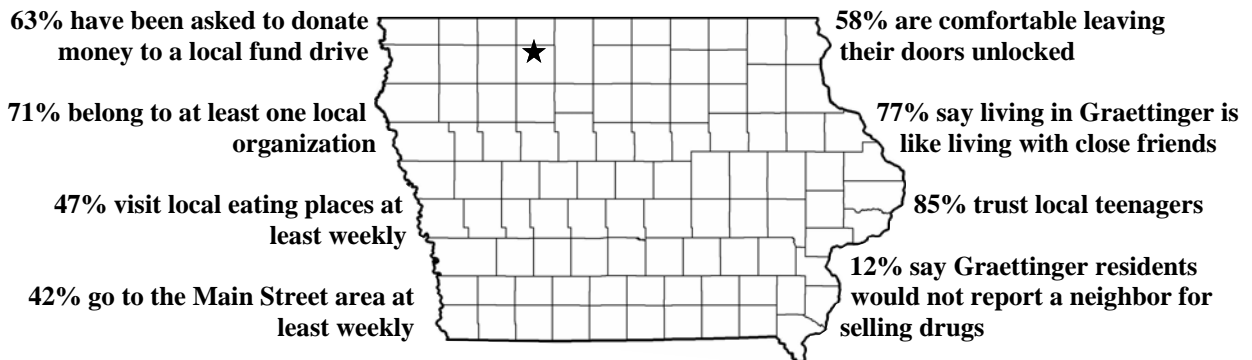


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN GRAETTINGER

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 Graettinger. 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, 118 Graettinger residents responded to the survey, and 100 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Graettinger residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN GRAETTINGER IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

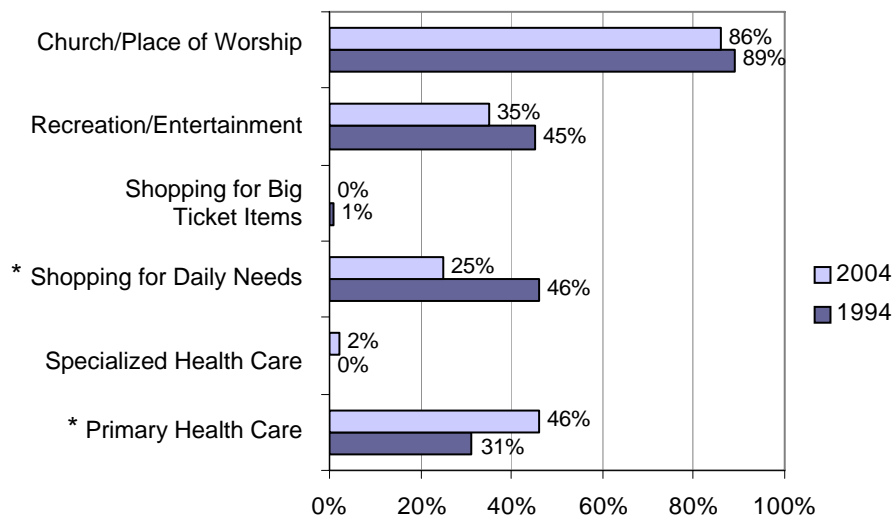


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. The Graettinger survey results, which are displayed in Figure 1, show that residents tend to follow this pattern. In both 1994 and 2004, almost all residents stayed in town to attend church or their place of worship, but most of them left for the other services. In 1994, slightly less than half stayed in town for recreation/entertainment and daily shopping needs. By 2004, however, the percentage who stayed in town for daily shopping had dropped sharply to 25 percent. Significantly more residents stayed in town for their primary health care in 2004 than in 1994. Very few in either year shopped for big ticket items locally or received their specialized health care in Graettinger.

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A Note on Interpretation: For Graettinger, 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

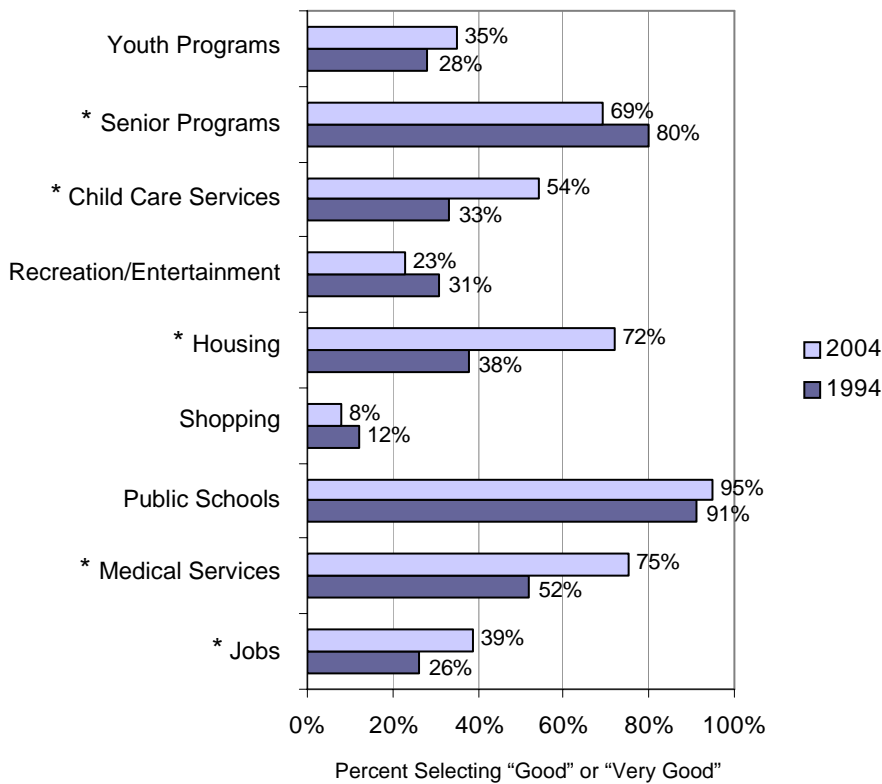


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 received the highest ratings in both years, with positive ratings from over 90 percent. The lowest ratings in both years were for shopping. From 1994 to 2004, the percentage of Graettinger residents who rated senior programs as “good” or “very good” fell significantly, from 80 percent to 69 percent. The ratings for housing increased significantly, from 38 percent to 72 percent. The percentage of positive ratings for child care services, medical services, and jobs in Graettinger also increased significantly.

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, Graettinger residents were generally pleased with the quality of their government services. Emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, water, and parks received positive ratings from more than 70 percent of residents in both years. The condition of the streets and police protection received the lowest ratings. However, residents rated the condition of the streets significantly more favorably in 2004 than in 1994, and police protection was rated significantly less positively.

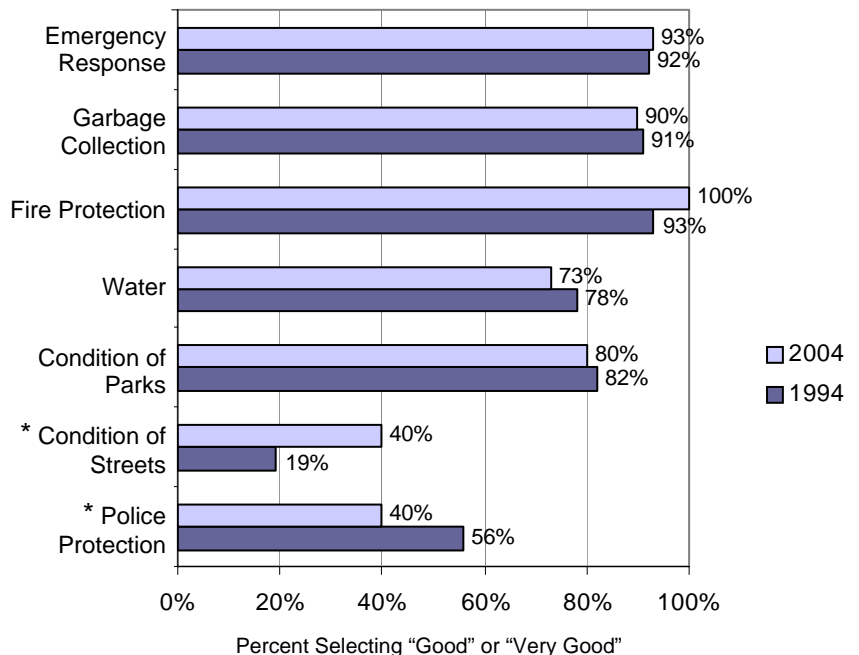


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

GRAETTINGER'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.

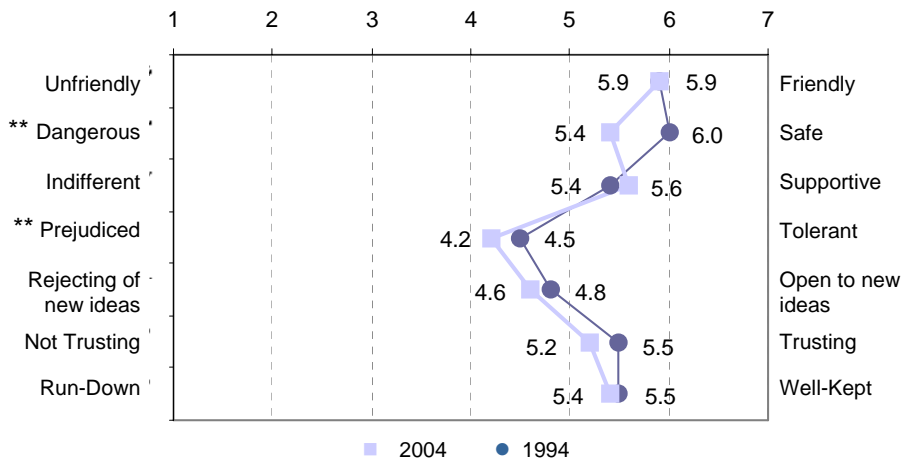


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

** 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. Figure 4 shows how Graettinger residents evaluated their town on these qualities in 1994 and 2004. In 2004, friendliness received the highest ratings and tolerance received the lowest. The major changes over the period are that residents viewed their town as less safe and less tolerant in 2004 than in 1994. The drop in the rating for safety was especially large, from 6.0 to 5.4. Other than the changes for safety and tolerance, ratings for the other areas did not change significantly.

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, 72 percent of the residents said they knew the names of half or more of the people in Graettinger, compared to 78 percent in 1994. Sixty-one percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town in 2004, compared to 69 percent in 1994. Twenty-six percent of the residents in 2004 and 25 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 Graettinger 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 Graettinger. Approximately 85 percent also said that they would be sorry to leave the town. These high levels of community attachment in Graettinger have not changed significantly over the last ten years.

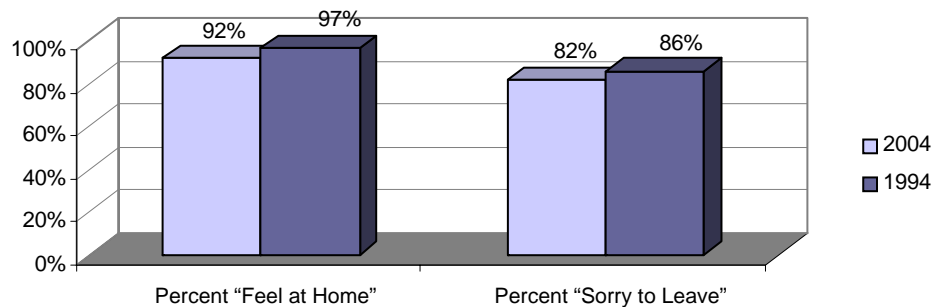


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Graettinger, 94 percent of the residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” In 1994, 48 percent reported participating in a local community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, and in 2004, approximately over half of residents did the same (see Figure 6). The percentage of residents who said they were “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities was slightly below 50 percent in both years (see Figure 6).

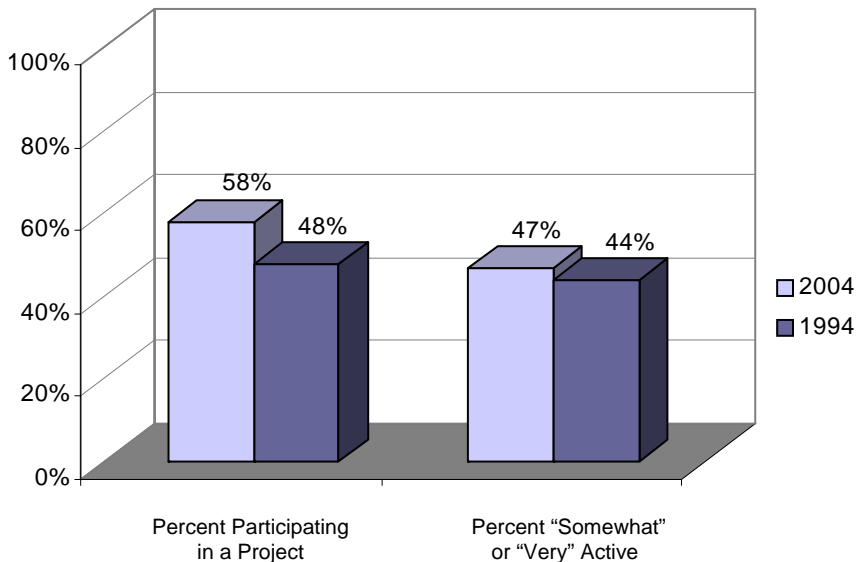


Figure 6: Community Involvement

The percentage of residents who said they were “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities was slightly below 50 percent in both years (see Figure 6). 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 the time to get involved (58%). Other common responses were that no one had asked them to volunteer (39%) and that they do not know how to become involved (32%).

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 Graettinger over the past decade? The percentage of people who shop for daily needs in town decreased, but the percentage who receive their primary medical care in town increased. Residents’ evaluations of child care services, housing, medical services and jobs improved, but their evaluations of senior programs declined. As for government services, residents’ satisfaction with the condition of their streets improved, but they were less satisfied with police protection. Assessments of all of the other facilities and services did not change significantly from 1994 to 2004.

The social environment in Graettinger has changed somewhat over the decade. The ratings that residents gave their community on some qualities remained unchanged, but significantly fewer residents felt that Graettinger was safe and tolerant. 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 Graettinger’s future. **We wish to thank the Graettinger residents who participated in the 1994 and 2004 studies for providing the information that made this report possible.**

RDI

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