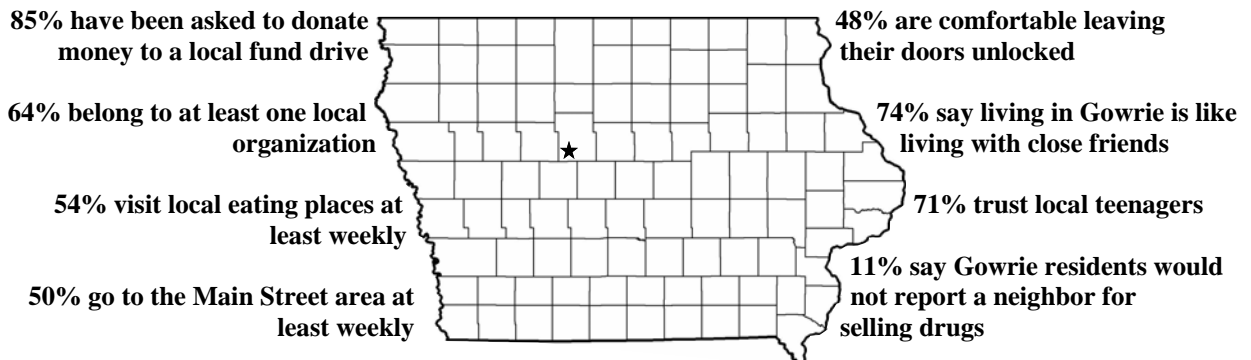


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN GOWRIE

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 Gowrie. 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, 121 Gowrie residents responded to the survey, and 104 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Gowrie residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN GOWRIE IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

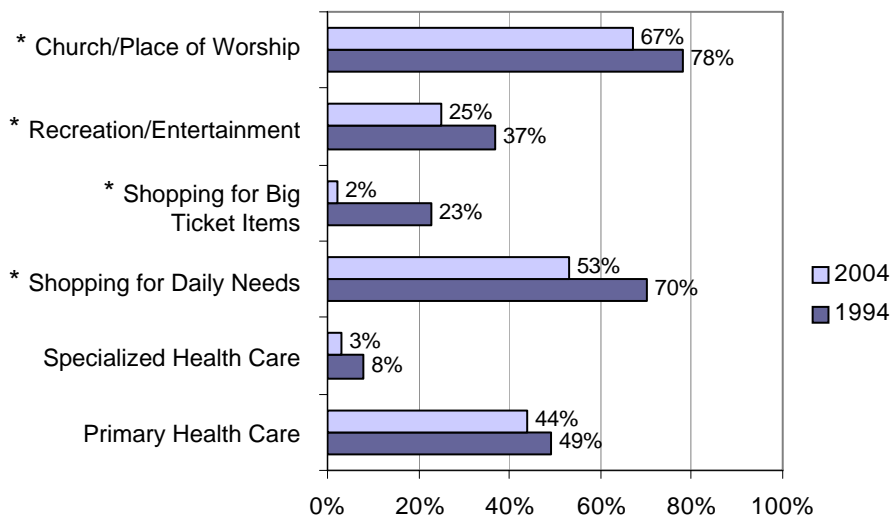


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. The Gowrie survey results, which are displayed in Figure 1, show that residents stay in town for some services, but travel for others. In both 1994 and 2004, the majority of residents stayed in town to attend church or place of worship and to shop for their daily needs. Slightly less than half stayed in town for their

primary health care. Twenty five percent in 2004 stayed in town for their recreation/entertainment. Few stayed for big ticket shopping and specialized health care in 1994 and even fewer in 2004. From 1994 to 2004, local patronage fell significantly in four areas: church or place of worship, recreation/entertainment, shopping for big ticket items, and shopping for daily needs.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Gowrie, 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

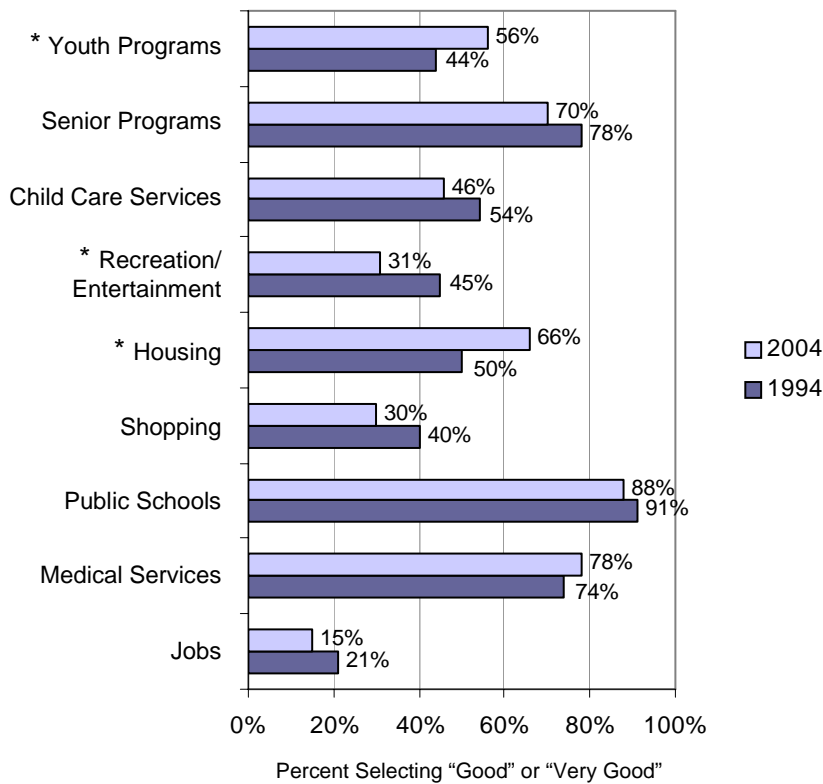


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Public schools, medical services, and senior programs received the highest ratings in both years. The lowest ratings in both years were for jobs in Gowrie. From 1994 to 2004, the percentage of Gowrie residents who rated recreation and entertainment as “good” or “very good” fell significantly. However, the percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to housing increased from 50 percent to 66 percent and youth programs increased from 44 percent favorable ratings in 1994 to 56 percent in 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. In both years, Gowrie residents were pleased with the quality of their government services. Emergency response, fire protection, and parks received the highest ratings from over 90 percent in both years. The condition of the streets received the lowest ratings in both years. The percentage of residents who rated police protection as “good” or “very good” fell significantly, from 80 percent in 1994 to 69 percent in 2004. The changes in ratings for all of the other services are within the margin of error.

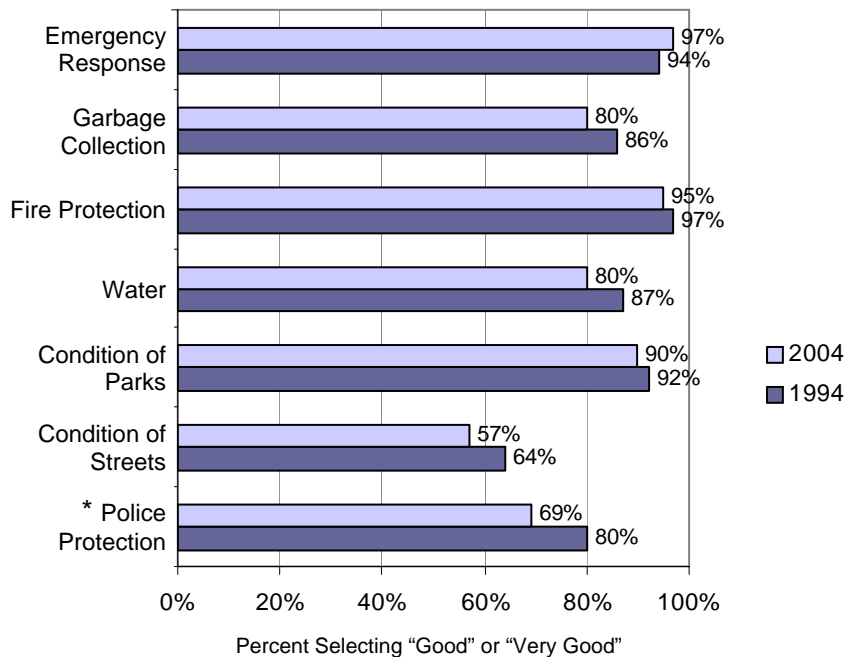
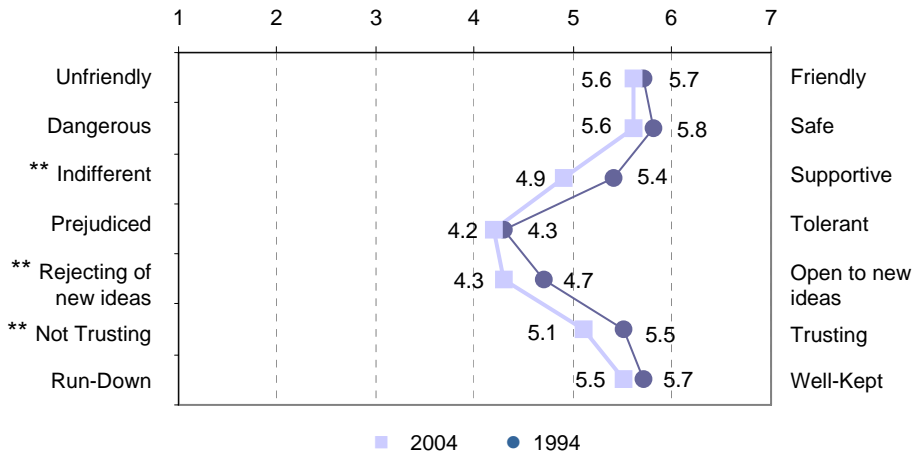


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## GOWRIE'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. Figure 4 shows how Gowrie residents evaluated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In 1994, residents assigned the highest ratings to friendliness, safety, and appearance, and these three areas also received the highest ratings in 2004. The lowest ratings for both years were for tolerance and openness to new ideas. From 1994 to 2004, the ratings for supportiveness, openness to new ideas, and trust decreased significantly. The ratings for the other areas did not change significantly.

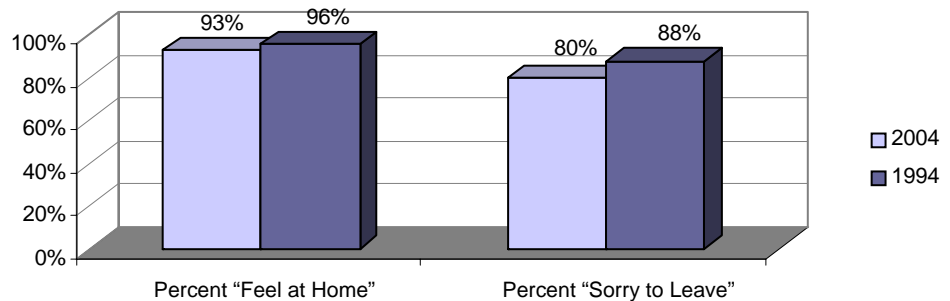
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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. As such, questions were included to assess local social ties. In 2004, 63 percent of the residents said they knew the names of half or more of the people in Gowrie, compared to 69 percent in 1994. Fifty-six percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town in 2004, compared to 66 percent in 1994. Thirteen percent of the residents in 2004 and 14 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in town. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Gowrie residents feel at home in their community? Figure 5 shows that almost all of the residents in both 1994 and 2004 felt at home in Gowrie. More than 80 percent of residents reported that they would be sorry to leave the town. These high levels of community attachment in Gowrie have not changed significantly over the last ten years.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Gowrie, 89 percent of the respondents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In both

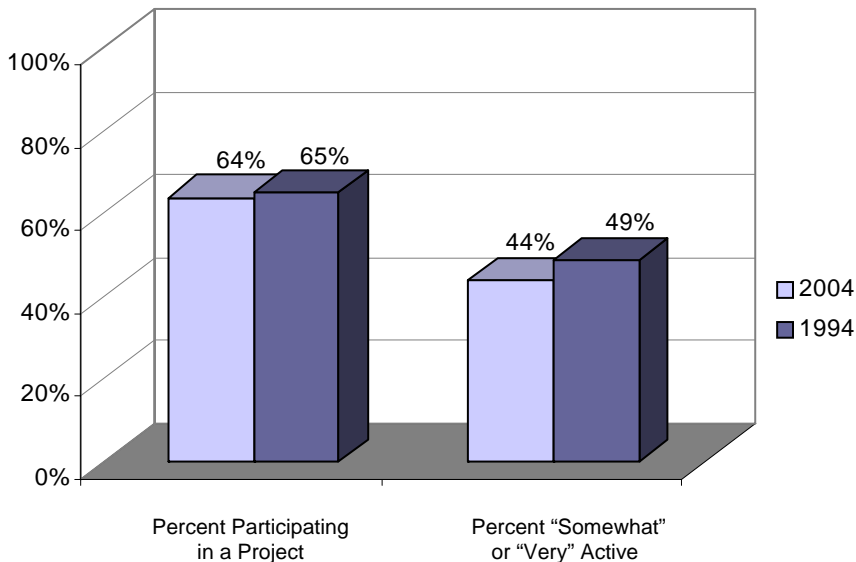


Figure 6: Community Involvement

1994 and 2004, over 60 percent of the residents reported participating in a community improvement project during the year prior to the survey (Figure 6). The percentage of residents who said they were “somewhat active” or “very active” in community activities was slightly below 50 percent in both years. When respondents were asked to consider the factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top response in 2004 was that they lacked time to get involved (55%). Other common responses were that no one had asked them to volunteer (35%) and that they did not know how to become involved (20%).

## 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 Gowrie over the past decade? The percentage of people who stay in Gowrie to attend church or their place of worship declined, as did the percentages who stay in town for recreation/entertainment and for shopping for big ticket items and daily needs. Residents’ evaluations of youth programs and housing improved, but their evaluations of recreation and entertainment in Gowrie declined. As for government services, residents’ satisfaction with police protection fell significantly. Assessments of all of the other facilities and services stayed about the same from 1994 to 2004.

The social environment in Gowrie has changed somewhat over the decade. The ratings that residents gave their community on some qualities remained unchanged, but significantly fewer residents felt that Gowrie was supportive, open to new ideas, and trusting. There were no significant changes in the percentage of people involved in community activities. It is interesting to note that one of the top reasons people gave for not being involved in community projects was that they had not been asked to volunteer. This suggests one way for increasing community involvement.

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

**RDI**

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**RDI-171** — 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.