

LORIMOR, IOWA: A typical small rural midwestern farming community. Population 1200 (town 400)

## TYPICAL COMMUNITY

The community of Lorimor is located in the NE corner of Union County. It is 20 miles from the County Seat of Creston, 15 miles south of Winterset and 60 miles south of Des Moines.

Lorimor gets its name from J.S. Lorimor who moved to Union County in 1854 where he farmed and taught school. In 1887 the railroad approached him for a right of way and he agreed to donate the land. The town was platted into sixteen blocks and the Town of Lorimor was established.

In the early 1900's Lorimor saw rapid growth with 40 thriving businesses and a population of over 800. Early entertainment included traveling tent shows, a weekly movie and a skating rink.

movie and a skating rink.

In 1932 highway 169 was paved and Lorimor became accessible from miles around. For the next 22 years it was the site of the Lorimor Agricultural Fair called, "The Little World's Fair".

"The Little World's Fair".

In 1965 Lorimor's High School was consolidated with East Union School District and moved to its present site near Afton. During this time many businesses closed and the population dropped to an all time low of 346 in 1970.

Recently there has been a trend toward growth. The municipal gas and water system and the plans for a city sewer system have attracted new families. New businesses are also looking at Lorimor as a future site.

### DEMONSTRATION COMMUNITY

The Institute of Cultural Affairs has been working with rural towns in Iowa since 1976. During 1977-78, over 100 communities (one per county) participated in the Town Meeting: Iowa program. Most of these meetings were held in small rural towns under 500 population. Lorimor held a Town Meeting in November, 1977.

In March, 1978, 45 towns sent representatives to a state-wide Town Meeting Assembly held at the Farm Bureau Federation Building in West Des Moines, to exchange results of their Town Meetings and to make recommendations for the future. At the Assembly, it was announced that the Institute would be selecting a rural community to be a demonstration of small town renewal. In total, 30 communities were looked at as possibilities.



Lorimor Consult working session.

Lorimor was chosen for several reasons; 1) it had obvious potential, 2) there was a core of interested residents, 3) its plight was typical of other small midwestern towns on the economic decline. After visiting over 25 Lorimor community leaders and receiving a written invitation from the Lorimor Community Boosters, Lorimor decided to become the Lorimor Human Development Project.

The first step of the project was to hold a consult from June 18-24, 1978. Over 150 Lorimor residents joined with 35 non-residents for a week of intensive analysis and planning. Beginning with breakfast at 7:00 am groups worked steadily through the day and evening to create a practical plan of action and establish basic directions

for the future.

The entire consult took place
right in Lorimor. The main plenary
space was the elementary school gym
with team spaces located in the Town
Hall, the old variety store and the
old hardware store, as well as two
teams in the gym. During the week
every household had at least two
visits, with teams of participants
asking people, "What are your dreams
for the future?" and "What's blocking
those dreams?" These ideas were
brought back to the teams for organizing into reports for the following morning. The morning plenary
sessions served to pull together the thinking of the entire
group and steadily built a concensus
of action throughout the week.
The result was a comprehensive two
year plan of social and economic
development.

An auxiliary staff remained after the consult to facilitate the implementing of the 14 program arenas.



New Hardware Store opened in November.

## NEW ECONOMIC VITALITY

In 1922 main street Lorimor boasted 40 businesses. In 1978 over half of the commercial space was either gone or vacant and only a dozen full time businesses remained. Over the years from 1940 to 1970, Lorimor lost over half of its population and gradually lost its role of "sole provider" to the surrounding rural area. Local commerce steadily declined to a very minimal level, and many decided that Lorimor was just too small to have a significant local economy in a world of shopping malls and easy mobility. By 1978 the community's tax base was too small to provide adequate public facilities and services, much of the housing would not meet current standards, and the risks of any new economic venture appeared paralizingly great.

Lorimor

The basic approach in the economic area this year has been to investigate possible new employment through light industry, to revitalize the commercial base through advertising and determining what would make up a viable commercial district and to explore public resources to deal with the deficiencies in housing and public services.

The following are the major signs of a new economic vitality which has happened this year.

- ★ LORIMOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION formed (non-profit) in August as a vehicle for economic development
- \* 8 ACRE INDUSTRIAL PARK site secured and advertised
- ★ SEWING INDUSTRY CONTACTED and is preparing to move to Lorimor bringing 17 new jobs the first year
- ★ HARDWARE STORE opened and doing well after 7 months
- ★ COORDINATED BUSINESS ADVERTISING established in weekly local paper
- ★ \$323,000 HUD GRANT pre-application approved for housing rehabilitation, fire hydrants, sidewalks, demolition and resurfacing main street
- ★ ELDERLY HOUSING project signed contract for construction of 8 units through Farmers Home Administration
- ★ EMERGENCY VEHICLE purchased and training started
- ★ BODY SHOP site purchased and cleared for building this summer

# "YEAR OF

- \* BUSINESS DIRECTORY published and mailed to every household
- ★ EVENING SHOPPING tried with some success
- ★ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE remodeled and opened last fall
- ★ FEED BUSINESS REOPENS under new management



Used Emergency Vehicle purchased for \$1,000 which was then raised at a Benefit Ball.

June 1978

### THE COMPRE-HENSIVE PLAN

Comprehensive Community Reformulation in Lorimor Plate 5  ONE TWO THREE				
TOWARD THE BUILDING OF ECONOMIC VITALITY IN LORIMOR		TOWARD THE BUILDING OF	TOWARD THE BUILDING OF SOCIAL EFFECTIVENESS IN LORIMOR	
INCOME DEVELOPMENT A	LIVING Environment B	COMMUNITY LIFE IN LORIMOR C	INCLUSIVE Education D	CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT E
INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISE I	HOUSING EXPANSION PROJECT IV	LORIMOR IDENTITY CAMPAIGN VI  DOWNTOWN SHOWCASE	EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY X	YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES CORPS XII
NEW INDUSTRY COMPLEX II		PROJECT		VOLUNTEER WORK FORCE XIII LORIMOR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION XIV
		SOCIAL ACTIVITIES DESIGN		
COMMERCIAL SUPPORT SERVICE III	PUBLIC SERVICE SYSTEM V	COMMUNITY SERVICES CENTER IX	ADULT SKILLS INSTITUTE XI	

THE FOURTEEN ACTUATING PROGRAMS

# **MIRACLES**"



110 foot "Christmas Tree" overlooked main street during holiday season.

## COMMUNITY LIFE BLOSSOMS

In the past, Lorimor, like similar communities had two major centers-of-focus for community life, the high school, and the main street business district. Both were gathering places where all segments of the community met in activities of common interest and concern. Much of the community's former identity and vitality was tied to either the High School or main street. Thus when the High School left and main street died, all that was left were the pieces of a community, clubs, churches, etc. but nothing to hold them together.

The main objectives this year have been to establish new symbols of community identity, to create a new focus in community life through an emphasis on community wide events and activites involving many segments of the community, and to rejuvenate main street as a gathering place and center of community activity.

Major accomplishments in the area of community life have been:

DEFINING THE COMMUNITY as a 100 square mile area around Lorimor.



First community work day resulted in six store fronts painted

- ★ 110 FOOT WATERTOWER "Christmas Tree" visible to the whole 100 square mile area
- \* 80 YEAR OLD BANDSTAND rebuilt by volunteers
- ★ 10 COMMUNITY WORKDAYS concentrated on beautification of main street and Lorimor Park.
- ★ COMMUNITY CENTER under construction by volunteers on main street
- \* 14 STORE FRONTS PAINTED
- MINI PARK created from vacant lot on main street.
- ★ COMMUNITY SYMBOL AND SLOGAN established through T-shirts and signs
- TREES AND PLANTERS give new look to main street
- ★ HAUNTED HOUSE spooked over 200 kids
- ★ CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL activities on Friday nights with evening shopping, hay rides, best decorations awards, and little church dedication.



Community Service Center makes use of vacant store front.

- ★ WATERMELON DAY fall festival augmented by history museum, flea market, and community tours.
- ★ ANNUAL CALENDAR created to balance major and minor activities
- ★ BENEFIT BALL raised over \$1000 for emergency vehicle
- NEW LORIMORIAN established as weekly newspaper with paid ads
- ★ COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER open weekdays 9 to 5 to coordinate volunteer activities.



All ages participate in activities.



Kickoff Banquet for Lorimor Junior Achievement Program.

# INITIATIVES IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The dispair that accompanied the steady decline of the community resulted in a "vacuum of initiative" to meet community needs. No community based youth activities, little neighborhood identity, and no coordinated efforts toward civic improvement were signs of this vacuum.

The basic objectives in this area included leadership development, youth engagement, and regular consensus building events. This years accomplishments included:

- ★ PRESCHOOL opening in January with 15 children and two local teachers.
- ★ LEADERSHIP TRAINING COURSE held with 18 participants.
- ★ FIREFIGHTER TRAINING completed by 18 new and 'old-hand' firefighters.
- \* 3 FIRST AID COURSES held.
- ★ JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM is in the state in a rural community.
- ★ WEEKLY YOUTH MEETINGS started to plan social and community service activities.
- ★ 5 NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS called Stakes, meet monthly.
- ★ WEEKLY 'GUILD' MEETINGS held all year to coordinate activities.
- ★ QUARTERLY COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES held to maintain and develop community consensus.



Preschoolers visit fire station.

## FIRST YEAR LEARNINGS

Probably the most exciting results of the first year of The Lorimor Human Development Project have been those things that have been learned which can benefit other communities.

The following are a few initial reflections on what were several particularly important learnings:

(1) Working Out of a Comprehensive Plan: The comprehensive social and economic development plans which were created last June and reflect the community's basic consensus were a kind of "bed rock" to refer to when immediate issues became overwhelming or motivation lagged.

- (2) Establishing Regular Communication: Probably the single most important activity of the year was the creation of the "New Lorimorian" which is now a weekly newsletter mailed free of charge to every household in the community. Rumors and misinformation have been minimized and people are much more aware that they are a community.
- (3) Creating an Annual Rhythm of Community-wide Events: This was experienced as creating the skeleton which gave shape to community life. In addition to an established Fall Festival, a Christmas Festival, Winter Benefit Ball, and Homecoming Weekend in May were added.
- (4) Concentrating on "Catalytic"
  Events: Learning to focus efforts on
  events and activities which would do

the most to establish a new and positive image of the community's future and involve the most people was key. Things like painting nearly every building downtown, the Christmas Festival, buying a used ambulance, and the Community Center Project have been particularly "catalytic".

(5) Seeing is Believing:
Over the year interest and enthusiasm were largely maintained by
systematically improving the physical looks of the space. A first
project was the transformation of
an overgrown vacant lot into a downtown mini-park. Another has been
the creation of seasonal window
displays in the unoccupied buildings
on main street. This spring will
see trees and flower boxes added to
main street.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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