

# **Economic Epideictic: The Virtuous Business of Main Street, USA**

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Rhetorical critics have established the epideictic nature of corporate values advocacy, sponsorships, philanthropy, apologies, community outreach programs, and advertising. Others have observed further that epideictic elements are apparent even within ostensibly forensic and deliberative corporate messages and that the full range of contemporary corporate activity, including the actions of employees, vendors, and customers, engages the ongoing values debate regarding the proper role of business and business people with respect to society. This project documents the epideictic rhetoric that was collectively produced by and about the business communities in two small Iowa towns over the course of one year. An analysis reveals the values judged to be commonly held by the community as well as areas where contested and paradoxical values illuminate the contrasts with the values attributed to Wall Street and the variable relationships between local businesses and their communities.

If one is to believe the media, the values of the business community, or the lack thereof, is a major concern these days for regulators, legislators, and business educators. There is some danger, however, that media coverage of high profile scandals, expensive bailouts, and environmental disasters will lead to poorly conceived and ultimately ineffective policy solutions. Bemoaning the lack of moral behavior on the part of an enemy is a time-honored rhetorical device, but successful legislation requires careful attention to motivations, rewards, and material consequences. Rhetorical devices have been an integral part of the political process and are often studied as a means to explain political effectiveness. Effective public policy requires, however, a fuller understanding of the rhetorical processes that define and sustain the public itself as a viable community that is capable of creating policy at all. In the case of economic policy, it becomes particularly important to understand and account for the rhetoricity of the market as well as the economic constructions of moral behavior.

Public attempts to regulate business activity have roots in ancient usury and trade laws, a rich history of economic and political theory, and considerable contemporary disagreement over the proper relationship between business and society. Throughout, the most productive and economically stable communities have shown a connection between their values and the economic rewards to those who hold them. In times like ours, when rhetorical values appear to be at cross purposes with economic rewards, solutions would seem to call for recalibration. The primary rhetorical question is not simply how to persuade economic agents to behave morally. That would presuppose a stable rhetorical system (Ehninger, 1968). At this point in history, the more important task is to understand why those who behave according to a society's moral law are not reaping its economic rewards.

As just one small part in the much larger project, this article does not attempt to pose a complete answer to these vexing questions. In fact, it proposes only to explore what would appear to be a largely assumed element of economic philosophies: the values held by the business community. U.S. fiscal policy is being shaped by regulators and legislators acting on their own assumptions about the intrinsic good or evil of banks, bankers, and banking customers. The economic philosophies of those who make policy are built on

assumptions about the values, and thus about the motivations and probable behaviors, of their fellow citizens, whether as business owners, corporate functionaries, or consumers.

Debates over economic policy are thus, at heart, debates about assumed values. Disagreements over the potential outcomes of economic policies are disagreements about the workings of a community's rhetorical process. These are ongoing debates and disagreements, of course. Each era determines its own solution in a blend of psychology, context, and environmental constraints (Black, 1980; Ehninger, 1968).

Effective public policy must be built on a complete and accurate understanding of the values of both Main Street and Wall Street—and all the avenues in between—in order to foster economic recovery. Program administrators engaged in the design of economically sustainable communities must create persuasive development communication to effectively implement their programs. Academic faculties require guidance to reach the pedagogical aim of an ethical framework for business practices. An important first step is to identify the values actually held by the business community, a project that necessarily involves learning to make distinctions among the diverse groupings of businesses, markets, and economic interests that comprise the overgeneralized notion of the U.S. business community.

### **The Epideictic**

Within Aristotle's triad of civic oratory, forensic (legal) and deliberative (political) discourses had immediate practical value, while epideictic (ceremonial) occasions were intended to praise the honorable or blame the disgraceful at public funerals, dedications, or remembrance events. A successful epideictic address required attention to "virtue and vice and honorable and shameful; for these are the points of reference for praising and blaming" (Aristotle, 1991 (c335B.C.), p. 79), and Aristotle's catalogue of topics provided a summary of the commonly held values of the Athenian audience. Rhetorical theorists have since noted that a reverse analytical exercise can deconstruct those values, which can then be assumed to be widely and non-controversially held.

The rhetorical situation offers complex productive opportunities as well. As a rhetorical act, ceremonial discourse transcends the immediate context, and the most apparent effect of the eloquent epideictic is to "increase the intensity of adherence to values held in common by the audience and the speaker" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 52). As the community's values are being tapped to justify praise of the fallen comrade, they are also being reinforced in the emotional aftermath of his death. A well-crafted epideictic "attempts to foreground and celebrate values assumed to be central to the identity of a group of people" (Halloran, 1993, p. 227). As such, it functions to publicly reinforce and reiterate "who 'we' are" as a community (Halloran, 1993, p. 227) and "set the conditions for a viable public sphere" (Hauser, 1999, p. 18). The instrumental persuasiveness of political or legal discourse might be more explicit, but the potential of the ceremonial occasion for influencing a community's moral values—in fact, constituting the audience's very identity as a moral community—is no less profound.

Aristotle recognized that a rhetor might also chose to move beyond acknowledging and reinforcing values toward utilizing or manipulating them to achieve some additional purpose. At a purely self-interested level, the speaker's association with widely held values can be tapped for personal credibility or as a basis of political power. Even though the speaker might not "explicitly seek judgment from its audience," his or her use of "publically acceptable, non-controversial themes" can help to "ward off criticism and establish a

positive image that can be used as a cache of goodwill in future controversies” (Stahley & Boyd, 2006, p. 312). The rhetor can also educate, using the epideictic to lead the “less knowledgeable” toward a better understanding of practical moral conduct (Hauser, 1999, p. 10).

Contemporary critics have demonstrated the potential of epideictic to perform highly sophisticated rhetorical work. Scholars have shown that within the ancient encomia “rhetorical choices of inclusion and omission inscribed contrasting visions of the polis” (Hauser, 1999, p. 5), and the genre retains the potential to highlight and resolve the paradoxical values shared by a community (Stahley & Boyd, 2006). The epideictic does not merely call upon a community’s values; it opens a window on underlying assumptions and allows the critic to interrogate their discontinuities. We can ascertain the acknowledged values of a community, but we can also gain insight into the capacity of that audience to define and sustain itself as a viable community, capable of creating effective public policy.

### **Epideictic and the Business Community**

To the extent that business discourse has been subjected to analysis, epideictic appears as an effective and “sophisticated rhetoric” that enhances the image of the corporate rhetor by delivering “non-controversial messages...to people who already believe them,” as when Mobil Oil used paid “advertorials” during the oil crisis of the 1970’s to “create a particular corporate ethos and a specific reality for the reader” (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1983, p. 383). By praising those with whom it agreed, the company was able to “both to create certain strategic identifications and to make even more universal persuasive appeals” (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1983, p. 388).

A contrasting position was taken by Kallendorf and Kallendorf (1985) who argued that the three kinds of rhetoric proposed by Aristotle did not allow room for the “social and economic structure whose development he could not have foreseen” that required “a fourth kind of rhetoric for business” to take its place alongside forensic, deliberative and epideictic. They argued that in business discourse, a goal of “‘profitability’ becomes the counterpart of advantage, justice, and honor” (p. 45) . In contrast to the classical epideictic, which uses “praise” and “blame” to achieve its ends, business goals of profitability would require “what we might call ‘assurance,’ or confidence in the company, its products, and its personnel” (p. 45) .

More recent work has established the epideictic nature of corporate issues management (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1983), values advocacy (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994), sponsorships, philanthropy, apologies, community outreach programs (Stahley & Boyd, 2006), and advertising (Stahley & Boyd, 2006; Zeyinoglu, 2007). Others have observed further that epideictic elements are apparent even within ostensibly forensic and deliberative corporate messages (Johnson & Sellnow, 1995), and the contemporary reality is that the full range of corporate activity, including the actions of employees, vendors, and customers (Stahley & Boyd, 2006), engages the ongoing values debate regarding the proper role of business and business people with respect to society.

### **Conflicted Values on Main Street**

The current discussion of ethical business practice is the merest fragment in a tapestry of texts of ancient origin and multitudinous layers, a contentious discourse that has yet to resolve the relationship between business and society. In contemporary political discussion, the tensions are most often framed in terms of

competing but strongly held values. Despite theoretical and policy disagreements, the U.S. public retains a fundamental faith in the value of free-market capitalism. Meanwhile, the businessman, as either the individual Ebenezer Scrooge or the corporate voice of Greed, Inc., plays a continuing role media role as cultural villain. The conundrum has emerged as a problem for politicians and policy makers, who find themselves without a basis for action on some set of authentically held common values. Instead politicians resort to a narrative that attempts to balance the extremes of good “old-fashioned market values” against disdain for evil “business” interests that seem to translate into disaster for the community as a whole (Easton, 2010).

The immediate project here is to examine these seemingly paradoxical values by examining the assumptions, contradictions, and tacit messages embedded in the epideictic rhetoric of the business community. This involves a potentially subversive critical frame from the outset. Business discourse does not, in general, embrace paradox. The discursive expectations of U.S. contract law, reporting standards of GAAP, and disclosure requirements of the SEC reflect an overriding assumption that clear, complete, and consistent communication is the gold standard in business discourse. “Integrity” is a primary goal of strategic corporate communication, which is defined in terms of consistent messages across multiple media and audiences (Cornelissen, 2008). Based on an analysis of corporate epideictic, Stahley and Boyd have argued that organizations can hope only for “the management-- but not elimination – of paradox in organizational epideictic” (Stahley & Boyd, 2006, p. 311), which necessarily reflects the multiple perspectives and polysemy inherent in widely accepted values. This is not, however, a perspective that resonates with the objective empiricism implicit in traditional business practice.

Still, the strategic use of contrasting values is not a new tactic in corporate discourse. One of the world’s largest corporations was arguably quite successful in “differentiating itself from ‘big business’ generally” to achieve its own political ends (Cable & Vibbert, 1983, p. 392) . Using a friendly, humorous, folksy style that was unusual for business discourse of the time, distributing its message in the decidedly non-business oriented Sunday magazine section of newspapers across the U.S., and calling forth values of “home, family, and community” were all rhetorical moves that set Mobil in contrast to the “overtly persuasive appeals to ‘the mighty’ that appeared in the more traditional business or political press” (Cable & Vibbert, 1983, p. 394) .

A contemporary version of the strategy appears within a narrative that contrasts the values of Main Street versus Wall Street. The story line is ubiquitous but complex. Media coverage of ethical lapses, financial crises, and economic policy presents the competing values as a contrast between Main Street values of thrift, hard work, and personal responsibility and the self-interested greed of Wall Street. The plot is complexified when Wall Street brokers work insanely long hours, however, or Main Street businesses refuse to risk expansion. Warren Buffet’s folksy Main Street rhetoric functions as a critique of Wall Street values, but within that lies a critique of the foundational premise that economics, politics and moral discourse function in separate rhetorical spheres (Cyphert, 2009).

A tremendous amount of political chatter calls forth Main Street values, but precious little public policy analysis has gone into what those might actually be. When pressed, the academically inclined might cite Weber’s (1930) theory of a Protestant work ethic or Tonnies’ (1957) claim of small town *gemeinschaft* to justify the stereotype. A few have taken up the pragmatic task of empirical observation, arriving at a catalog of rural and urban differences (Markley, Macke, & Luther, 2005), for instance, or relationships among economic and civic elements of a locality (Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, & Nucci, 2001). To the extent that

effective public policy depends on rhetorically sustainable solutions, it would seem that a rhetorical analysis of the commonly held, paradoxical, and potentially problematic values would be useful.

### Heroes and Villains

To that end, this project documents the epideictic rhetoric that was collectively produced by and about the business community in two small Iowa towns over the course of one year. An analysis of those texts uncovers the values judged to be commonly held by these Main Street communities. It further suggests ways in which those values might differ from those that are supposedly foundational to free market capitalism, popularly characterized as Wall Street values. Finally, the discourse offers insight into the relationship between local businesses and their communities, with implications for the foundational myths surrounding the relationship of business to society and the fundamentally rhetorical nature of economic activity.

Two communities were chosen as part of a larger research project on the discourse of rural economic development. Each is the trade center and county seat of a predominantly rural county and shows the economic isolation and cohesive identity that are characteristic of Iowa's 947 communities. Harlan, population 5,400, lies in the southwestern corner of the state in Shelby County, about 50 miles from the Council Bluffs side of the Omaha, NE metropolitan area, one of the Midwest's largest urban concentrations with a total population of 838,000. Cresco, population 3,900, is in Howard County, which borders Minnesota in the state's northeast quadrant. The closest cities are Rochester, MN, population 103,000 and home to the Mayo Clinic at 60 miles, and La Crosse, WI, at 90 miles, which anchors a metro area of 126,000. Residents of these communities count their economic isolation in terms of the distance to the nearest Wal-Mart: 25 miles to Atlantic or Denison for those in Harlan, 20 miles to Decorah for the citizens of Cresco.

Every issue of the weekly *Harlan Tribune*, its companion weekly *News Advertiser*, and the weekly Cresco *Times Plain Dealer* was reviewed for 2009 calendar year. Each instance in which a business or business person was praised or blamed was recorded, along with the context and strategic purpose of the claim. As it turns out, public shame was a rare event. There were only five instances of blame in the Harlan newspaper, none in Cresco's, and these were all situated within larger narratives of personal or business misbehavior. These are discussed as part of the contrasted and problematic value systems, but were not included in the tabulated value analysis (Figure 1).

The total number of epideictic articles in Cresco's *Times Plain Dealer* exceeded the number found in the *Harlan Tribune* and *News Advertiser*, but the difference is in proportion to the overall difference in business news coverage. The *Times Plain Dealer* typically published about 20 pages and featured an average of 4.5 business-related articles, representing an average of .23 items per page over the year. The combined *Tribune* and *News Advertiser* typically produced about 30 pages in a week, and featured an average of 3.9 items concerning businesses or business people, an annualize rate of only .13 business articles per page.<sup>1</sup> There were 24 businesses or business people who were the subject of epideictic display

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<sup>1</sup> Neither column inches of coverage nor space devoted to advertising were considered in this examination. The length of a typical article was also much greater in the *Times Plain Dealer*, so the proportional coverage of business was even greater than these figures would indicate. The percentage of space devoted to advertising is affected by rates, media competition, and sales methods—issues that lie beyond the project's focus on editorial content.

in the Harlan newspaper, 13.4% of the total number of news or editorial items. In the Cresco paper, 36 items represented 14.9% of the total business-related items.

Each instance of praise was examined for value laden-words or phrases, which were then categorized thematically. Fifteen clusters emerged, which were tabulated according to the number of articles in which they occurred, and ranked for each town as well as overall (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

	Harlan T & NA	Rank	Cresco TPD	Rank	Overall Rank
dependable, responsible and trustworthy	8 (38%)	1	6 (17%)	6/7	1
contributions to the community	6 (29%)	3/4	9 (25%)	2	2
quality or successful outcomes	7 (33%)	2	7 (19%)	3/5	3
customer service	2 (10%)	10/15	13 (36%)	1	4
longevity or durability	4 (19%)	5/7	6 (17%)	6/7	5
other	6 (29%)	3/4	1 (3%)	12/13	6
talent, ability expertise	2 (10%)	10/15	7 (19%)	3/5	7/8
hard work	2 (10%)	10/15	7 (19%)	3/5	7/8
friendliness	3 (14%)	8/9	4 (11%)	8/9	9/10
integrity and honesty	3 (14%)	8/9	4 (11%)	8/9	9/10
health, wellbeing	4 (19%)	5/7	1 (3%)	12/13	11
community involvement	4 (19%)	5/7	0	n/a	12
motivation or high energy	2 (10%)	10/15	2 (6%)	10/11	13
environmental concern	1 (4%)	16	3 (8%)	10/11	14
leadership	2 (10%)	10/15	0	n/a	15

### ***The Values***

Although their frequency varied, there was general consistency in the way values were presented in the texts of the two newspapers.

Longevity or durability: The distinctive terminology in this category was that the entity “had been in business since....” The emphasis was on “faithful” service, “years of service” to the organization or community, or the number of years or generations involved. Characteristic of these tributes was the lack of any reference to character or personality providing moral impetus for the behavior. These folks were not said to be acting out of loyalty or steadfastness or trustworthiness; they had simply spent a long time in one enterprise, and the descriptors seemed more indicative of equanimity or inertia than of moral character.

Dependable, responsible, and trustworthy: The theme of dependability was used in association with longevity in two instances, once in each sample, but was a discernibly separate construct. The praise went beyond mere time on task to note that the individual could be “counted on” to do the work. Service was not merely long, but “dedicated” and “reliable.” Perfect attendance, finishing the job, and an aversion to saying “no” were all sources of praise.

Motivation or high energy: Individual business people, in particular, could be lauded for their self-motivated enthusiasm for the enterprise with such descriptors as “highly motivated” or “energetic” or for their desire to get moving or enjoyment of “a challenge” that translated into extraordinary efforts.

Hard work: Effort was noted as a separate category of praise, beyond the simple fact of time on task, the moral obligation to do the work dependably, or motivation to work.

Talent, ability, expertise: Praise for specific knowledge, ability to do the job, or innate intelligence were categorized together in their focus on task-relevant knowledge or ability. Descriptors ranged from the very general “business savvy” or “talented” to specific explanations of expertise such as having “taken some online classes.”

Quality or successful outcomes: A common theme surrounded the “quality” of the enterprise, which might be described as a “first class facility” or “smoothly” running, or its products. Overall, these appeared as happy adjectives with virtually no substantive descriptions of the actual outcomes. Products were described as “great” and services as “better” or “best” without further detail.

Friendliness: A range of generally pleasant interpersonal relationships were categorized together for their overall acknowledgement of value of a pleasant personality. Individuals were praised for “rapport” with others, being a “great” neighbor or friend, helpfulness, or making customers “feel welcome.” While the emphasis on positive relationships was clear enough, a larger sample might have yielded some additional distinctions among specific behaviors.

Contributions to the community: Specific behaviors that involved donations of time, money, or services were categorized together, regardless of the specific types or amounts involved. The emphasis here was simply on a tangible benefit to others, and no distinctions were made regarding the recipient, which ranged from disadvantaged members of the community, to organized community fundraising campaigns, to nationally-recognized charitable organizations.

Community involvement: Multiple references to service to the larger work of the community warranted a separate category in its praise for the specific political and civic roles that an individual had performed. This was qualitatively different from hours of service on community projects or time spent in general participation in the civic life of the community.

Health and well-being: Concern for the health and physical well-being of employees or community members was a distinct theme, but disproportionately common in Harlan, where the community had taken on a long term fundraising campaign for a community wellness center.

Integrity and honesty: References to the moral nature of the subject were rather loosely termed “integrity” in the discourse, with description of or statements of commitment to ethical behavior included in this category. There were no descriptions of specific ethical conduct located in this sample.

Customer service: Customer service was used as a descriptor just once in the Harlan paper, in conjunction with smiling friendliness but no additional detail. A difference in the Cresco discourse is apparent in the much higher ranking of this value, but the considerable detail provided suggests there might also be underlying differences in the value construct itself. The single Harlan reference was to a business’s service

to individual customers, but Cresco offered descriptions of the way the business provided “services the citizens of the community needs,” stays in business because it cares about “the community,” or creates a community atmosphere with “fresh popcorn...and caramel corn on Saturdays.” The category of customer service in the Cresco community describes business in terms of its service to the economic and social needs of the community as a whole, not merely as serving the desires of individual customers.

Leadership: The term was used several times as a value term, but in no case were specific leadership behaviors or outcomes described.

Environmental concern: General references to “going green” were expanded with praise for products or the degree to which a local business could allow customers to avoid the environmentally detrimental drive to a larger trade center.

Other: Praise was made with reference to a number of additional values that did not occur more than once: boundary-spanning, toughness, enjoyment of work, teamwork, passion, and mentoring.

### ***Shared Values***

The first question is whether these observed sources of praise reflect the values reported to be characteristic of small, rural communities. John Allen, director of the Western Rural Development Center in Logan Utah, “has summarized extensive research into a set of urban and rural cultural values,” distilling that research into several key characteristics: a value of community interaction, conformity with ascribed roles, particularistic sanctions on behavior, conservative leadership, little value on anonymity, and a generally collectivist ethic (Markley et al., 2005).

There does seem to be a rough correlation between the two most commonly expressed values, dependability and contributions to the community, with both the dutiful acceptance of one’s ascribed roles and a collectivist ethic that calls for individuals to subordinate their own interests to the common good. The next most common sources of praise, quality and customer service, are ubiquitous value terms in the contemporary business press, suggesting that successful rhetorical analysis must account for variable ways in which popular terminology might be appropriated by a community. The fifth ranked value, longevity, mirrors the value of stability described by Allen as conservative leadership, an assumption that good leadership protects the community from disruptive change.

The two business communities were found to share some common values, and their commonalities offer insights into their relationships with the larger community. There were also clear discursive differences in the representations of praiseworthy behavior. To the extent that its style of discourse reflects a community’s “habitual patterns of commitment” (Black, 1976, p. 85), an analysis of those differences will yield insights in differences in these two towns’ relationships with their business communities.

The very obvious differences in the way the two communities spoke of customer service suggests a fundamental difference in the way these two towns understand the role of business. In Harlan, a business is praised when transactions are performed to the benefit of customers, but there is no sense that doing so is a value that accrues to the community as a whole. In Cresco, on the other hand, the reporters’ descriptions and business people’s self-descriptions highlight the degree to which being in business is itself a service to the community. The emphasis is not on a single customer’s experience, but on the

community's collective ability to obtain goods or services that would not otherwise be available or to experience a uniquely personal shopping experience that cannot be found in large cities.

The news that was deemed of interest to Harlan citizens included several items of business malfeasance. Several articles referred to an ongoing situation in which a processing plant had repeatedly failed to meet water discharge requirements. This could have been due to a difference in the actual degree of misbehavior on the part of Harlan businesses, but two facts suggest otherwise. First, during the observation period, Cresco was facing similar challenges with at least one processing plant, but references to the situation were minimal and framed as an ongoing problem-solving process rather than as a moral failure on the part of the business. Further, the *Harlan Tribune* and *News Advertiser* featured a series of articles produced by the Better Business Bureau on the dangers of fly-by-night contractors and financial industry scams. The overall effect was that Cresco's businesses were framed as partners in developing solutions to community problems, while Harlan businesses—both individually and in general—were seen as entities the community needed to protect itself from.

Finally, differences in order suggest additional differences in the values important in the two communities. As mentioned earlier, Harlan's wellness center fundraising campaign might explain the higher value expressed for caring for others' welfare as well as the disproportionate mention of monetary contributions to the community, in contrast to Cresco's focus on in-kind contributions and volunteer efforts. The number of references to political service might simply be an artifact of the small sample, but could also reflect a greater overlap of business and political groups in Harlan. The value of hard work in Cresco might suggest that things are a bit tougher for business in the smaller community, and could also reflect long term effects of isolation and a community's need for self-reliance. More variety in the sources of praise in the Harlan discourse might indicate less commonality among the paper's readers or in the businesses community's values, or both.

### ***Main Street versus Wall Street***

The second question asks to what extent these values challenge the purported values of free-market capitalism. Those fall into two rather different categories: moral values of individual freedom and autonomy that are protected and nurtured by a suitably laissez faire economy and pragmatic recognition of the market economy as a means to gain the valued outcomes of efficient and productive resource use.

None of the values displayed seem to correlate with either category. Instead, the discourse seems to support the dichotomous values found in Allen's analysis. Urban values of individualism and autonomy are contradictory to a collectivist ethic of small rural communities (Markley et al., 2005). The Wall Street capitalism that values freedom and autonomy is not revealed, but instead the collectivist ethic is supported with values of community contribution. While individual talent or expertise is noted in one discursive cluster, the value was derived from placing that talent in service to the business or the community.

Allen also contrasted the urban value of ethical universalism against a particularistic willingness to make ethical choices in context (Markley et al., 2005). There was so little detail provided in the praise of integrity that no conclusion can be drawn about the bases for ethical decision-making, but its relatively low ranking does suggest that any generalized position with regard to moral behavior is less important than specific, contextualized acts of duty or service.

## ***Business and Society***

Finally, the discourse offers insight into the relationship between local businesses and their community, with implications for the foundational myths surrounding the relationship of business to society and the fundamentally rhetorical nature of economic activity. The small business owners of a small community in Iowa typically spearhead community betterment projects (Besser, 2002), and while small town business people will often declare that business has no responsibility to society, those same individuals would meanwhile declare that “businesses should contribute to the welfare of the community” (Besser, 2002). Their epideictic discourse supports the same point; in these communities, the business person is lauded for contributions to the local community, but there was not a single instance of praise for contributions to national charities, environmentally responsible products or processes outside the local community, or ethical human resource practices.

## **Conclusions**

Although this sample of small town discourse is relatively small, the examination provides evidence that a more extensive study of a community’s epideictic rhetoric can yield important insights. The degree to which a community supports its business community is important for its economic and civic health; rhetorical analysis can yield insights into that relationship and suggest effective strategies for development communication.

This analysis also demonstrates a difference between the values of Main Street and those typically associated with Wall Street capitalism. Public policy choices built on the assumptions of one community might yield unintended consequences when applied to the other. Clearly, rhetorical analysis has a promising role in responsible public affairs that is considerably more sophisticated than merely recording and cataloguing the effective rhetorical strategies and tactics of politicians.

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