

The Greater Baraboo that the City Can Become

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

In a previous article published in September, we reviewed the early history of Baraboo, followed by a description of the city fifty years ago—a good city, but pretty much unremarkable among its peers at that time. A second story reviewed the progressive changes and the quality amenities and attractions which developed in the last fifty years.

One marvels at the establishment of the UW Baraboo-Sauk County campus, the new Circus World, the International Crane Foundation, Leopold Foundation, Mid-Continent Railroad, and the Riverwalk, to name a few. One especially marvels at the endurance of the magnificence and historical significance of the Al. Ringling Theatre, and also the quality programs and activity of the combined Sauk County-Baraboo Historical Society.

Between 1961 and 2012 the population doubled, industry grew large and prosperous, and the Baraboo area's quality attractions and amenities blossomed. Your scribe later found himself with a newspaper column, recounting the events of the past which laid the foundation for the city to prosper. Now, as I consider laying down my pen, I boldly prepare to envision what the city can become, if it will, in the coming five decades.

POLITICAL SAVVY: Baraboo has not had a state senator or representative from within the city in well over 50 years. Some good people from our rural areas have represented us, but their interests were not centered on Baraboo. You can bet that had we had political presence in 1959-60 we'd have had an Interstate exit on County A. It is said that powerful interests elsewhere didn't want an exit there, bypassing their strip.

With political influence, a recent redesign of Highway 12 might have served rather than cut off the businesses on "old 12" between Baraboo and Lake Delton, with perhaps more exits. You can also be sure that South Boulevard would long since have been rebuilt, and Eighth Street properly widened and repaved.

PROMOTION: It is astonishing that with all of its QUALITY attractions, Baraboo seems reluctant to toot its own horn. Here's a suggestion: We can't afford to lure tourists via the Dells'

expensive "Ad-Lit" brochure boxes, so, why not our own display boxes, aptly titled "The Quality Attractions of Baraboo". A brochure box with two levels, an upper section for our area attraction brochures to invite travelers to visit Baraboo, and a lower level for commercial brochures.

The non-commercial upper section of the brochure box would contain folders advertising featuring attractions such as Devils Lake, Crane Foundation, UW Baraboo-Sauk County, Ringling Theatre, Al. Ringling Home, Clown Hall of Fame, Mid-Continent Railway, Circus World, Zoo, Riverwalk, Leopold Center, and seasonal attractions such as band concerts, and The December Parade, Etc. All are quality reasons to spend some time and money in our city.

MANAGE OUR COMPLEX: This observer suspects that Baraboo has a complex: We don't want to be overly promotional like our neighbor to the North, so we only modestly mention our attractions. As a result we miss multiple thousands of dollars from tourist visitors.

Downtown events are great, but need more area-wide promotion. I hear some hope that our Chamber of Commerce plans to become truly aggressive in promoting visits to the city in cooperation with Downtown Baraboo Inc. and other groups. Baraboo is fourth best on the Smithsonian list of best cities. Area visitors should know hear about that.

If we advertise ourselves better, tourist dollars will flow more freely, producing jobs. It is astonishing that two million visitors a year visit Devils Lake, a mile south of the city, and a similar number visits just to the north. Our location is great, our attractions are quality. We should share in the tourist visits and dollars which accompany them.

CROSS-TOWN TRAFFIC: With Eighth Street and Avenue the only east-west through streets, the congestion is bound to grow. If Second Street were a through street like Second Avenue, it would provide rapid access to locals, relieving Eighth Street. Unlike Second Avenue however, Second Street has at least five or six stop sign or lights. Not exactly a through street! Yes, there is a jog which would have to be addressed.

It looks like another article or so is needed to predict the future of Baraboo. Your ideas are welcome, so drop a line to this writer via the newspaper.