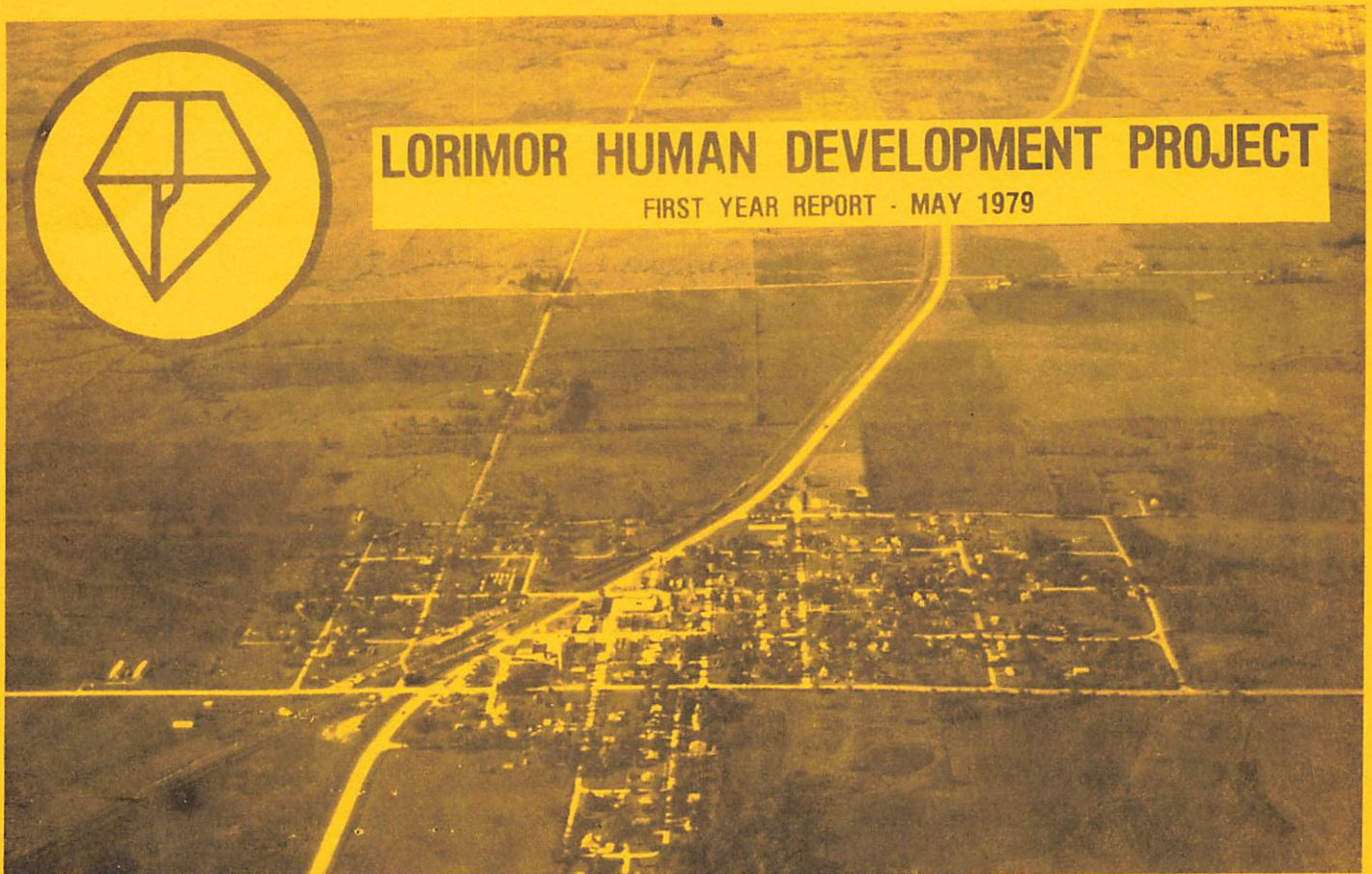




LORIMOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

FIRST YEAR REPORT - MAY 1979



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.

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".

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 consensus 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.

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 activities 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 despair 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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