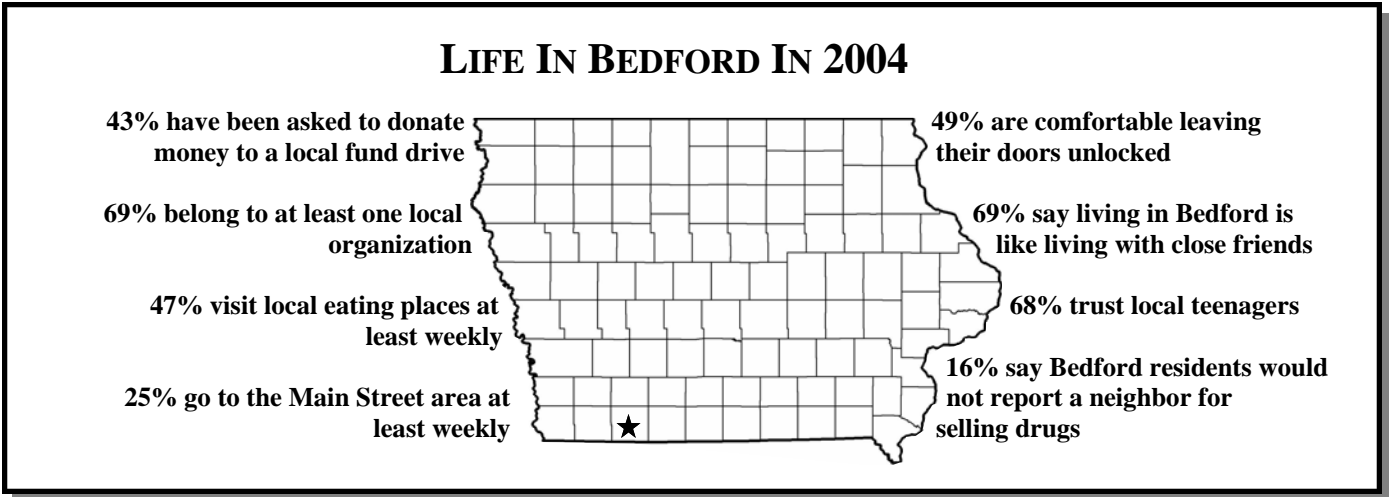


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN BEDFORD

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 Bedford. 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, 100 Bedford residents responded to the survey, and 84 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Bedford residents have changed over the past decade.



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

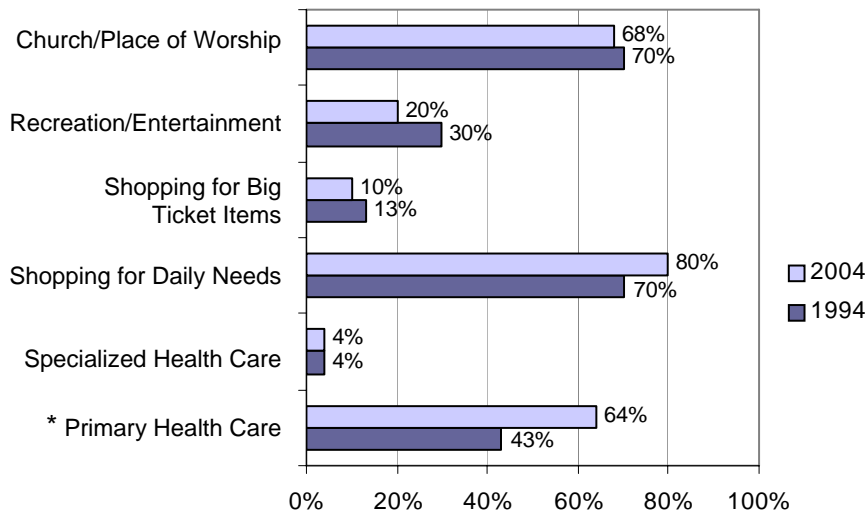


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Bedford residents defied the trend for some services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Bedford for both 1994 and 2004. In 2004, more than 60 percent of residents remained in town for church/place of worship, shopping for daily

needs, and for primary health care. Less than a fifth stayed in Bedford for recreation and shopping for big ticket items or utilized local specialized health care. While the percentage of residents who utilized local primary health care in 2004 was significantly greater than in 1994, changes in other services over the decade are within the margin of error and essentially unchanged.

A Note on Interpretation: For Bedford, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 12 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 12 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

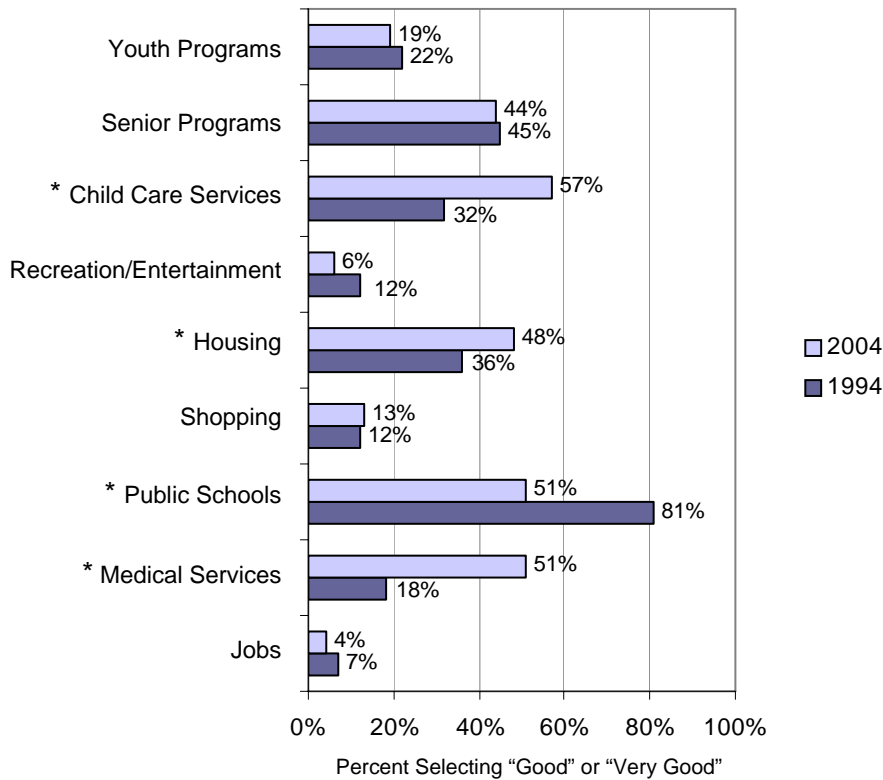


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. About half of Bedford residents rated the public schools, housing, and medical services favorably in 2004. This represents a drop for public schools compared to 1994, but an improvement of ratings for housing and medical services. Evaluations also improved for child care services from 32 percent approval in 1994 to 57 percent in 2004. Jobs, shopping, recreation, and youth programs received the lowest ratings in both periods with fewer than one in four Bedford residents indicating the services were good or very good.

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, Bedford residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than seven in ten rated emergency response and fire protection favorably in both times. More than half indicated that garbage collection, condition of parks and police protection were good or very good in 1994 and 2004. Notable are the significant declines in the evaluations of water services, condition of parks, and condition of streets in 2004 compared to 1994.

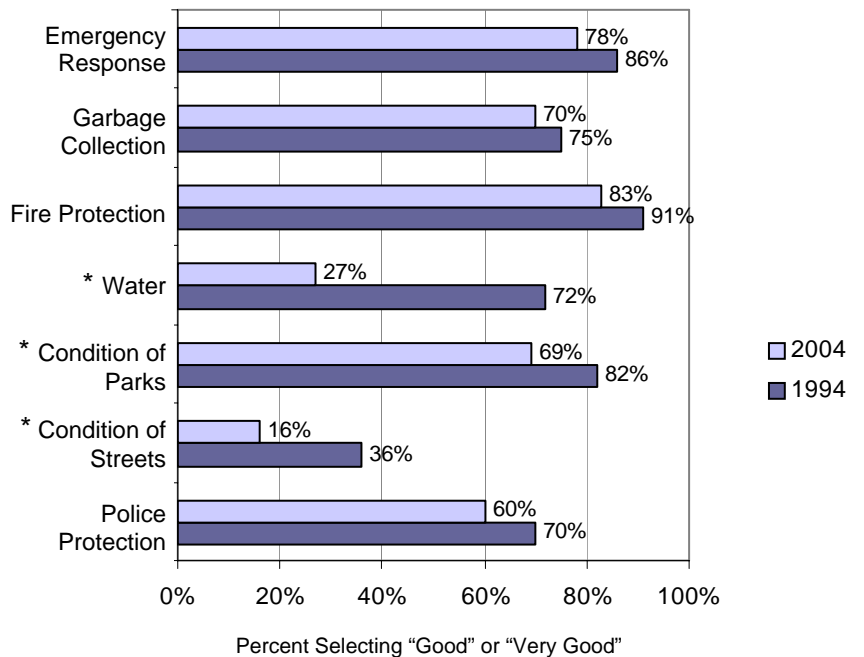


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

BEDFORD'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.

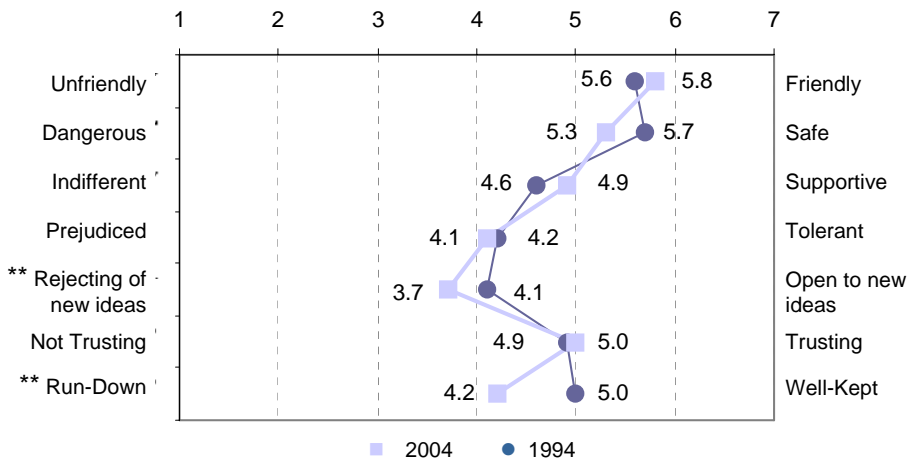


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 both periods, safety and friendliness have the highest evaluations. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. Significant declines occurred in residents' assessments of Bedford's openness to new ideas and physical appearance during the ten years. The ratings for other qualities were essentially unchanged.

** 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.

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, 58 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Bedford, which was unchanged from 1994. Similarly, 69 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Bedford, compared to 63 percent in 1994. Twenty nine percent of residents in 2004 and 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Bedford. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Bedford residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Bedford 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 Bedford. Feelings of attachment have not changed significantly in the last decade.

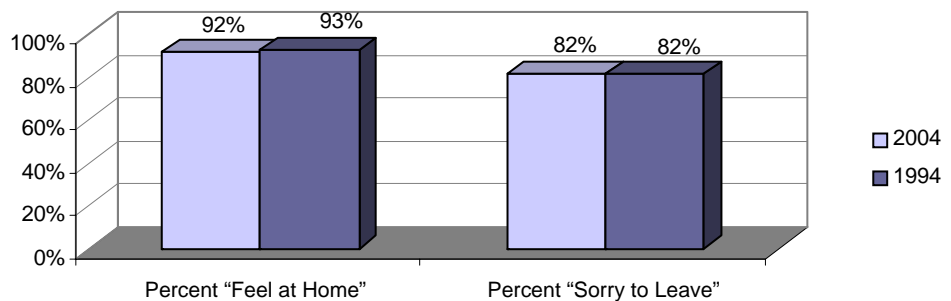


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Bedford, 68 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Slightly more than half reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey and about one in four described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). Participation levels were essentially unchanged from 1994, but reported community activeness has declined significantly from 44 percent in 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors selected by Bedford residents were lack of time (64%), not being asked to volunteer (34%), and having no interest in participating (32%).

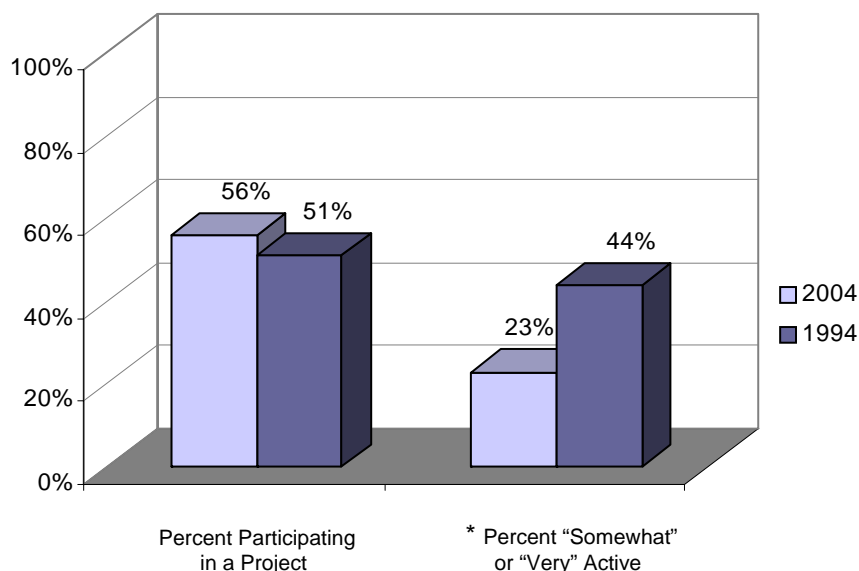


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 12 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in Bedford over the past decade? Bedford residents were more likely to utilize local primary health care in 2004 than in 1994 and still remained in town for church/worship and shopping for daily needs. While more residents approved of the quality of child care services, medical services, and housing, fewer rated the public schools, water, and the condition of parks and streets favorably in 2004 as compared to 1994. Most government services continued to be rated positively.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Bedford residents still described their town as a safe and friendly community, but viewed it as less open to new ideas and less well-kept compared to 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Bedford. More than half reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good and involvement levels in the community were unchanged. However, fewer described themselves as active in the community in 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 Bedford’s future. **We wish to thank the Bedford residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

Prepared by: Terry Besser, Kerry Agnitsch, Laura Forster, Jean Friestad, Tom Rice, Vern Ryan, and Nick Recker, Department of Sociology, Iowa State University. For further information, contact Terry Besser, 515-294-6508, tbesser@iastate.edu or Kerry Agnitsch, 515-294-4095, kagnitsc@iastate.edu.

RDI-141 — 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.