

How does Kenosha “stack up” against other communities with respect to employment and education opportunities, culture, lifestyle amenities and quality of life? Can we compete?

In 2009, Kenosha Area Business Alliance created a comprehensive economic development strategy for Kenosha County. One of its goals is to attract, retain and engage talent by increasing interaction with young professionals. Young professionals are a key demographic to talent attraction and retention because the 21-34 year old demographic is highly educated and likely to relocate for employment.

In this context, Kenosha County UW-Extension created an assessment program of the Kenosha area through the eyes of young professionals, called First Impressions for Young Professionals. Volunteers from two similar communities agree to do unannounced exchange visits and then report on their “impressions” based on the appeal of the partner community as a place to live and work. Kenosha County UW-Extension worked with two young professional organizations in Kenosha and Sheboygan to implement First Impressions for Young Professionals with the goal of identifying each community’s strengths and challenges for talent attraction and retention.



HOUSING: Apartments near the Metra station were appealing



TRANSPORTATION: Highway 158, the main gateway into the City of Kenosha, was described as “rough.”

Key Findings + Comments

Restaurant & Bars

A-

"Great selection of dining. Different ethnicities + price ranges."

Housing

C+

*(for single residents, families with young children and rental housing)
"...I would only consider the downtown area [for housing]."*

Quality Web Presence

A-

These commonly-used websites were analyzed: Kenosha Convention and Visitors Bureau, Downtown Kenosha, Inc, Kenosha Area Business Alliance, YLink, Kenosha Unified School District.
"[The websites] pulled me in. I saw reviews that made me want to visit."

Wi-Fi Access

C

"Not good; I didn't find WIFI anywhere."

Wayfinding Signage

C-

"Signs are not prevalent... it was a bit confusing downtown."

Parks

A

"There's so much open space! Nice trails around the lake."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

We compiled information from the First Impressions of visitors to Kenosha and created an actionable list of issues and recommendations. Take a look!

ISSUE 1: Public Perception

Respondents felt public perceptions of Kenosha were negative. Several respondents reported that their idea of Kenosha before their visit was based on perceptions of crime and poverty.

“The city has more depth than what I was expecting.”

“My perception was not accurate. I did not expect such a beautiful community.”

RECOMMENDATION

Develop and share more positive press (beyond job creation numbers) about Kenosha to regional audiences. Use social media more effectively to get visitors to the Kenosha area to engage in authentic interactions—beyond the touristic experience, with Kenosha’s people, culture and natural assets.



LEISURE: Lakefront received consistent praise, “Harbor was GORGEOUS”

ISSUE 2: More complete, positive online messaging

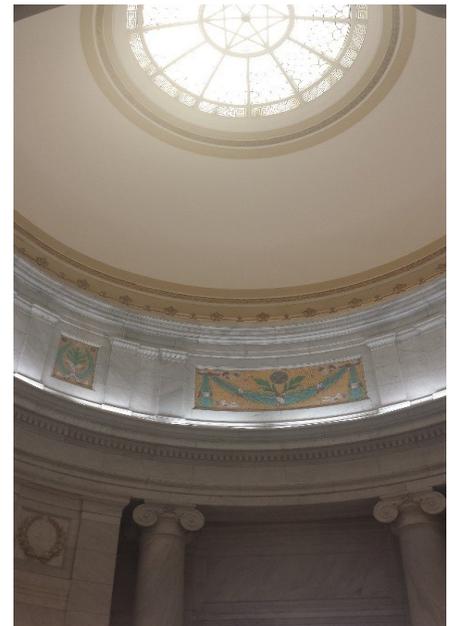
The online information presents a very limited picture of the community, to its detriment. Participants felt common Kenosha area websites targeted tourists and not those considering living/working in Kenosha.

“The online information highlighted the ‘tourist’ part of Kenosha, which was accurate. I didn’t know about all the historical sites, or how the downtown was.”

“There are many things that YPs miss if they don’t research an area thoroughly. This assessment provided links to the community that I would have otherwise missed.”

RECOMMENDATION

Improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Downtown Kenosha, Inc and YLink, and other key websites that would appeal to diverse lifestyles for those considering Kenosha as a place to live and work - not merely visit. Include profiles of YPs from the Kenosha County community in marketing pieces to portray aspects of real life in Kenosha.



CULTURE: Some respondents were surprised by Kenosha’s historic character

ISSUE 3: Centralized portal to living in Kenosha

First impressions of housing quality, affordability and availability were not generally favorable. Most participants were disappointed with the housing stock, and some would only consider living in Kenosha if they could live downtown.

“Didn’t seem like there were many options for one person to find housing for a reasonable price.”

RECOMMENDATION

Create a centralized website/portal for topics related to living and working in Kenosha. Work with realtors and property managers to publicize quality online housing information.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

The full report has been made available to the community.

Contact:

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Are there other ways to tackle these issue areas? This is just a start! What do you have to add and how can you get involved?
Contact Amy Greil, who administers the First Impressions Program at Kenosha County UW-Extension.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WAS GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY

