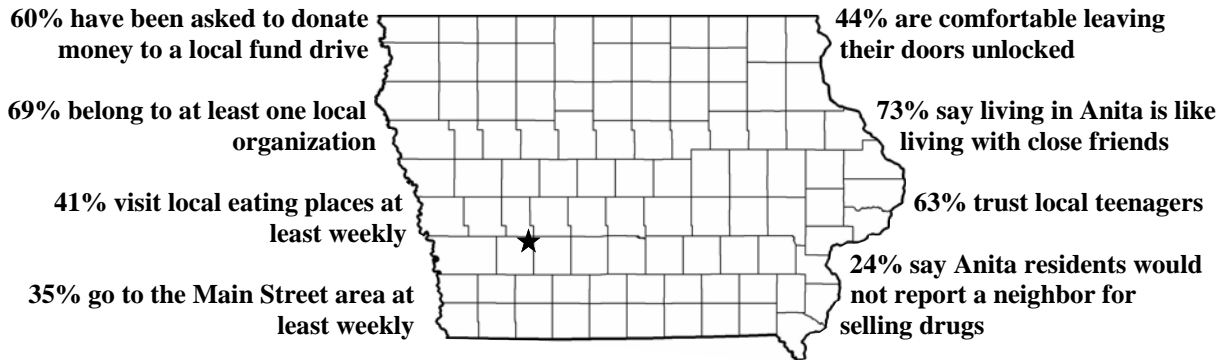


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN ANITA

In February 2004, the Rural Development Initiative Project at Iowa State University conducted a survey designed to look at changes in the social conditions in Iowa's rural towns. The survey was mailed to nearly 15,000 households in 99 towns, one of which was Anita. Ten years ago, residents of these same 99 communities were asked to complete a similar survey. The households for both surveys were selected randomly from local telephone directories (150 households per community). In 1994, 112 Anita residents responded to the survey, and 105 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Anita residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN ANITA IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

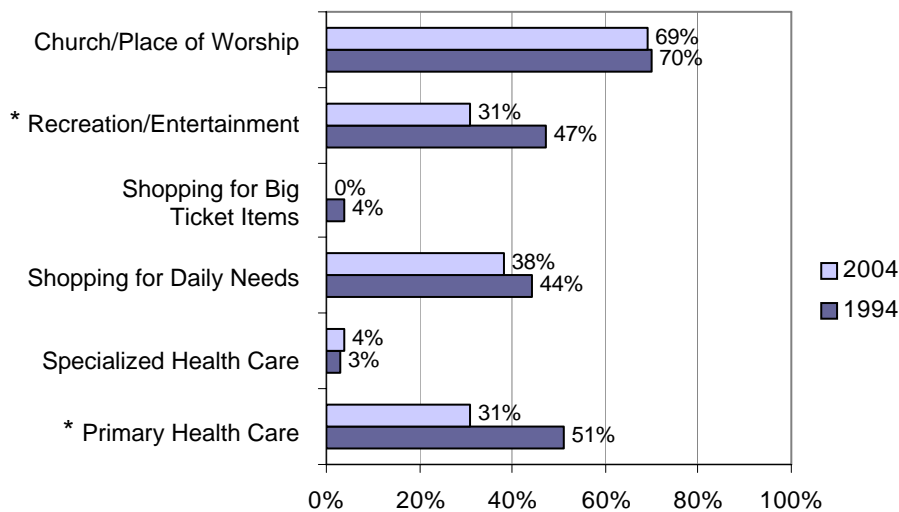


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Anita residents followed this pattern in 1994 and even more so in 2004. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Anita. Almost everyone went out of town for specialized health care and shopping for big ticket items in 1994 and

2004. Roughly a third patronized local services for recreation/entertainment, shopping for daily needs, and primary health care in 2004. Both recreation/entertainment and primary health care patronage were down significantly from 1994. About seven in ten attended local church/place of worship in 2004, which is essentially unchanged from 1994.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Anita, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 11 percent should be considered a statistical "dead-heat." That is, they fall within the margin of error range, which occurs whenever samples are used to draw conclusions about a larger group. With the modest sample sizes used in this study, the differences must be relatively large before we can be confident that they are real. Throughout the report, differences that are equal to or exceed 11 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

## RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

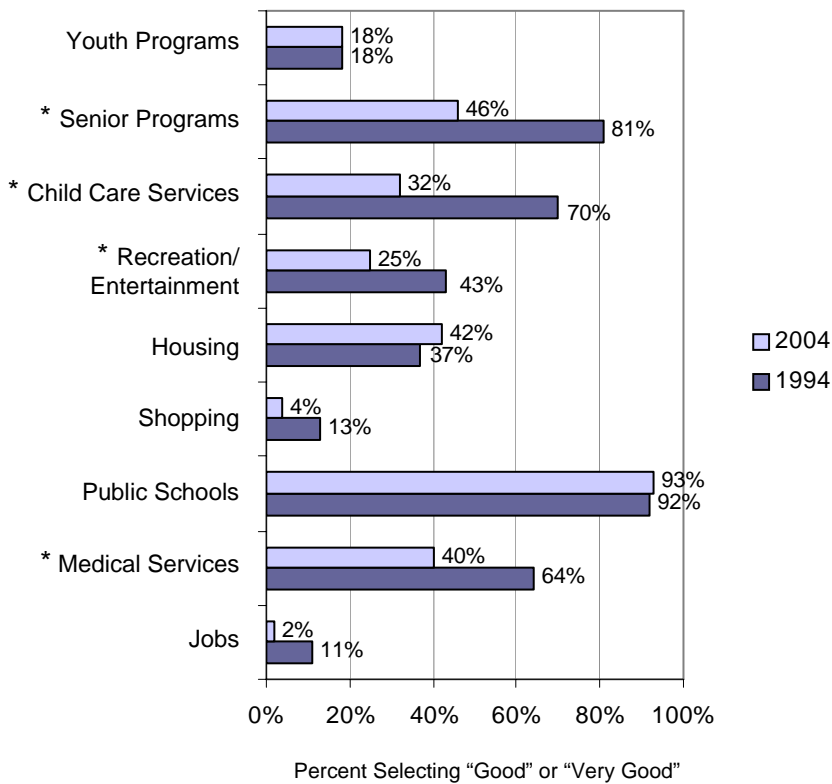


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

Nine local services were listed on the questionnaire along with instructions to rate each as “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” or “not available.” Figure 2 shows the percent of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. Over 90 percent of residents rated the public schools positively in 1994 and 2004. Other services had less than 50 percent approval in 2004 with recreation, medical services, child care and senior programs experiencing significant declines. Senior programs dropped from an 81 percent positive rating in 1994 to 46 percent in 2004 and child care services fell from 70 percent approval in 1994 to 32 in 2004. Ratings were unchanged for other services over the decade. Jobs and shopping received the lowest ratings in both periods.

## RATINGS OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Respondents were asked to provide ratings for seven services normally provided by local governments. Figure 3 shows the percentage of residents rating each service as “good” or “very good” for 2004 and 1994. Generally, Anita residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than 90 percent rated emergency response and fire protection positively, and almost that many rated garbage collection and parks positively in both time periods. The lowest assessments were for police protection and water in 2004. Still, more than half indicated their approval of those services in both 1994 and 2004. Significantly more residents approved of the condition of streets in 2004 compared to 1994.

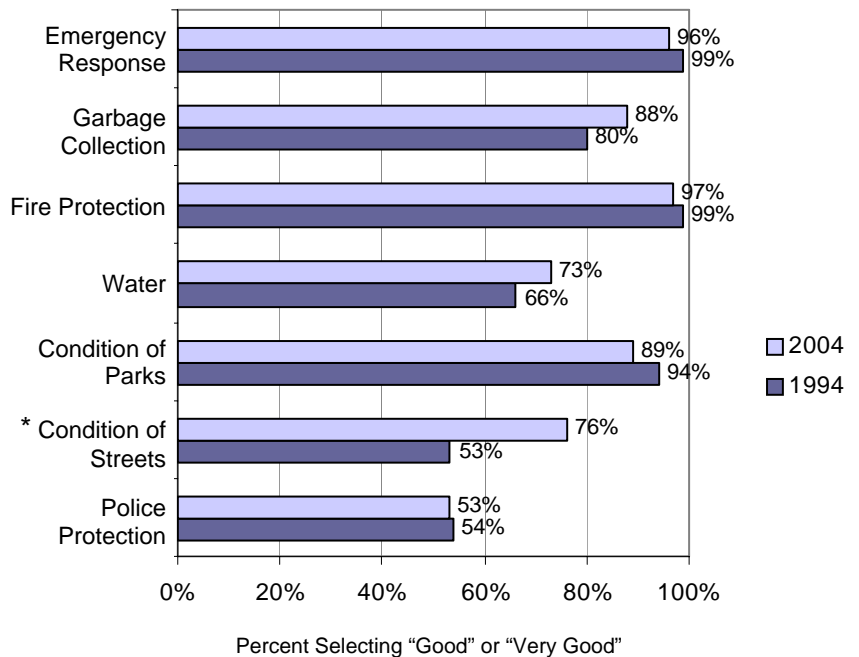
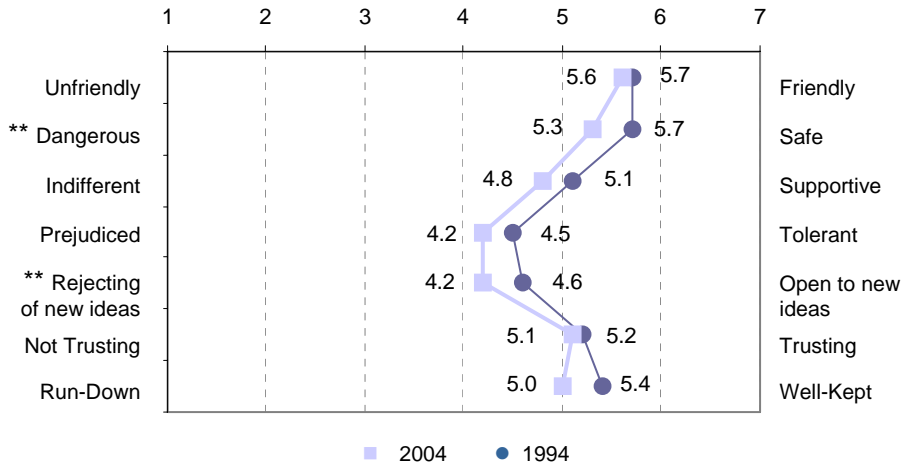


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## ANITA'S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In spite of the frequently publicized economic challenges faced by many of Iowa's small towns, they are regularly praised for having favorable social climates. A main goal of this project has been to determine the extent to which Iowa's rural towns possess favorable social environments. Accordingly, a variety of questions were included on the survey asking residents to evaluate various social attributes of their communities.



**Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale**

\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only those items designated by double asterisks (\*\*) have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and can thus be considered to have changed since 1994.

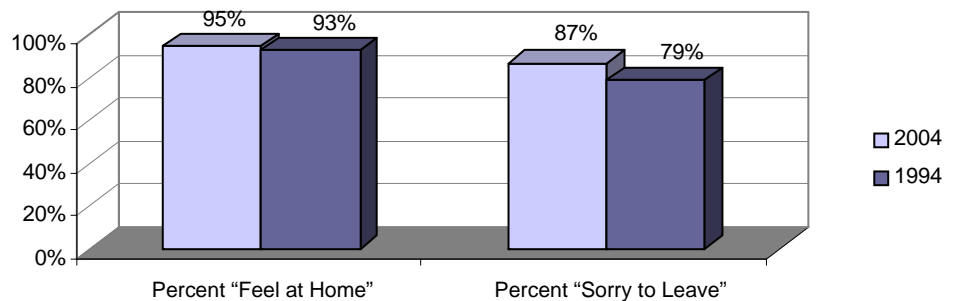
Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, safety and friendliness have the highest evaluations. In 2004, there was a significant decline in Anita residents' assessment of safety. Even so, safety and friendliness still received the highest ratings. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Openness to new ideas declined significantly in 2004 from its 1994 level. The evaluation of other qualities remained the same.

### SOCIAL TIES

"Everybody knows everybody" is often cited as a feature of small towns. The extent to which people know and interact with each other influences commitment to the community and interest in its well-being. Therefore, questions were included about local social ties. In 2004, 61 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Anita, compared to 62 percent in 1994. Similarly, 65 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Anita, compared to 61 percent in 1994. Twenty six percent of residents in 2004 and 24 percent in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in Anita. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Anita residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Anita in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). Furthermore, about eight of ten in both 1994 and 2004 indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Anita. Feelings of attachment to Anita have not changed significantly in the last decade.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Anita, 78 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is

“good” or “very good.” At the same time, 63 percent reported participating in a local community improvement project during the year prior to the survey and more than one in three described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). Reported participation in projects was significantly higher in 2004 than in 1994 when 52 percent reported participating in a project. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Anita residents were lack of time (58%), not asked to volunteer (31%), and no interest in participating (26%).

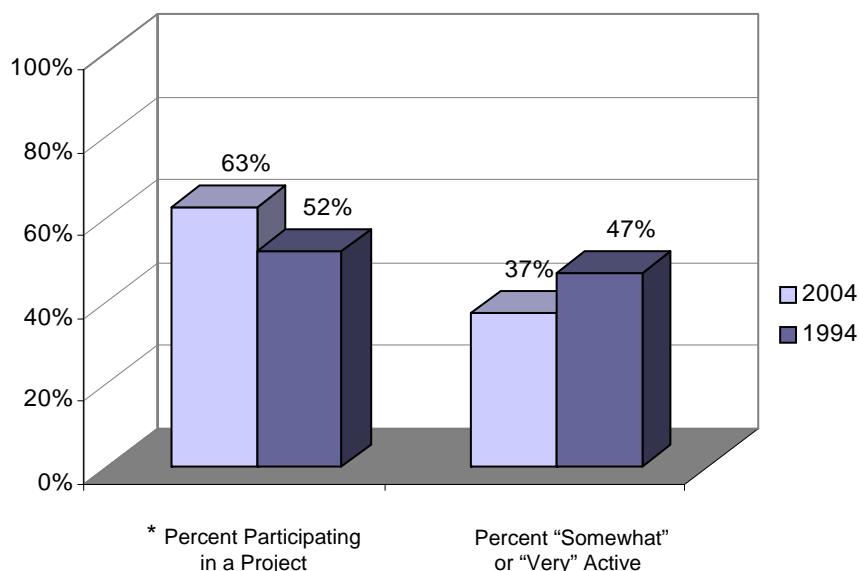


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## SUMMARY

A major goal of this project is to examine changes in the social conditions in rural Iowa over the past decade. As previously discussed, the differences between 2004 and 1994 shown in this report must be interpreted to account for the margin of error—that is, we cannot say with confidence that a change has occurred unless the difference is equal to or greater than 11 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Anita over the past decade? Findings revealed decreases in local patronage for recreation/entertainment and primary health care. Resident evaluations of the quality of public schools remain high, but declines have occurred in assessments of senior programs, child care services, recreation/entertainment, and medical services over the decade. Ratings for government services were positive in both time frames and ratings for street conditions improved significantly.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Anita residents still described their town as a safe and friendly community, but viewed it as less safe and less open to new ideas compared to 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Anita—that is, a vast majority feel at home and would be sorry if they had to leave. About eight in ten reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good and levels of community involvement increased from 1994 to 2004. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that no one asked them. This suggests a possible strategy to increase community participation in the future.

The past decade has been challenging for Iowa’s small towns. We hope this information will prove useful in planning for Anita’s future. **We wish to thank the Anita residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

**RDI**

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**RDI-134** — This report was prepared through the **Rural Development Initiative** Project, Iowa State University and funded by the National Research Initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No. 2003-35401-13828.