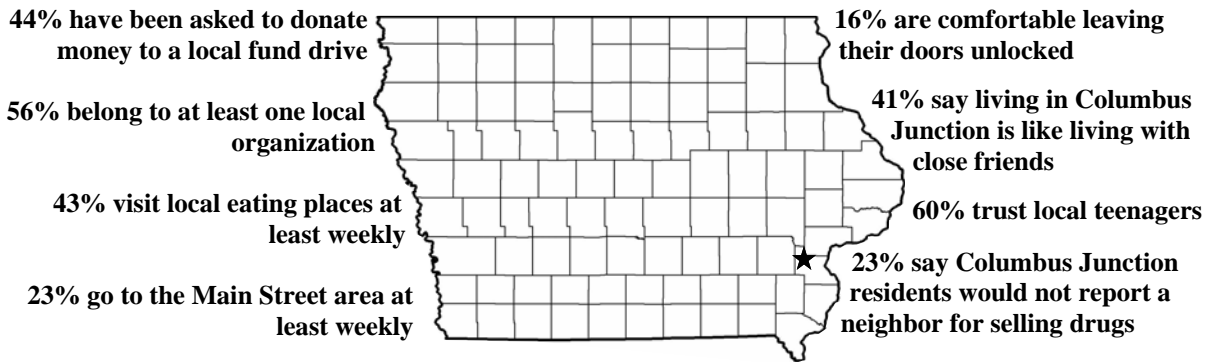


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN COLUMBUS JUNCTION

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 Columbus Junction. 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, 102 Columbus Junction residents responded to the survey, and 87 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Columbus Junction residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN COLUMBUS JUNCTION IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

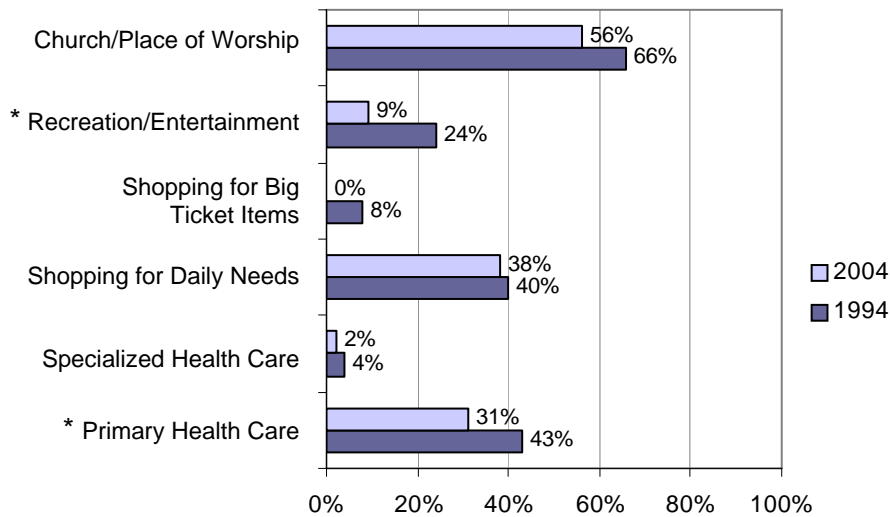


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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

health care in 2004. Fifty-six percent remained in town for church/place of worship services in 2004. This figure was down from 1994, but the difference does not exceed the margin of error for the study. However, there were significant declines in the percentage of residents who patronized local recreation venues and local primary health care services in 2004 compared to 1994.

A Note on Interpretation: For Columbus Junction, 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

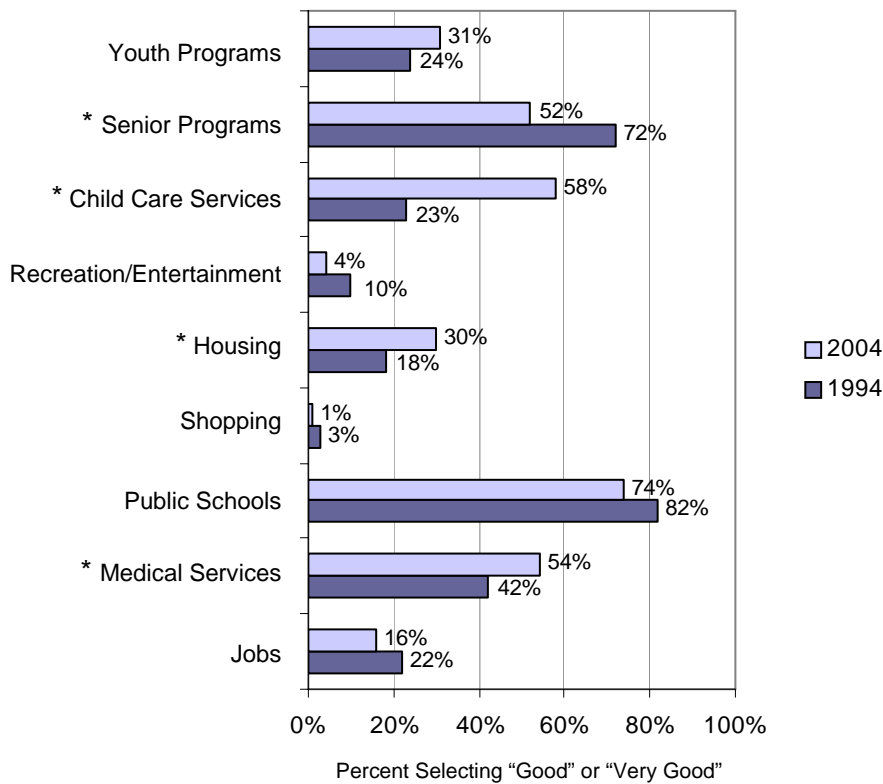


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Public schools received the highest ratings in 1994 and 2004. More than half of Columbus Junction residents rated local child care services, medical services and senior programs favorably in 2004. Shopping, recreation, and jobs in Columbus Junction received the lowest ratings in both time periods. Child care services, housing, and medical services were rated significantly higher in 2004, but ratings for senior programs declined. The assessment of the quality of other services remained essentially unchanged over the decade.

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, Columbus Junction residents reported being satisfied with local government services. Sixty percent or more rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, water, parks, and police protection favorably in both time periods. In 2004, condition of the streets received approval from slightly more than half of residents. The only change over the ten-year span is an increase in approval of the condition of streets in Columbus Junction.

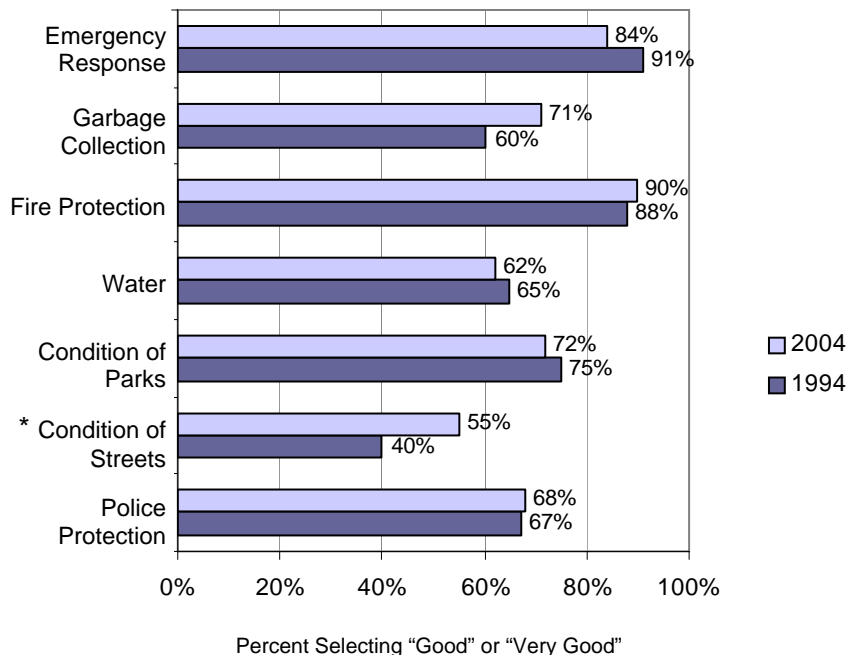


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

COLUMBUS JUNCTION'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.

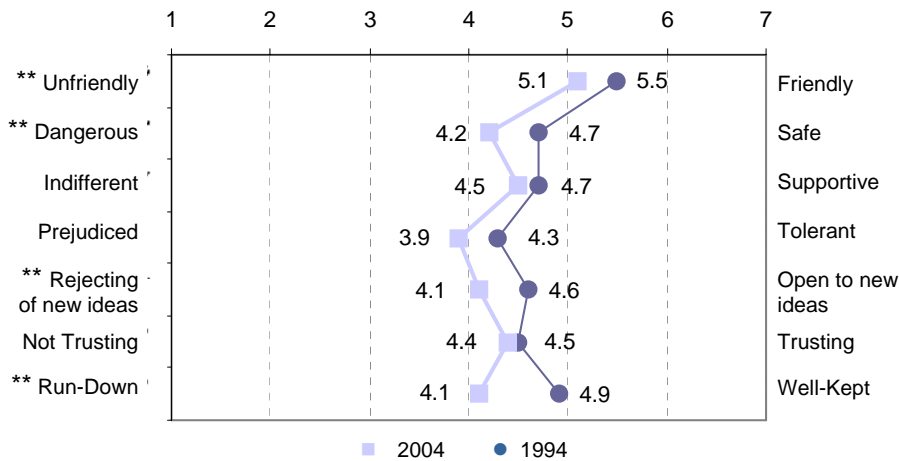


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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 residents of Columbus Junction gave friendliness and appearance the highest evaluations in 1994. In 2004, friendly and supportive received the highest ratings. In both time periods, tolerance received the lowest assessment. There were significant declines in residents' opinions about the friendliness, safety, openness to new ideas, and appearance in 2004 compared to 1994. Changes in other ratings were not statistically significant.

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, 35 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Columbus Junction, a decline from 49 percent in 1994. Similarly, the percentage who indicated that half or more of their friends live in town decreased from 68 percent in 1994 to 54 percent in 2004. Roughly the same percentage of residents in 2004 (29%) and 1994 (35%) said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Columbus Junction.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Columbus Junction residents to their community? More than 80 percent reported that they feel at home in Columbus Junction in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). Eighty percent of residents in 1994 indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. This declined in 2004. Even so, residents remained attached to Columbus Junction.

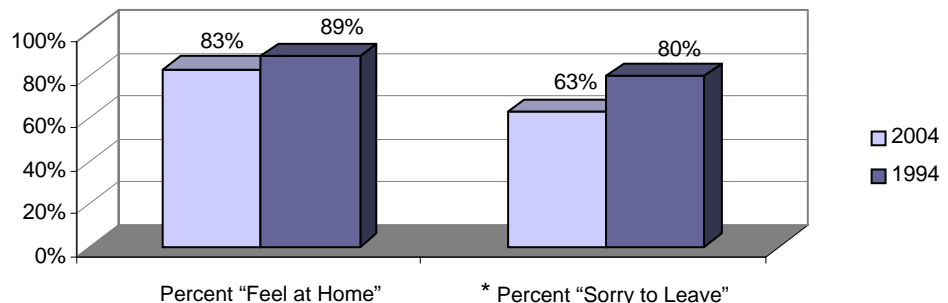


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Columbus Junction, 70 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.”

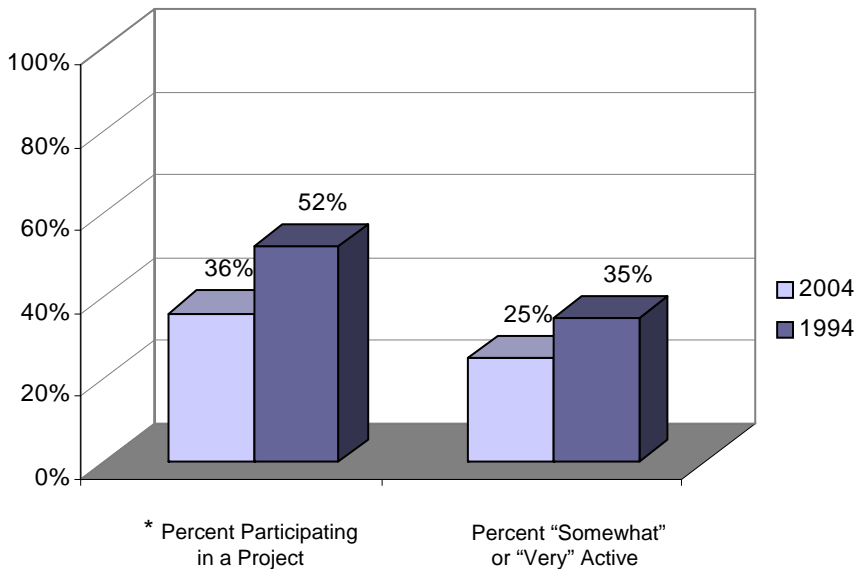


Figure 6: Community Involvement

About a third reported participating in a local improvement project in 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). The level of involvement decreased from 1994 when 52 percent reported participating in an improvement project. But the change in activeness was not significant. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by residents were lack of time (56%), not being asked to volunteer (34%), and having no interest in participating (29%).

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 Columbus Junction over the past decade? Findings revealed decreases in local patronage for recreation venues and primary health care. Positive evaluations for the quality of child care services, housing, medical services, and the condition of streets increased in 2004 compared to 1994, but the rating of the quality of senior programs was lower.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Columbus Junction as a friendly community, but viewed it as less friendly, less safe, less well-kept, and less open to new ideas than in 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Columbus Junction and most indicated that the spirit of community participation is good or very good. Levels of personal ties and community involvement have declined over the decade in Columbus Junction. However, 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 response suggests potential strategies for increasing community participation.

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

RDI

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RDI-151 — 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.