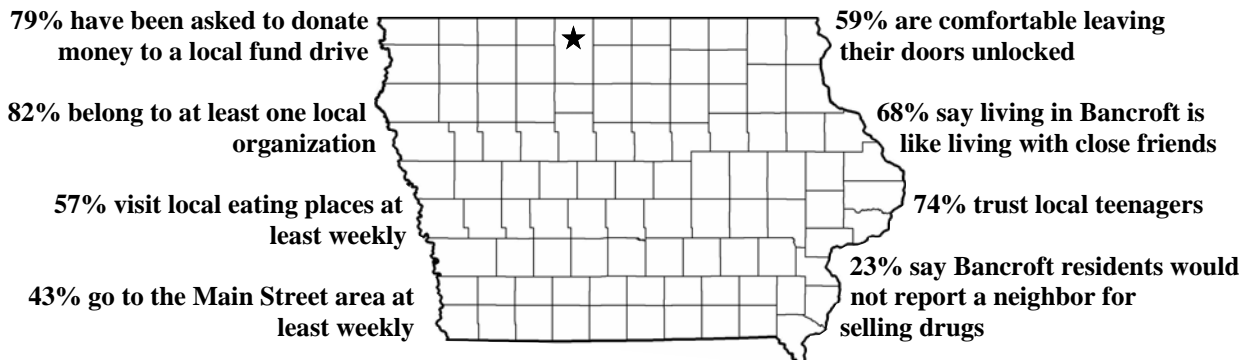


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN BANCROFT

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 Bancroft. 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, 118 Bancroft residents responded to the survey, and 112 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Bancroft residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN BANCROFT IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

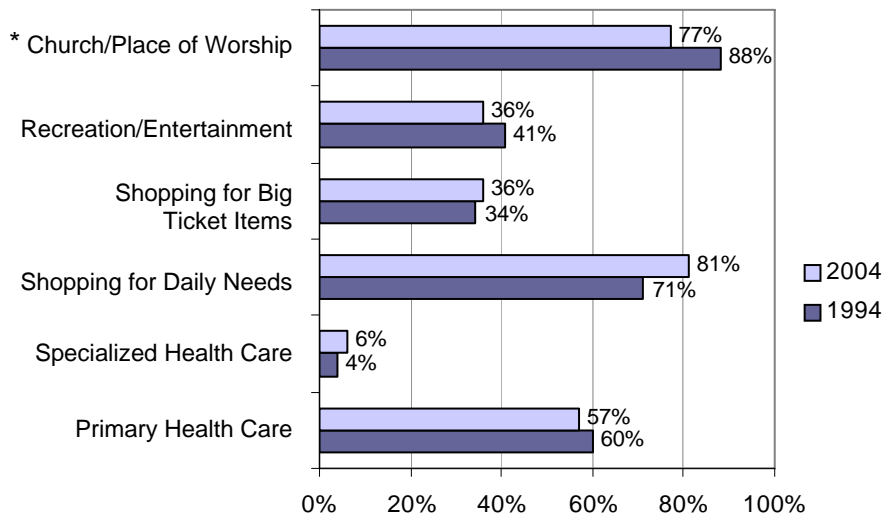


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Bancroft residents defied the trend for some services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Bancroft. In 1994, over 70 percent of residents remained in Bancroft for church/place of worship and shopping for daily needs.

Even so, this represented a significant drop in the patronage of local churches/places of worship over the past decade from 88 percent in 2004. For both 1994 and 2004, almost 60 percent stayed in town for primary health care and roughly one third stayed in town for recreation and shopping for big ticket items. Bancroft residents did not patronize local specialized health care in either time period.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Bancroft, 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

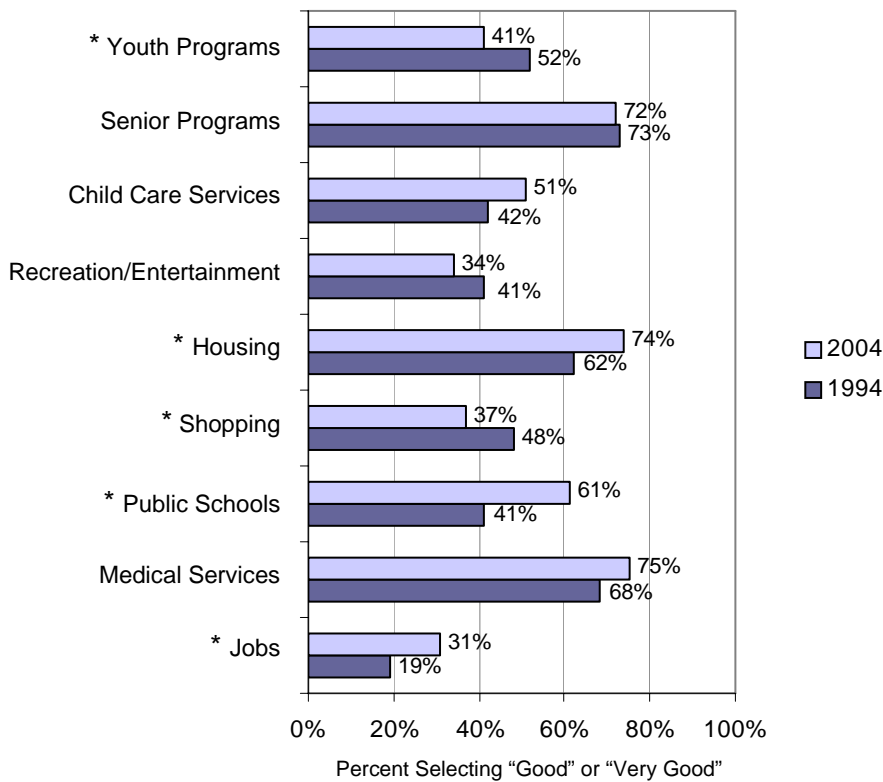


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 percentage of residents who rated each service as “good” or “very good” in 1994 and 2004. More than half of residents rated the senior programs, housing, and medical services positively in both time periods. There was a marked increase in the evaluations of housing, public schools, and jobs in 2004 compared to 1994. However, ratings for youth programs and shopping declined over the decade. Even though the assessment for the quality of jobs improved over the ten-year period, jobs and recreation/entertainment 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, Bancroft residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than nine in ten rated emergency response and fire protection favorably in both times. More than two-thirds of Bancroft residents evaluated garbage collection, water, the condition of the parks and streets, and police protection as good or very good in 1994 and 2004. There were no significant changes in the ratings for government services between 1994 and 2004.

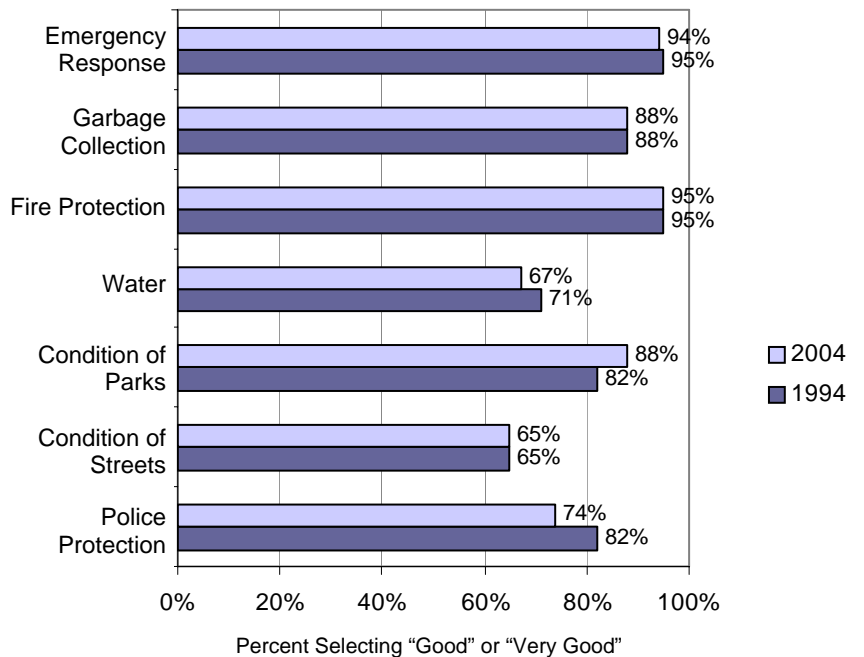
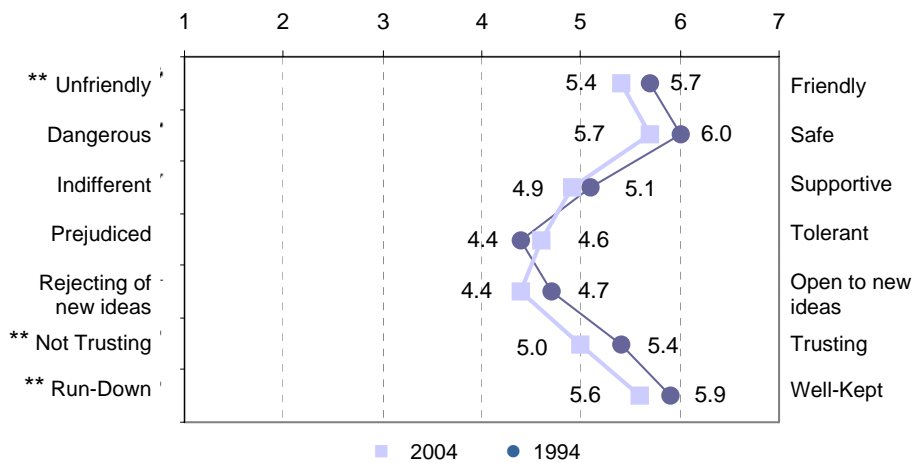


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## BANCROFT'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.

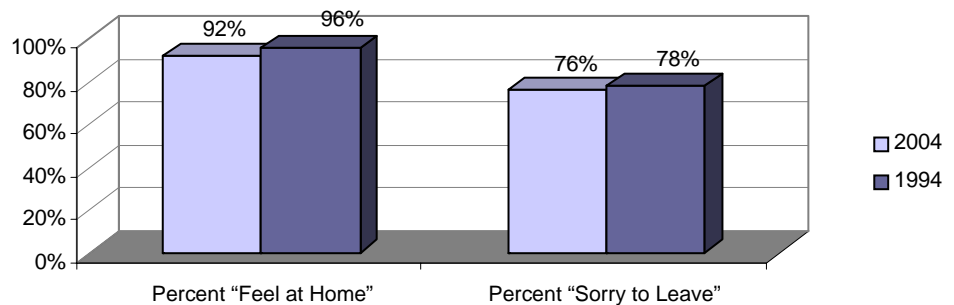
Residents were presented with a list of qualities and asked to evaluate their town on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, safety, appearance, and friendliness received the highest evaluations. In 2004, there were significant declines in residents' assessment of friendliness and appearance in Bancroft compared to 1994. Even so, these two qualities and safety still received the highest ratings. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Noteworthy also is that the rating for trust dropped in 2004.

## 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, 87 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Bancroft, compared to 91 percent in 1994. Similarly, 56 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Bancroft, a significant decrease from 77 percent in 1994. Twenty eight percent of residents in 2004 and 37 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Bancroft.

## COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Bancroft residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Bancroft in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). Furthermore, more than seven of ten people in both 1994 and 2004 indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. Resident attachment to Bancroft has 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 Bancroft, 77 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, almost three-quarters reported participating in a local improvement project in the year prior to the survey and about half described themselves as “somewhat or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). Reported participation in projects increased substantially since 1994 when it was 51 percent, while “activeness” remained essentially the same. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Bancroft residents were lack of time (58%), not having the skills to participate (32%), and not being asked to volunteer (29%).

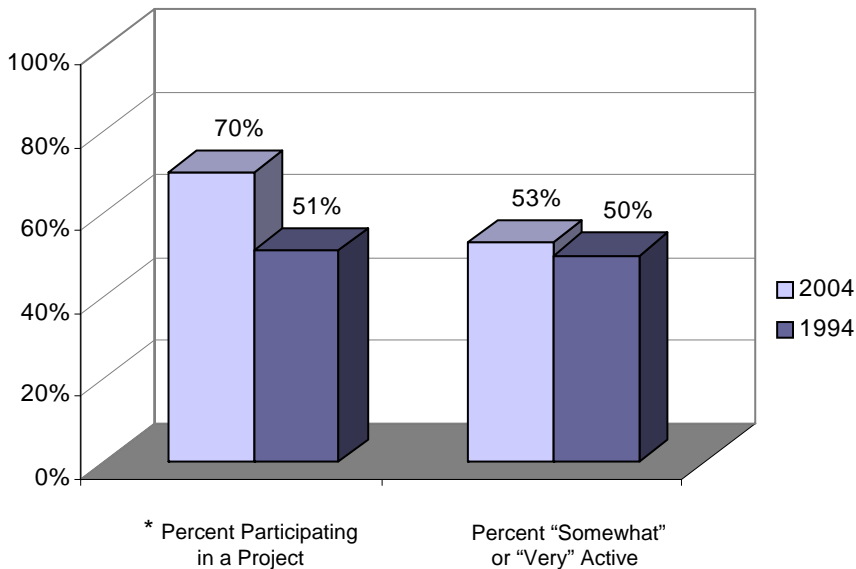


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## 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 Bancroft over the past decade? Bancroft residents were less likely to remain in town for church/worship in 2004 compared to 1994. More evaluated the quality of the public schools favorably, but fewer reported that the quality of local youth programs and shopping were good or very good. Government services and medical services continued to be rated positively. Residents’ opinions of other services and other patronage patterns have not changed over the decade.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Bancroft residents still describe their town as a safe, well-kept and friendly community, but viewed it as less safe, less well-kept, and less friendly compared to 1994. Residents remain strongly attached to the community. Almost eight in ten reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good and the level of involvement in community projects increased over the decade. It is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects were that they did not have the skills to contribute and no one asked them. This suggests possible strategies 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 Bancroft’s future. **We wish to thank the Bancroft residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

**RDI**

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