town—Yachty Gras Night Boat Parade, Village Fair & Texas Music Festival, Keels & Wheels – Classic Cars and Vintage Boats, South Shore Dockside Food and Wine Festival. But these treasures are buried pretty deeply within the website. And, then I found the online relocation guide—a much better portrayal of the beautiful and special place you have.

I continued my research by phoning the City of League City. Your city employees are a great resource for you. I mentioned my impressions of League City from your website and she had a calm and rationale explanation for each, and

eased my anxiety considerably. She said League City still has a small town feel even though the population has grown so much and there is more commercialization. She told me it is still much different than the Houston or Galveston areas. By the time we hung up I was ready to get on a plane and plan for a couple of weeks there to “spend some time—see what feels right.”

I really would like to visit this area to see the sites on the gulf coast and take in some of the events I mentioned above. Since I have family in the Dallas area, yes, I would definitely make a special trip there. It would be fun to spend several days or a long weekend enjoying the water, seafood, boats, and a warmer climate. I would probably avoid the hotter, more humid times of the year and make this outing one with my spouse and other adult relatives. It would be fun to take in a boat ride or two, witness some of the boat races, relax on the beach, wine and dine.

I still don’t think I would relocate anywhere in south Texas because of the heat, humidity, hurricane threat, and the number of people. I phoned a number of towns in the Pasadena to Galveston corridor—Nassau Bay, Webster, Shore Acres, Friendswood, Sante Fe—and almost every one spoke of how it’s getting more difficult to tell where Houston ends and Galveston begins.

Other suggestions to improve marketing and appeal:

Finding the “gems” in League City needs to be much

easier. Bring links for Tourism, Trails, etc. to the main pages for more prominence. Photos of some of the events (people having fun!) is a great way to draw attention to them.

It would be good for the City, Chamber, visitleaguecity, and the relocation website to work together. Crosslink to each, decide what role each website will play then encourage each other to do that one part well.

Concentrate on keywords and metatags so search engines will bring you closer to the top. And/or pay for some Google keywords if you have to.

The very first search I did was “living in south TX” which brought up “the cons of living on the south TX coastline” on the top of the list. After reading that list, I wasn’t sure I wanted to live anywhere in southern Texas!! A first suggestion might be to do some search engine work to displace the negatives and bring more positive information to the top for your entire area.

My next search was for Houston, TX. I went to www.houstontx.gov/ where I then clicked on a drop down link “I Want To...Relocate to Houston.” Unfortunately the Relocation Guide link takes you to a media kit or guide for those interested in advertising in the guide. I couldn’t find a link anywhere to request a copy of this relocation guide. First, League City should advertise in the guide, then make sure the Houston website provides a link to the guide for those interested in moving to the Houston area.

Distance Marketing Assessment #2 Part 1

A quick look at the AAA Road Atlas and I see that between Pasadena and Galveston, near the coast, the communities of: La Porte, Seabrook, Webster, League City, and Dickinson and all seem like possibilities. I think I’ll give Houston a quick call (713-437-5556) and see what they suggest. I am transferred twice and then given the number to the Clearlake/Space Center Visitor’s Bureau (866-611-4688), which is really the Bay Area Visitor’s Bureau. I’m transferred again and finally settle in for a nice, 22-minute chat with their representative. He closed the sale like no one I’ve talked to in a long time. He suggested we start our visit in La Porte as it is on the water and has a great restaurant called the Monument Inn and the Battleship Texas that is huge and will keep us busy for a couple hours. We should then head to the Clearlake/NASA area to visit the Space Center and then head to the Kemah Boardwalk for an evening of carnival rides (“this is a real nice carnival, not your ‘just came to town’ carnival”) and 8 restaurant choices all with beautiful views of the water and a nice breeze. He went on to describe the Armand Nature Park, the exotic animal wildlife park near Dickinson, the Haak winery, League City’s historic downtown with lots of boutiques and also the Lighthouse Shopping District near the Kemah Boardwalk.

La Porte’s #1 web site on Google is La Porte, Texas (laportetexas.net) and the pictures on the home page make it very inviting. I think with a name like La Porte (because anything said in French always

sounds a bit more sophisticated), the website could use the wonderful pictures but upgrade the layout. While white space is a very good thing, they could use just a bit less of it. A quick read about its history, which sounds like a great small town, and on to the demographics—oops that page “cannot be found”. Returning to the home page I am able to load the PDF demographics file. This is a long document done in 2005, while I found it interesting, you could put the information easily into a few charts and make it much easier for the potential business to get a quick snapshot.

I give them a call (281-471-1123), and I speak briefly with a 19 year old woman who tells me she has grown up there and loves it. The town is the “perfect size” and if you want more you can always go to Houston or south to the Kemah/Dickinson area. She doesn’t close the sale as she just wants to send me info and then I can call back and ask her questions. She doesn’t mention the Monument Inn or Battleship Texas. She gives me the number for the Dickinson Chamber, but it is disconnected. I also try the Main St. Assoc. (281-471-4600), but it too has been disconnected.

The LaPorte-Bayshore website is pretty classic, lots of white space but all the important info listed—local attractions, dining, accommodations and contact information. The attractions page has a decent list and the ever-helpful direct links to most places, however they need pictures and direct links to every suggestion. Sadly, only two of the four links work. I am surprised that the Battleship Texas is not listed, nor is the San Jacinto Monument.

Clicking on Demographics I am hoping for a quick review, however I am taken once again to the same PDF document I mentioned above. Since Dave mentioned how great the Monument Inn is I easily find it on the Chamber site with a direct link and wow (www.monumentinn.com/) what a home page! This website has great information and appears to be in a fabulous location, however they could really benefit from some professionally done photographs on a nice sunny day, it would make all the difference!

I need to move south, League City sounds interesting. Easily found on the web (www.leaguecity.com/) it appears to be older than it sounds, the name makes me think of a new suburban town. There is no Visitors Tab; perhaps Links of Interest will be more interesting. They need an "About League City" tab just to give background information and some demographics. The links page buries Tourism, History and Local Links—let's get these out on the home page. The history is written too tiny to bother with, and I move on to Tourism. Please add some photos, larger type and instead of having to click again, just list all the sources on this page. Wow, one click on Tourism and Fun and I am whisked away to a beautiful website (www.visitleaguecity.com/). This needs to be on the City's Home page as a direct link; having to click three times to get here requires perseverance. The Amusements page is perfection! Logos, addresses, phone numbers and a link that gives you a direct link make exploring super easy. Finding their phone number is easy and I have a delightful chat with a CVB rep. She couldn't have been friendlier and was

going to leave a packet of info. on the doorstep in case we got to town late. She suggested we stay the South Shore Harbour Resort since it has a pool and a great restaurant. She said the whole area has "gobs" of good food and lots of variety. She mentioned the Kemah boardwalk and Schlitterbahn water slides in Galveston. I asked her about moving there and which school districts could she recommend. She told me that she knew a few experienced realtors that could help us once we got more serious about our move. She told me that the best website for the area is Visit Bay Area Houston.

This is a busy CVB (www.visitbayareahouston.com/) site, but I always love rotating pictures on the home page as it gives a great overview of the scenery—well-done Bay Area. Love the direct link to Seabrook. Great tourism site as all essentials are listed on the home page with detailed tabs. I'm very impressed with all the parks in Seabrook. Love that the Places to Eat has tabs divided by type of restaurant, very helpful. I like the listing under Things to Do, but I think they need a tab for Nearby Attractions, since they are so close to the Space Center and boardwalk, etc. I am impressed with their boating tab—so many options. A quick look at Local Information and I can tell this is a pretty small community as it doesn't have a high school and they have a volunteer fire department. It looks like a quaint town and has a quaint motto.

Webster needs a look and they have a wealth of information, maybe a bit too much on their home page. They do have a great page for attractions

and accommodations with direct links. Their phone number is listed on numerous pages so I give them a ring and am rewarded with a very well spoken gentleman that is the best seller of the day. In our 15-minute chat he gives me a wealth of information about the area and lodgings. One of his best sells was telling me to pick up the Dining and Entertainment Guide so that I could get coupons for the Space Center and numerous restaurants around Webster. He thinks it is the perfect spot as it is exactly halfway between Houston and Galveston. The town is only 6.7 square miles with 9,000 people but they will keep you busy with the Main Event Entertainment Center and the Putt-putt golf Funhouse.

I find Dickinson under the North Galveston County Chamber of Commerce. This is a very clear website and I like their graphic that represents the four cities. I was hoping that the Event Pictures would give me a view to the area, but it is all people. There is no visitor tab and the membership directory shows 19 restaurants. I find a link to Keep Dickinson Beautiful that shows me that there is a group that wants to preserve Dickinson's green space. I am not having much luck getting any more information. Googling it gives me the city data site. The Chamber could definitely improve its visitor information.

I would consider La Porte, League City and Seabrook.

Part 2

In my previous assessment, I had discovered League City (LC) and had a great conversation with a representative at the CVB. Going back to their website, I decided Links of Interest would help me and they guided me to the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership. This is a great website offering lots of data on all the cities between Pasadena and Galveston. I would start by investigating the different districts. In a quick review, the Clear Creek and Friendswood ISD's are ranked higher than La Porte, Pasadena and Dickinson. A quality school district can generally indicate a higher socio economic class and a slightly higher tax base. Scrolling further down this website I find all the Bay Area's EDC sites listed and click on LC's site. Its central location would be very appealing if I was moving there; 25 minutes each way to Houston or Galveston. I am curious about the demographics. It is refreshing to see that there are estimates for 2008 as the Bay Area stats were all 2007 or further back. All the stats are very clearly displayed and easy to read. LC is appealing, great climate, a nice size city of 68,500 and growing, numerous healthcare facilities, affordable housing, and once again the SAT and ACT scores are higher in LC compared to Dickinson.

I need to compare LC's site to others: La Porte has a bad link, as does Seabrook. Friendswood's site is not as pleasing as LC's site, they have a lot of text describing each tab, however the Fast Facts are helpful. This is a much smaller town than LC, lower crime rate and quality school district. LC does not

offer an income analysis, which is very interesting and I think a good way to compare cities.

Moving on to Dickinson's EDC site I land on an insurance ad (www.dickinsonedc.com/). Webster offers a lengthy PDF document that is hard to review online.

Calling a friend who moved to LC about 18 months ago, I wanted to know how she selected it from all the surrounding communities. She is a high school teacher and her husband works in the shipping industry. They chose LC because of the proximity to both Houston and Galveston's harbors. They also own a boat and wanted a nearby marina. They really liked the small town feel and the older established neighborhoods. Another factor was to be a bit further inland and on higher ground to avoid gulf flooding and storm insurance. Finally, the higher socio economic level and highly educated population was also a draw. They have been very happy with their choice and love being so near to so many tourism sites, but not living with tourists like you would if you lived in Kemah or Webster.

Granted I'm biased by my friend's experience, but LC sounds like a pretty nice place to live and the older neighborhoods really are very pretty.

Would I vacation there???? First, a quick look at Kemah as everyone I have spoken to mentions it. Wow it looks very honkytonk. I think I would like to spend an afternoon and evening here, but not stay here, as it seems like it would be really busy and possibly loud.

Referring to the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce's long list of accommodations there are numerous possibilities in Seabrook and Webster and only one listing for LC. Most of the listings are large corporate hotels/inns, The Old Parsonage Guest House in Seabrook catches my eye, it looks quaint but they seem to be having technical difficulties, as I couldn't access all the info. LC's offering is the South Shore Harbour Resort and Conference Center, and it sports a lovely web page, however it looks awfully large. I think it would be great for a group or family.

Back to the LC's CVB site, one suggestion I would make would be to fill the black empty ad boxes with something, pretty views, even some text that says "your ad here" would better than black holes. Wow, where to stay gives me two choices?? The South Shore HR or a Super 8 and two RV parks. Revisiting the Bay Area Houston site I realize that any independent inn or small hotel will most likely be in the Kemah area. There are numerous small places, both www.clipperhouseinn.com and www.edgewaterinnkemah.com/ catch my eye. I have to admit I am a bit startled by the accommodation situation: either nationwide motel/hotels or mainly B and Bs, no boutique hotels to be found. Found LC's fun site (www.leaguecityfun.com/) but they aren't showing me anything new.

They do lead me to LC's chamber site, and they offer a great treatise on Why League City? Also, I finally find household income and it shows a nice upper middle class income level. This website needs to be glammed up a bit—it looks too governmental.

There is a wealth of information on this website and the tabs are set up well. What it needs is more contemporary graphics, lots of pictures, larger type on the pages (Why LC?) and graphics (charts, icons) to describe or illustrate all LC's strengths. I would also like to see the historic downtown and information about shopping and antique stores.

Returning to CVB website to investigate shopping I was surprised that all the shopping mentioned is in malls or on the Kemah boardwalk—support LOCAL! The woman at the CVB and my friend mentioned that LC's downtown had some great little boutiques.

I wouldn't spend the night in LC as I don't like either option, I might visit for an afternoon. I would drive through it on the way to Seabrook or Kemah. I would try to visit in the spring or fall, as summer would be too hot for me. I would probably visit with my family as there are so many attractions nearby. I would not fly from Seattle but would probably drive two to three hours to visit the area.

I want to visit LC, but I'm not convinced I would find enough to do there. I realize it is close to the Space Center, Kemah, and other amusements, but a vacation isn't relaxing if all your time is spent in the car. I'm wondering if the downtown really is quaint? Living it and Loving it are great, but a visitor needs an invitation... League City invites you to relax, League City welcomes you to the center of the Bay Area. Center yourself in LC—make it the spa, yoga, health retreat of the bay area—just an idea.

Distance Marketing Assessment #3 Part 1

My first criteria for any new home would be that I live in very close proximity to open water. So, I would want to live in a waterfront city. This narrowed my search to those communities on the water from Pasadena to Galveston, Texas. My first stop for information for all the towns I researched was my National Geographic Family Reference Atlas, followed by Wikipedia. Subsequent information sources are listed in the entries below.

A general note: there's an understandable amount of general and specific references to Hurricane Ike in nearly all the information sources I used. However, they leave me wondering why in the world I would want to move to the hurricane prone gulf coast during an era of increased hurricane activity (see recent articles in National Geographic Magazine, and online version). In initial order of preference, my three top choices are:

Seabrook – Honestly, I like the name of this town, it evokes a picturesque quality by itself. While not large, the town's proximity to NASA and Houston seems to have resulted in a middle and upper-middle class bedroom community that would attract the kinds of services I am interested in. Seabrook is also a growing community, which is important from the standpoint of being a small business owner. Its Pelican Project and success as a weekend tourist destination reflect a strong sense of community pride.

Clear Lake Shores – The median income and close proximity to Houston are attractive, even if the town itself is very small. Its boating focus is very appealing. The city's website has beautiful photos of the community and mentioning features like the farmer's market add to its attractiveness.

Shoreacres –Lack of its own services and attractions (other than access to the water and yacht club) would be made up by its closeness to Houston. The Flickr photo gallery I accessed from the city's web site showed too many photos from Hurricane Ike to really serve as a lure for future residents, but I would still be interested in learning more.

Now, if I were allowed to include Galveston itself I would (I don't know if people in Galveston would consider themselves as living in a "suburb of Houston" as the assignment directions dictate). Though much further away from Houston, Galveston is large enough to contain all the amenities and has some rich history and corresponding historic districts that add aesthetic and architectural appeal to the community for me. The university and college presence generally means added cultural opportunities that also interest me. Its popularity as a cruise ship port bodes well for tourism related business opportunities.

Other communities I looked at but dismissed:

- Taylor Lake Village– yes, it's upper middle class and very lovely looking, but it's adjacent to lakes, not the gulf. I'd prefer the bigger body of water.
- Baycliff (Bayview)– too small, lower socio-

economic indicators

- San Leon – same issues as Baycliff
- Texas City – oil refineries and history of disasters caused by industrial shipping,
- Morgan’s Point – too small and industrial with its shipping container port area,
- League City, Texas.

Part 2

In my initial search I didn’t even glance at League City as it is not on open water, my personal main criteria for Part 1 of this assessment. The name didn’t even register in my mind since my map searches did not show League City as a waterfront community. Now looking it up on Wikipedia, I do see that it’s a sizeable community with some history and a fairly affluent resident base.

Looking at League City as a potential place to live in Part 2 of this assessment, assuming that I have abandoned my personal criteria for water access, I am impressed by what I see at the city’s official website. The slide show features some lovely photos (except the railroad tracks ... they could find something more visually appealing to convey history) and interesting tid-bits. Even the stock photos used to highlight information on water rationing and traffic construction are aesthetically pleasing – a wise move creating an overall positive impression. The bells and whistles seem to stop at the home page, and I think they are missing an opportunity to augment the functional Events Calendar page with photos and links to any websites related to events. Beyond the marketing

tools, the events calendar seems to be devoid of any June – August special events that a tourist or potential new resident would find interesting. Are the Police Civil Service Test and Economic Development Corporation luncheon really the only things going on in town? No Fourth of July parade or picnics? No farmers markets, cookouts, fairs?

On to the Destination League City Convention & Visitors Bureau website, which has a colorful home page. Having been disappointed by the city’s events calendar, I immediately clicked on the Events page here and found just what I was looking for. The Oak Tree Festival mention included a link to that site, which in one sentence informs me that there is both a Historical District and Heritage Foundation in League City, both great attributes pointing to cultural opportunities and city pride. I was excited to click on the schedule for the festival, but found a page that said the schedule was still being put together. That doesn’t make sense for an event that happened just days ago. The Vendors and Entertainment pages also include planning information, not marketing information to promote this year’s offerings. Did the Oak Tree Festival even happen this year?

The South Shore Dockside Food and Wine Festival coming up in October looks promising, so I click on that link and find a sophisticated looking website with an attractive photo of a marina. But clicking on the links I again find an incomplete website with “coming soon” under the “festival schedule”, “exhibitors” and “festival information” links. Even the sponsor’s page only has one logo among scores

of placeholders for other sponsors. Less than a month away from their start date and what appears to be a major event is not detailed out on its official web site? I go back to the visitleaguecity.com site to see if I can find other events, but the Calendar of Events only lists upcoming events, not past events, and these two very incomplete links are all that are available. Which leaves me wondering what else is there to do in League City.

I head to the “What to Do” section and click on Attractions, where text informs me of offerings, but offers no photos of the features mentioned. Since historic Main Street is mentioned, I click on the Historical Sites page hoping to see photos of this part of town and learn more, but instead that page focuses on museums and galleries. Those look interesting, and I click on more information for the San Jacinto Monument & Museum of History where I learn a little more about the war monument. Looks like a must-see for schoolchildren studying Texas State history. Looking more closely I see the Museum and Monument are actually in LaPorte.

Wondering if any of the things listed in “What to Do” are in League City, I go back and check the other offerings. Sure enough, all except the last listing are outside of League City. While I appreciate how close these attractions are to League City, and maybe worth mentioning in terms of things to do in the general vicinity of League City, I would think that the What to Do section should focus on promoting the city itself. Photos of the historic district and the South Shore Harbour Resort (with link) would be a good start.

South Shore Harbor and Resort and the Super 8 are the only places listed in the Lodgings page, which tells me that people don't consider League City a destination. Where are the bed and breakfasts and the small inns? Suspecting that the resort itself is the destination, I Google South Shore Harbour Resort and find their web page, where I see detailed information befitting a resort and conference center with 240 rooms. It is clear from the information that conferences and large events are the staple of this resort. The fitness center and spa and tropical pool are inviting for guests who are there for an event or conference.

The Restaurants page includes a surprisingly wide range of offerings, and I go to seafood to explore further. Joe's Crab Shack is the place I click on to find more information, only to find it is in Kemah, not League City. The next on the list, Saltgrass Steakhouse, is also in Kemah. I stop my searches there, feeling really confused about what is in League City. The last tab, Visitor Information, tells me about a boardwalk in the nearby town of Kemah, which looks nice. It appears League City promotes the cities around them.

So, would I move to League City? It would not be on the top of my list to explore. Once on the ground, given how close all the communities are south of Houston, I might find reason to stop and look further. But what I have found online doesn't entice me to put it in my top five at this point. Wikipedia's data on median income indicates there must be some nice neighborhoods, but absent a real estate agent to lead me there, I'm not going to

explore on my own. I haven't seen any photos to lure me to come in person.

If I were looking for a place to live and run my small business, there isn't any associated data readily available on any web site I found. Not having been enticed by other aspects of League City, I didn't bother to do any calling around.

Would I visit League City, stay there? I would not make a special trip to League City based upon the events and attractions I have found online. I would not go to League City to stay at the Super 8, and am not inclined to pick a big conference center resort for vacationing with family, girlfriends or just my husband and I. I suspect that I would enjoy the South Shore Harbour Resort if an event or conference I needed to attend was there, but I would not otherwise seek it out.

The one event I might seek out is the Food and Wine Festival, if it were a fully realized event with a nice variety of wineries and cuisine represented. In that case it could be a destination for a trip with girlfriends or with my husband and perhaps another couple. But lacking any details on the event, I can't say much more about how long we'd stay.

Distance Marketing Assessment #4

For my latest assessment assignment, I was asked to research League City, Texas, one of several communities just south of Houston, between Pasadena and Galveston, but not too far off the

coast. This community was one of my top three choices when asked to consider a community where I might relocate to if I was moving to the Greater Houston area and considering opening a business.

Sources of information for this assignment were several websites: The League City Chamber of Commerce site, www.leaguecitychamber.com/; the Destination League City website at www.leaguecityfun.com/ and Bay Area Houston CVB's, www.visitbayareahouston.com/.

Does it look like a great place to live? League City has a lot of positive things going for it. It made my list of top three places to live because of its close proximity to Houston, area attractions and medical facilities, its location on Clear Lake, the quality of its schools, the number of community events and its efforts at preservation. I was also impressed with its designation as one of the 100 Best Small Cities in America.

Would I consider League City as a place to visit or make a special trip there? After reviewing the information offered by the organizations promoting the community, I would say "maybe" but not for a long period of time. If I lived within a few hours drive, I would imagine driving to League City for the day. After reviewing the list of attractions on the League City Chamber and CVB websites, I'd probably spend my time in the historic district, known as Historic League City. I'd enjoy seeing the historic homes and parks described and visiting the antique and home décor shops. It says that

one-hundred-year-old oak trees line this area and make for a pleasant backdrop while strolling along. I was disappointed to learn that the Bay Area Houston CVB website didn't even mention this area in their Shopping section. Also, the link from the Destination League City site showed a promotion on an upcoming event instead of any information on the historic district and shopping. I would have liked to see photos of the area and a map along with the names of shops and what they sell.

It seemed to me that League City, itself, did not promote its own attractions. Rather, the focus was on the major attractions of the greater area, Kemah Boardwalk, Moody Gardens, Johnson Space Center, etc. This lack of activities gave me the impression that I might pass through on my way to somewhere else, instead of spending time in League City.

I was also interested to learn about the water activities offered in League City, but then I came across a disturbing notice that changed my mind. On the "What's New" page of the Bay Area CVB website, I read the following:

"Life in the Bay Area Houston just about revolves around the water – charter boats, fishing, sailboat races, dinner cruises, parasailing, sunsets, the Kemah Boardwalk – and we like it that way. Recently, however, there have been reports that the water in Clear Lake is unsafe for any sort of water recreation due to contaminants including flesh-eating bacteria. These reports are simply untrue. They are merely a vicious attack apparently perpetrated by a malicious webmaster with a

grudge.

"Still concerned? Here's the real scoop about our regional water sources;

"When testing the water, the Texas State Department of Health Services determined that fish taken from Clear Creek holds a level of PCB, a chemical that may cause ill effects with repeated, prolonged consumption. There is no danger with water recreation; including cruising, jet-skiing, and even swimming in Clear Lake. Also, this has no effect on the seafood served in our local restaurants and fish markets – while this seafood is fresh; it has never come from Clear Creek. In short, it's business as usual down here."

As a potential visitor not familiar with the area, I was immediately "turned off" to the idea of spending time in the lake or eating in a local restaurant. This notice was ill-placed in the "What's New" section.

I might also visit League City for the day to attend one of their community events. Bluegrass music concerts are held the third Saturday of every month. The Oak Tree Festival features entertainment, activities, food and a common market during a weekend in September. There is also Holiday in the Park in early December with a night parade, Santa, arts & crafts, entertainment and puppet shows.

League City touts only two hotels: The South Shore Harbour Resort and a Super 8 Motel. If I were to spend the night, my only choice would be the Resort and Conference Center situated on Clear Lake and recently remodeled. I might want to

spend the night during the South Shore Dockside Food & Wine Festival held in October, but I couldn't get much information off its website.

Overall, the Destination League City site did nothing to close the sale for me. Its tagline "Close to Everything, Far From it All" is so generic it could be any city in any state. The site should provide what there is to do (activities) in the area by theme, i.e. family fun, gardens & nature, history lovers, sports enthusiasts, water activities, etc. There should be tons of photos on the site. The ads by Google should be removed. There should be a map of League City with area attractions shown and distance to the major attractions noted plus a whole section on the Historic District, if in fact, there are 10 plus shops and places to eat and parks to play in. In my opinion, there is a lot of work to be done on this site to make it a useful marketing tool.

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