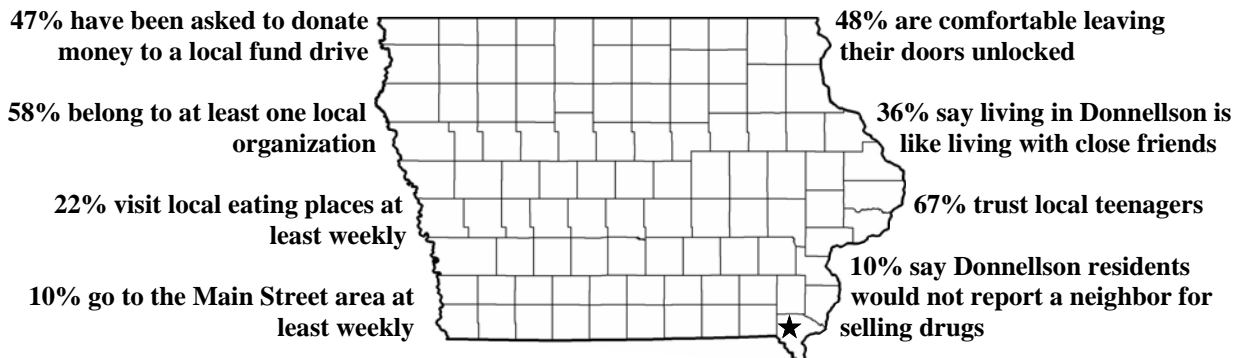


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN DONNELLSON

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 Donnellson. 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, 111 Donnellson residents responded to the survey, and 106 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Donnellson residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN DONNELLSON IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

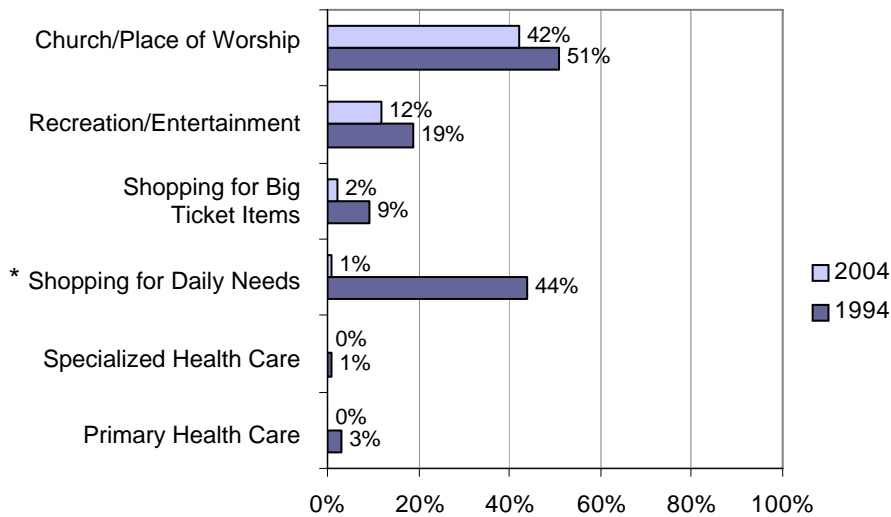


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Donnellson residents followed this pattern in 1994 and 2004. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Donnellson. Almost everyone went out of town for all services except attending church or place of worship. About half of resi-

dents remained in Donnellson for church/place of worship related services in 1994 and 42 percent in 2004. This difference is within the margin of error for the study. There was a substantial decline, however, in the percentage of residents reporting that they shop for their daily needs in Donnellson. The percentage dropped from 44 to essentially none. Patronage for other services were unchanged.

A Note on Interpretation: For Donnellson, 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

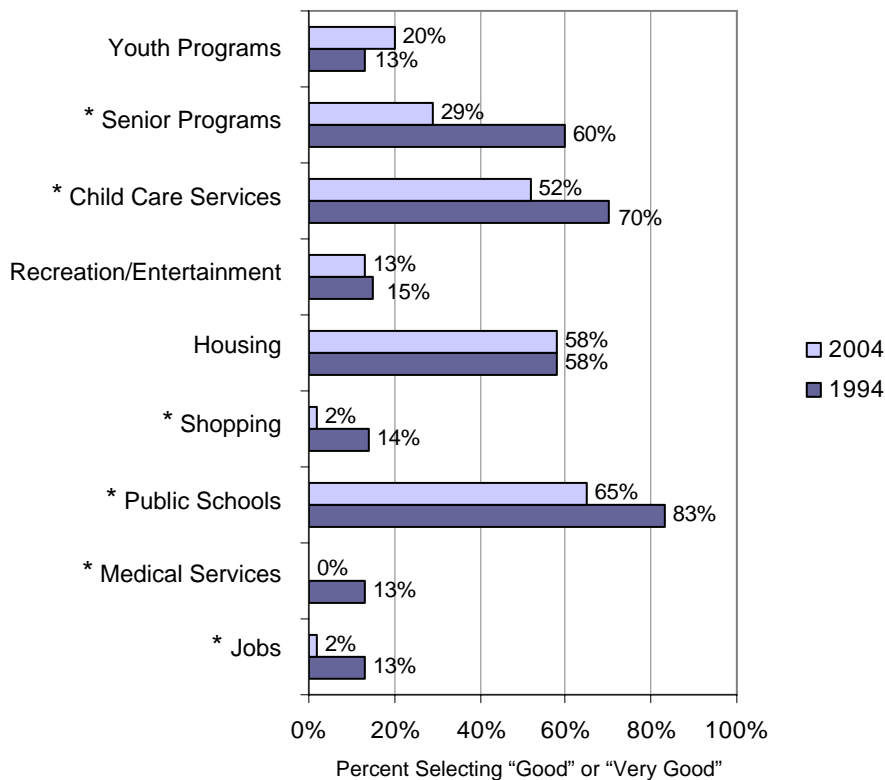


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. About two-thirds of residents rated the public schools positively in 2004, down from 83 percent in 1994. Similar declines occurred in the evaluation of the quality of senior programs, child care services, shopping, medical services, and jobs. Attitudes toward the quality of youth programs, recreation, and housing remained stable. Jobs, medical services, shopping, recreation, and youth programs received the lowest ratings in both periods with fewer than one in five 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, Donnellson residents reported being satisfied with local government services in 2004, but less so than in 1994. The majority evaluated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and parks favorably in both time periods. The ratings for emergency response and condition of the parks and streets were unchanged over the decade. All other government services in Donnellson received significantly lower ratings in 2004 compared to 1994.

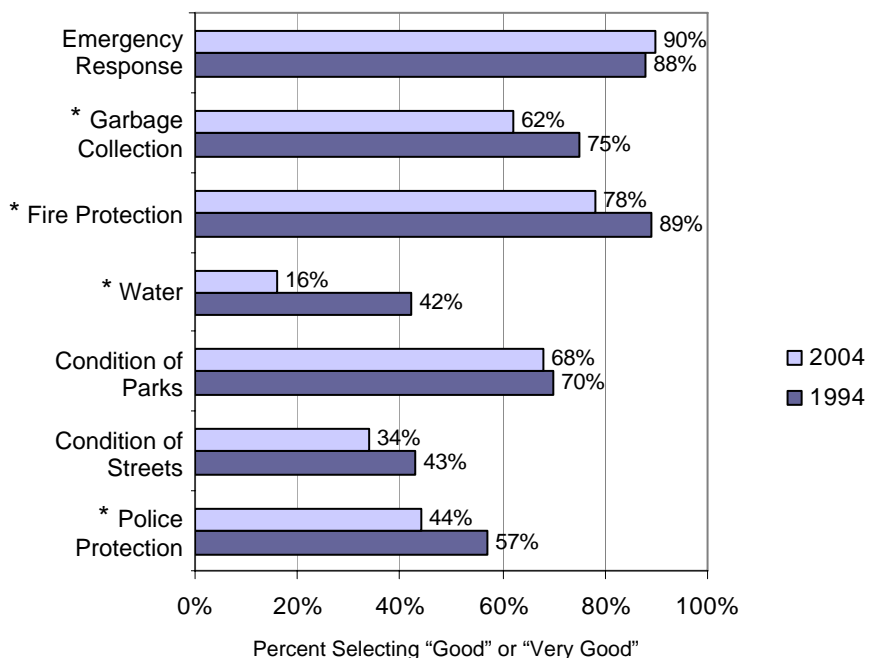


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

DONNELLSON'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.

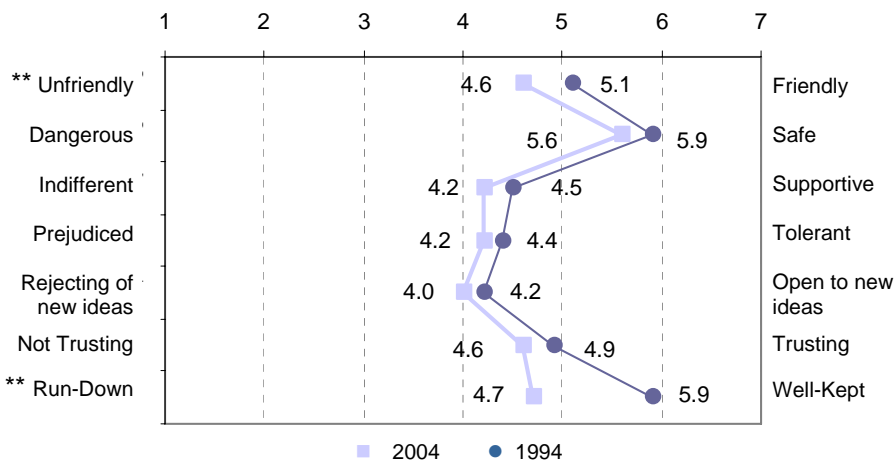


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** The margin of error is different for averages. Only those items designated by double asterisks have differences large enough to fall outside of the statistical margin of error and 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 appearance had the highest evaluations. In 2004, there was a significant decline in residents' assessment of Donnellson's appearance and friendliness compared to 1994. Even so, safety and appearance still received the highest ratings. Openness to new ideas, tolerance, and supportiveness received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. The evaluations of most qualities remained unchanged over the decade.

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. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. Therefore, questions were included about local social ties. Forty-six percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Donnellson in 2004 and 1994. Similarly, 22 percent of residents in 2004 and 28 percent in 1994 said that half or more of adult relatives and in-laws live in town. However, the percentage who indicated that half or more of their friends live in Donnellson dropped from 1994 (44 %) to 2004 (26%).

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

How attached are Donnellson residents to their community? Almost everyone reported that they feel at home in Donnellson in both 1994 and 2004 (see Figure 5). Sixty-three percent reported that they would be sorry to leave town in 2004, a decline from 76 percent in 1994. Even so, the majority of residents are still attached to Donnellson in 2004.

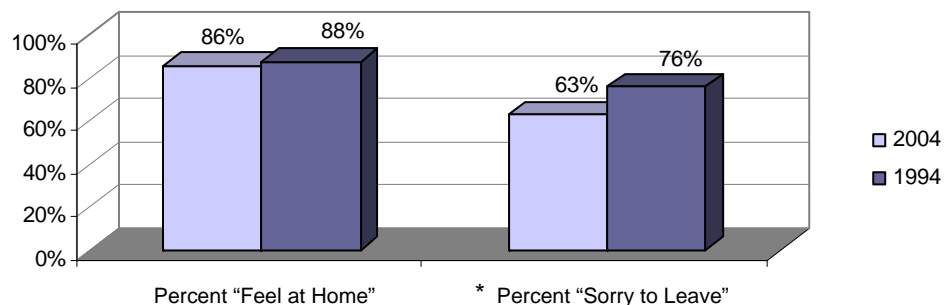


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Donnellson, 50 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” About half reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey year and about one in three described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). This level of participation in Donnellson has increased from 36 percent in 1994, but reported active-

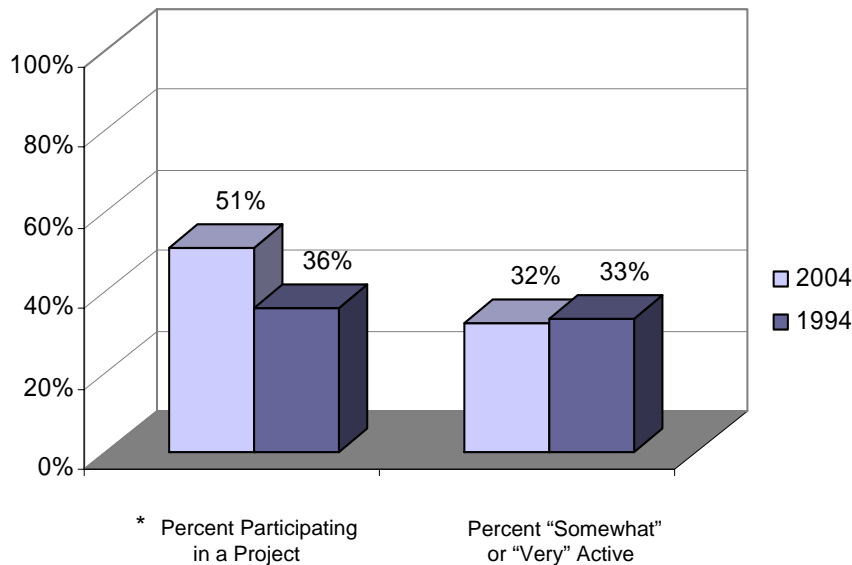


Figure 6: Community Involvement

ness was unchanged since 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned by Donnellson residents were lack of time (63%), not being asked to volunteer (38%), and not knowing how to become involved (33%).

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 Donnellson over the past decade? Fewer residents approved of the quality of senior programs, child care services, shopping, the public schools, medical services, jobs, garbage collection, fire protection, water services, and police protection. Also, they were less likely to shop for their daily needs in Donnellson in 2004 compared to 1994.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Donnellson as a safe and well-kept community, but viewed it as less well-kept and less friendly compared to 1994. They remained attached to Donnellson, but fewer reported that they would be sorry to leave town if they had to move away. Half indicated that the spirit of community participation is good or very good overall and the percentage of residents who reported that they were involved in community projects increased from 1994 to 2004. It is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects were that no one asked them and did not know how to become involved. These suggest 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 Donnellson’s future. **We wish to thank the Donnellson residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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