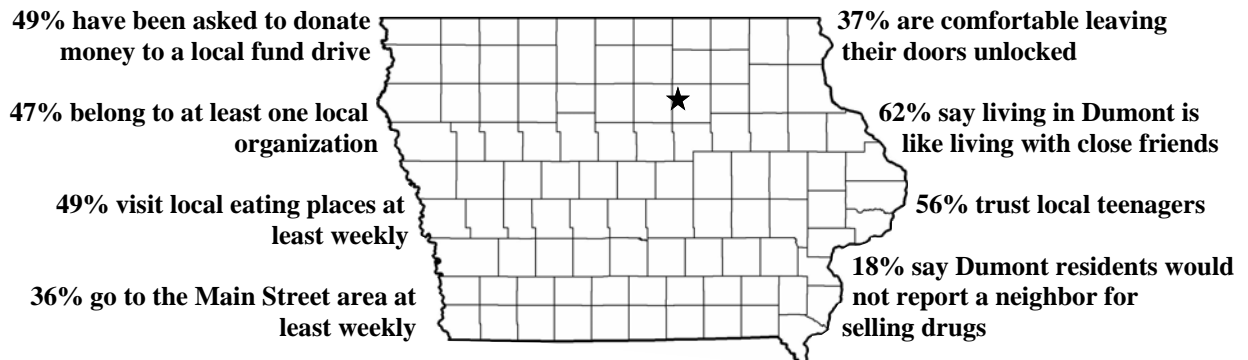


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN DUMONT

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 Dumont. 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, 117 Dumont residents responded to the survey, and 106 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Dumont residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN DUMONT IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

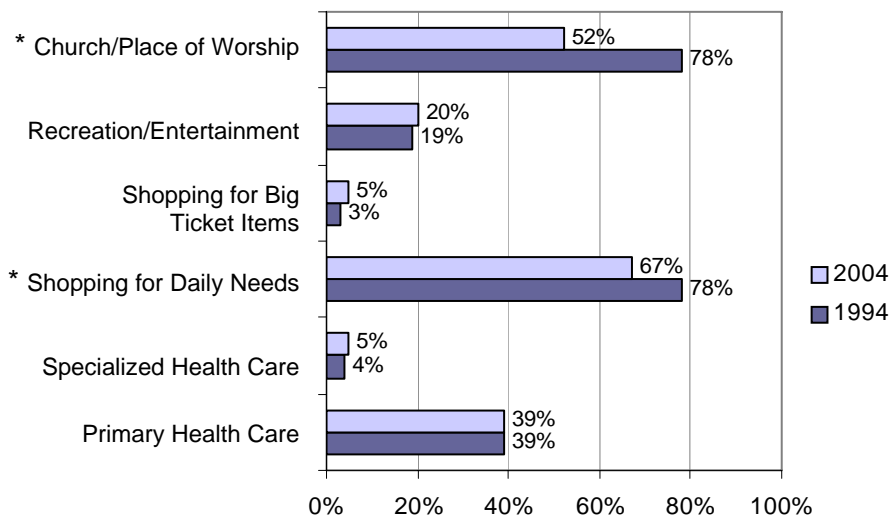


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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

items, and recreation. More than half remained in town for church/worship related services and shopping for daily needs. However in 1994, 78 percent of residents reported attending local church/worship services which dropped to 52 percent in 2004. Likewise, shopping for daily needs in town decreased from 78 percent in 1994 to 67 percent in 2004. Patronage of other services was unchanged over the decade.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Dumont, 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

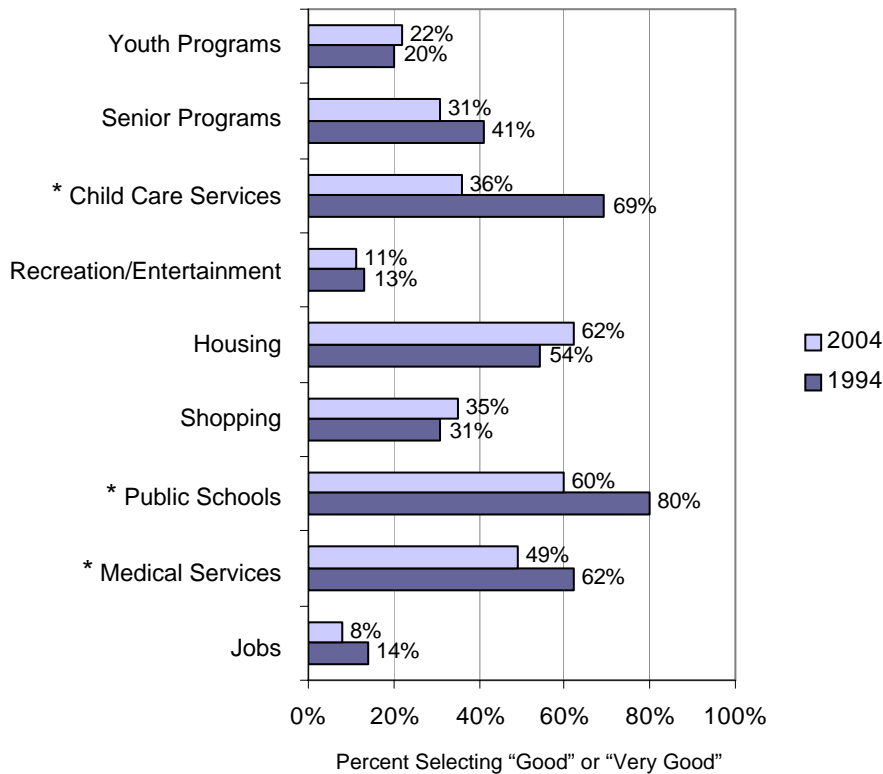


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 half of residents evaluated the public schools, housing, and medical services positively in 2004. Jobs, recreation, and youth programs received the lowest ratings in both 1994 and 2004. In the middle in 2004 were the evaluations of shopping, senior programs, and child care services. There were significant declines in the assessment of child care services, public schools, and medical services in 2004 from 1994 levels. Ratings for other services remained about the same from 1994 to 2004.

## 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, Dumont residents reported being satisfied with local government services. More than three-fourths rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and parks favorably in both times. Almost two-thirds indicated that water services was good or very good in 1994 and 2004. Police protection received the lowest rating in 1994 and declined even more in 2004. Residents also rated emergency response services lower in 2004 compared to 1994. Ratings for other services were unchanged.

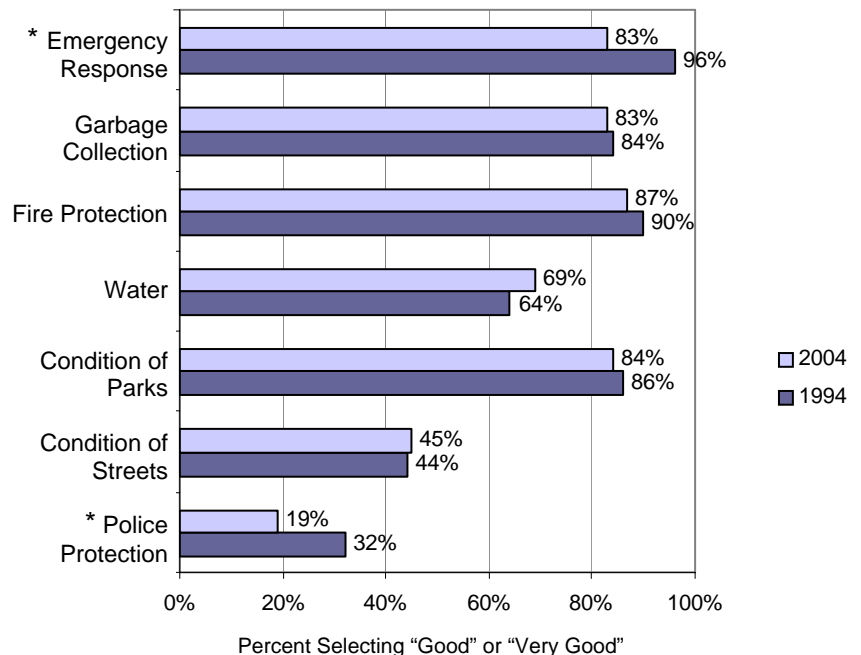


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## DUMONT'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.

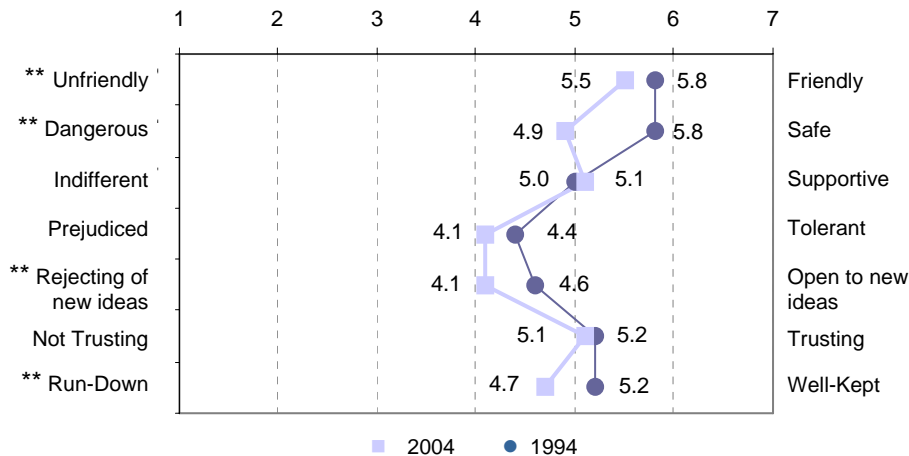


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

\*\* 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 Dumont on each quality using a 7-point scale. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, safety and friendliness had the highest evaluations. In 2004, there were significant declines in residents' assessments of safety and friendliness, such that the qualities with the highest ratings in 2004 were friendliness, supportive, and trusting. Openness to new ideas and tolerance received the lowest ratings in both years. In addition to the changes noted above, the ratings for openness to new ideas and appearance 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, 59 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Dumont, a decrease from 79 percent in 1994. Similarly, the percentage who indicated that half or more of their friends live in Dumont declined from 61 percent in 1994 to 42 percent in 2004. Roughly the same percentage of residents in 2004 (18%) and 1994 (25%) said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Dumont.

## COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

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

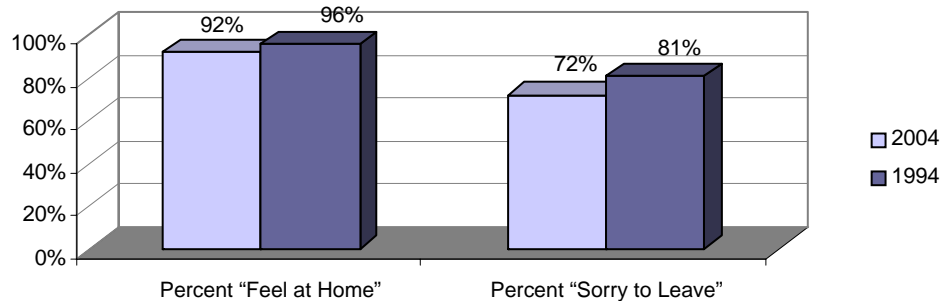


Figure 5: Community Attachment

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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

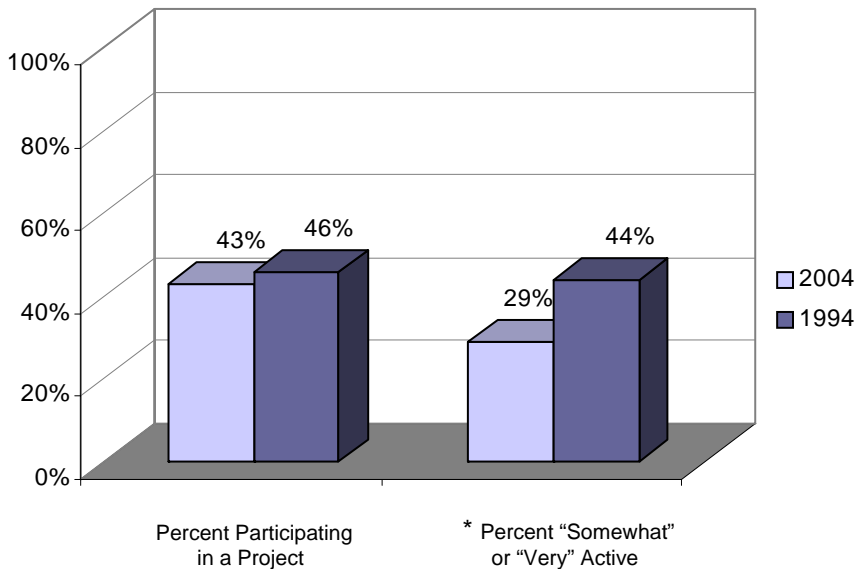


Figure 6: Community Involvement

Forty-three percent reported participating in a local improvement project during the last year and about three in ten described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). The level of participation is essentially unchanged from 1994 when 46 percent reported participating in a project, but self-described activeness has declined 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 mentioned by residents were lack of time (57%), not being asked to volunteer (34%), 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 Dumont over the past decade? Residents were less likely to utilize local churches/places of worship and to shop for daily needs in town in 2004. Fewer residents approved of the quality of child care services, public schools, medical services, emergency response, and police protection. Even so, government services and public schools continued to be rated positively.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Residents still described Dumont as a safe community, but viewed it as less safe, less friendly, less open to new ideas, and more run down compared to 1994. Residents remained strongly attached to Dumont and more than seven in ten reported that the spirit of community participation is good or very good. Fewer residents reported that they are active in the community, but about the same percentage reported involvement in improvement projects. It is interesting 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 get 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 Dumont’s future. **We wish to thank the Dumont residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

**RDI**

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**RDI-156** — 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.