INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The First Impressions Program is a service offered through the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK). First Impressions was developed by Andy Lewis, University of Wisconsin Extension Associate Professor, and James Schneider, Grant County (WI) Economic Development Director, and conducted in over 1,000 communities across the US and Canada. CEDIK has adapted the First Impressions Program to meet the need of Kentucky communities. The program coordinates anonymous visits to your community by professionals in community and economic development, small business owners, community leaders and more, depending upon your specific community assessment needs. Visitors document their experience and interactions with community members. Their responses are then compiled and presented back to the community by a CEDIK representative. In addition, the program will offer suggestions and resources to address the areas identified for potential improvement.

CONDITIONS OF VISIT

Visits to Lyon County were conducted by team members throughout the months of July to October. One team reported conditions of sunny, hot and pleasant for a late summer visit, while another team member reported warm but overcast weather in early fall. Visits were conducted on both weekdays and weekends to capture a variety of activity within the community. Overall, conditions were favorable for visiting and exploring the community.

TEAM MEMBERS

Adult ages ranged from 20 to 60 years, and youth from 11 to 18. Notable traits include: a college professor within ten years of retirement, a community specialist and active grandmother of a young child, an outdoors-active mother and her two children, and a recent college graduate considering future career options. Assessments were completed at an individual pace, allowing personal life experiences to shape participants’ impressions. While quotations in this report should not be considered true for all individuals of these demographics, they do provide a valuable snapshot of visitors from a variety of ages, life experiences, and interests.
BACKGROUND

PROCESS

Team members began by reviewing the Assessors’ Guide with the coordinator and clarifying the purpose of their visit and geographic location from which they would enter the community, in order to ensure that major entrances were explored. Assessors also identified past perceptions of Lyon County to establish a baseline of familiarity to ensure they had only a general knowledge of the community prior to visiting.

Then, assessors researched the community on the internet: visited official and non-official sites from search engines, restaurant and hotel reviews, and even school and newspaper outlets. After completing this “Pre-Visit” phase, your team began their time in Lyon County by doing a Quick Pass Impression: driving through the community quickly without stopping to create an instinctual impression without focusing too much on detail.

After completing the Quick Pass, Assessors returned to locations that caught their attention and began detailed exploration and documentation of the following:

- Educational
- Residential
- Healthcare
- Natural Resources
- Social and Cultural
- Civic Engagement
- Government and Public Services
- Recreational and Heritage
- Industry
- Restaurants and Lodging
- Additional Amenities

After several hours exploring Lyon County, assessors document their Lasting Impressions on assets, challenges and opportunities they envision for the community, and make recommendations for further appeal to visitors that travel to the area.
**Past Perceptions**

Knowing an assessor’s past perception is useful in order to understand what, if any, preconceived notions exist about your community. Sometimes these can be influenced by events in the news, family history with the area, or even just from knowing a positive or negative person that hails from the region. When asked about past perceptions, assessors recorded the following:

- I think it is a pass-through community.
- There are outlet malls there.
- Eddyville is a nice small town.
- Lyon County is a lakefront community.
- I’ve not given it a lot of thought.

**Quick-Pass Impression**

The Quick-Pass is a critical component of the First Impressions process, because it allows the assessor to develop an overall opinion of the community before spending too much time analyzing specifics. Oftentimes, a quick pass-through is the only chance visitors will give to a community before determining whether to spend the day or continue on the road. This also gives the opportunity to identify the things that stand out most in a community.

- Large water tower with ‘Eddyville’ can be seen from a distance.
- Lyon County appears to have lots of lakefront activity and recreation.
- It is difficult to determine which streets are the main streets.
- Kuttawa’s lay out was different from most towns.
- Appears attractive, well-kept….but not many people out.
- Not a lot of businesses but restaurants, grocery, gas stations easy to locate.

**Community Entrances**

Approaching from I-24 and I-69 there were plenty of signs.

Entering from Highway 62, you pass an area of ‘flea market’ stands; but they were empty and needed a good clean up.

Although I was entering a county with many lake amenities, I did not see many nice signs letting me know what is ahead.

Because of the way the town is spread out, it is not clear where to go.

From the south side, we saw several older, overgrown billboards in Eddyville.
EDUCATIONAL

The school website is very informative and indicates recent awards the school has received. This is a great asset to show educational activity that is not as obvious in a physical visit to community.

There is a large county school located in the town (Lyon County School). A High School, Middle School and Elementary School are all located on the campus. We saw several school crossing signs, but not much evidence of community school support. We did not observe any specific signs of community connection with the school district.

Did not see the schools—not on main roads that were driven during visit. Visited site on website: informative. Website included recent awards the school achieved.

All schools have websites in addition to district site. Several mentions of community support for schools on sites.

I learned more about the schools from the tourism & lakes websites.

RESIDENTIAL

The houses are small to medium-average. Yard and homes are mostly neat and tidy—only a few in need of serious repair or upkeep.

There were all types of houses: small, modest to large lake homes. Some of the areas could use some attention: cleaning out yards and mowing.

There were several “for sale” signs in Kuttawa.

Most lawns are mowed neatly and quite a few have flowers or some type of landscaping.

Saw a few of what appeared to be apartments, but most residential areas were single-family units.

Several beautiful residential neighborhoods with great homes, yards.

Old Kuttawa had lovely older homes. Some did need clean up & repair.

HEALTHCARE

Medical clinics were easy to locate and in nice condition.

We saw several private doctor’s offices, an EMS building and pharmacy. The community seems equipped to service general health needs—but we did not see a hospital.

The few medical buildings we observed were average looking and seemed about the average amount for community that size. Nothing had a “wow” factor.

From the website, I see the closest hospital is Caldwell Medical Center.

Medical and Dental facilities visible in both Kuttawa and Eddyville.
NATURAL RESOURCES

The community is adjacent to a very active lake, state park and outdoor recreational system. In town, there were business related to these resources, but the actual activities do not seem to be in the town itself.

The area is very closely tied to lake region and the smell was pleasant, outdoorsy, and very appealing to people who would like a cabin or lakeside air.

Venture River Water Park, Lake Barkley Recreation Area and attractions – all advertised well with signs and literature in various establishments in and around the city.

Venture River looked nice & visitors were there.

This area has a water park (venture river) golf course (mineral mounds) resorts on the lake-buzzard rock & eddy creek, parks in Old Kuttawa w/beach (was not being used the day of the visit).

SOCIAL & CULTURAL

We saw a senior citizens center and county library. Both had external advertisement for various activities, and looked engaging.

In the mall area, there is what appears to be a pavilion for entertainment—but looks like it hasn’t been used in a very long time.

Several community buildings: Kuttawa United Methodist and First Baptist Eddyville.

We did not see as many places of interest to stop and visit.

West Kentucky Education Cooperative had meeting space in old outlet mall: creative repurposing for space.

We did not notice indications of cultural diversity or expression in this visit.

Saw an application for Founders Day Pageant but never saw advertisement for the event itself.

Fall Event in Old Kuttawa’s brochure looked fun.

The community feels quiet and safe.

With the exception of right by the interstate, Kuttawa and Old Kuttawa felt deserted. It was a Monday but schools were not in session-expected more people out and about.

We saw virtually no youth or summer outdoor activity-seemed geared towards older residents. The community did not feel active during our visit.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Locals were very knowledgeable about city and area history. A marker at the park explains the city was established in 1969 after being relocated due to the
creation of Barkley Lake.

Several people had lived here their whole lives. They were very helpful and welcoming. They mentioned a lot of events and places from the past; but also directed us to places we could visit and enjoy while we were there.

A resident shared the challenges of multiple sales of the old outlet mall and some of the barriers for that property. She seemed very engaged and concerned about the future of the community.

The staff at the city hall and government offices answered all questions completely and politely. We visited during regular business hours on a Friday and hours were clearly posted.

The streets and downtown area are very quiet. There is not a lot of activity that we could see.

We met a gentleman who had grown up and lived his whole life in Eddyville. We originally asked him about a place to eat in town and he told us about some restaurants that had gone out of business. He directed us toward the mall for a new restaurant.

The employees at the restaurant knew directions to the courthouse, tourism office, and more.

We visited city hall and asked a lot of questions. Several people stopped to take part in our conversation. They were welcoming and eager to tell us about people and places. They were also helpful in directing us to places we wanted to visit.

We saw signs to join civic groups, but did not see visible examples of their activity in the community.

Everyone we spoke with was VERY friendly, welcoming, and inviting in appearance. They were genuine in conversation and answered our questions enthusiastically. The general appearances and attitudes of the people we spoke with were clean, well-spoken, average income, content, and they displayed some civic pride when sharing information about their community.

Everyone I met was friendly, well-dressed and helpful.

**Government & Public Services**

City Hall and County Seat buildings were found immediately upon arrival. The Post office and Courthouse in Eddyville was easy to locate.

Tidy yards and very nice, paved, wide, smooth roads in town. Looks “newer.”

In the immediate city center, the municipal buildings (Courthouse, city hall, etc) seem to be the most active and well kept.

County leadership and law enforcement very evident in town.

The town seems well-kept; sidewalks were clear, government center was prominent.
Streets are few but well-maintained. Sidewalks were generous along main streets, county seat and courthouse!

There were some sidewalks in Kuttawa and Old Kuttawa. There are good sidewalks in the town area of Eddyville, and streets are paved—looks nice.

Buildings were well-maintained, professional, and mostly up-to-date from all perspectives.

Part of the main downtown courthouse/municipal complex that occupies most of the city “center” were marked clearly with signage.

We had to go to the Barkley Lake & Lyon County Visitor Centers to discover community and chamber information. Eddyville shares with these places in lieu of having an independent location.

The Visitors Center had information about all the communities and the entire region. However, we did not find information (maps, calendar, brochure, etc) specific to Eddyville or find it anywhere in the town.

**Recreation & Heritage**

There was no notable cultural diversity or cultural “flavor” to the community.

There is a beautiful, well-thought out park in the center of town near the municipal complex. It is well maintained and has great features. A large clean pavilion with tables, a safe/smooth walking path, and also a butterfly garden with art.

Lyon County Museum – part of old Eddyville area. Very charming, beautiful and inviting period home. Old School in Eddyville, Hours by appt.

Lyon County Historical Society – have preserved the small amount of historical buildings possible. Provide interesting history, especially since the original town disappeared when the lake was formed.

The park across from the courthouse w/small walking trail was a nice surprise.

We saw the park while in town, but no sign or apparent name to the park is posted.

The park is clean and well-maintained with a paved walking path and permanent seating, grilling and park play equipment that was sparse but in good, clean working order.

The older, historic district of “old Eddyville” was inviting with the presence of the Rose Hill house and museum.

Another sign in the park park tells that the butterfly garden was dedicated in memory of a former Soil Conservation District Supervisor.

Park at old Kuttawa (one playground nice, one very old on the edge of the town).

Walking/nature trail with nice views of Lake Barkley.

We noticed a golf course and other amenities for leisure.
This community has a community swimming pool—this is nice for families.
Recreation seems to be evident around the community, but not necessarily IN it.
The waterpark was a huge draw for my daughter: she wants to go back every year!

**INDUSTRY**

Tourism geared toward the lakes and state park activities seem to be the biggest business influences. Most of the operational stores (other than food, gas, necessities) were selling recreational gear or lakehouse/water related items such as cabin furniture and knickknacks, boats, canoes, coolers, and outdoor related items.

In town, we could not identify many actual businesses in operation.
There is a barbershop with several patrons in it and a large, corner drugstore that seems active.

The other main employer would likely be the state penitentiary, the school district and the county and local government offices.

Tourism: lakes, fishing, boating. There did not seem to be a factory-type industry in the county—at least not easily visible.

This community appears sparse at it’s center and relies on the outlying businesses and recreational locations.

There were a few stores in town, but some marked very poorly. We could not tell from the outside if they were occupied or open. Outside of the mainstreet area, businesses are more clearly obvious.

**RESTAURANTS & LODGING**

City Hall staff directed us to “The Corner”—great meal, enjoyed it!
Broadbent’s Deli was very good!

We ate at brand new restaurant located in the mall—the owners were extremely nice and helpful. They took time to visit with us about the history of the mall and business developments in the town. They also provided a lot of insight about the past/future community economic situations. They named quite a few individuals who were involved in the process and different parts of city management who were supportive.

There are restaurants, but they need updated reviews online.
Restaurant reviews—are not plentiful, but the majority are positive.
Maple Hill Bed & Breakfast reviewed the most and highest.

We saw a variety of restaurants, and most seem locally owned.

The main places to eat in Eddyville were chain restaurants—Pizza Hut, Subway,
McDonalds, Hardee’s. We had a hard time find a unique place to eat. A catfish place is open for dinners only, and there was a Chinese restaurant. Someone told us about a Mexican restaurant but we didn’t find it. People at City Hall directed us to the mall where we ate lunch at a brand new restaurant called The Corner. It was a great meal – serving burgers, BBQ, sandwiches and a few homemade dessert items.

Country ham-award winning Broadbent’s Deli at the Cabin (Bait and Tackle store), we also saw a Mexican restaurant in Eddyville & Catfish restaurant. There were a few B&Bs that looked nice to stay in.

Lodging was not apparent or inviting from literature or noticed in actual visit--Could have more signs indicating lodging opportunities and options.

**LASTING IMPRESSIONS: ASSETS**

Close proximity to lake and outdoor recreation.

Clean, non-threatening environment.

Appears to be leisurely.

Streets, sidewalks and courthouse were well-cared for.

Close proximity to larger cities with employment opportunities

Charm of Old Kuttawa, the park, and walking trails.

Very nice housing and retirement/residential communities.

Marinas and restaurants-Kuttawa Harbor, Eddy Creek, and Buzzard Rock.

Can capitalize on charm and unique lakefront culture

Parks and youth/family friendly engagement seems a priority for town: a great place to raise children.

Everyone was incredibly friendly and welcoming: we felt like a part of the town.

**LASTING IMPRESSIONS: CHALLENGES**

There is no distinct “flavor” or identity to this community by way of culture, history, industry, geography (except maybe the lakes), architecture or persons of distinction. If any of these exist, they are simply not being marketed visually or exploited aesthetically in this particular community.

I don’t think this community has capitalized on its strengths-more direction and signs to wonderful places on the lake would be helpful; Eddy Creek & Echo, Charlie’s restaurant & all of Old Kuttawa . It would be easy for a visitor to drive through or stop for gas and never know what wonderful spots are so near.

There is not enough signage or information from the road to know what this area offers: marina, park, playground, restaurant, picnic areas, and new outdoor amphitheatre under construction.
The town is by all appearances not very old. Many older communities have the benefit of older buildings, homes and historical areas to offer charm or established “pockets” of influence.

Need thematic advertising in the region and on a broader base. Tell and show how Eddyville fits into the Lake Barkley experience and the unique reasons for visiting the town.

Stronger identity for town “personality” would make area more appealing. Promotion of basic civic institutions such as schools (school spirit) public services (library or park). Flowers and trees or some landscaping would nicely tie together the city and surrounding neighborhoods.

There seems to be many small, little sections, but they are not tied together or related. Signs or inviting names for each neighborhood would add flow, or perhaps city map or boards could help define the areas of Eddyville and help visitors see how the area is laid out and where major areas or places are located.

Marketing the culture and charm: we had to dig to find it!

The main street is attractive, but not a lot of visual activity: a sense that everyone leaves during the day. It seemed geared mostly toward older residents, aside from the park.

Lasting Impressions: Opportunities

Based on the feedback compiled from visits to Lyon County, the following suggestions are recommended for future opportunities:

Cohesive county marketing/media campaign

Friendliness of residents, parks, and proximity to the lake and recreation are major assets to Lyon County. A more prominent, cohesive marketing campaign could help boost tourism: perhaps develop a social media hashtag and Urbanspoon/YELP review campaign, such as #lyoncounty or #VisitLyonCo, for example.

Remember history, but move forward: embrace mid-century style

While flooding the community to build the lake did eliminate much of the history, the community’s mid-century architecture is cool again! Capitalize on the history that exists since the 1960s. Continue telling the story of the flood, but identify and capitalize on assets that present a unique lakefront experience and quirky culture.

Increased signage and wayfinding materials:

Once visitors started exploring, they uncovered many assets and charming locations within the county. Several recommended increased signage, wayfinding, and opportunities to celebrate town culture to make it easier for visitors to navigate to these areas. Explore increased signage locations to unify the appearance of the county—particularly from main entrances leading to assets in both Kuttawa and Eddyville.