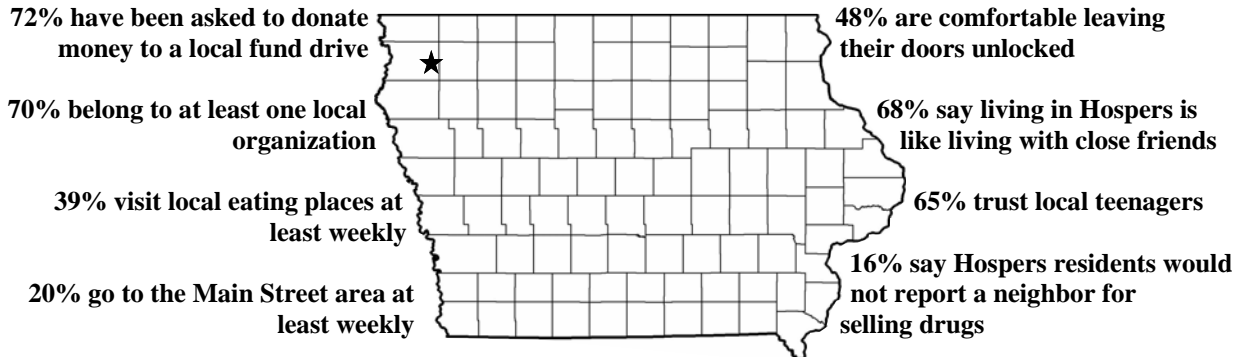


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN HOSPERS

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 Hospers. 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 Hospers residents responded to the survey, and 110 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Hospers residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN HOSPERS IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

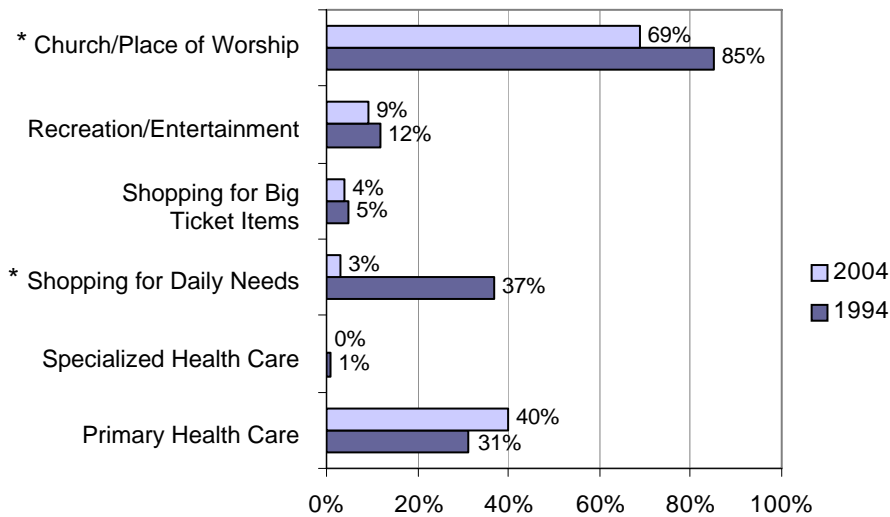


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Hospers residents follow this pattern for many services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Hospers. In 2004, 69 percent of residents stayed in Hospers to attend church/place of worship, a significant decrease from the

85 percent who did so in 1994. Three percent shopped for their daily needs in town, down from 37 percent ten years ago and four percent stayed to shop for "big ticket" items. In 2004, 40 percent of residents obtained primary health care in Hospers, but no one stayed in town for specialized health care. Also in 2004, approximately one in ten residents reported staying in Hospers for recreation.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Hospers, 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

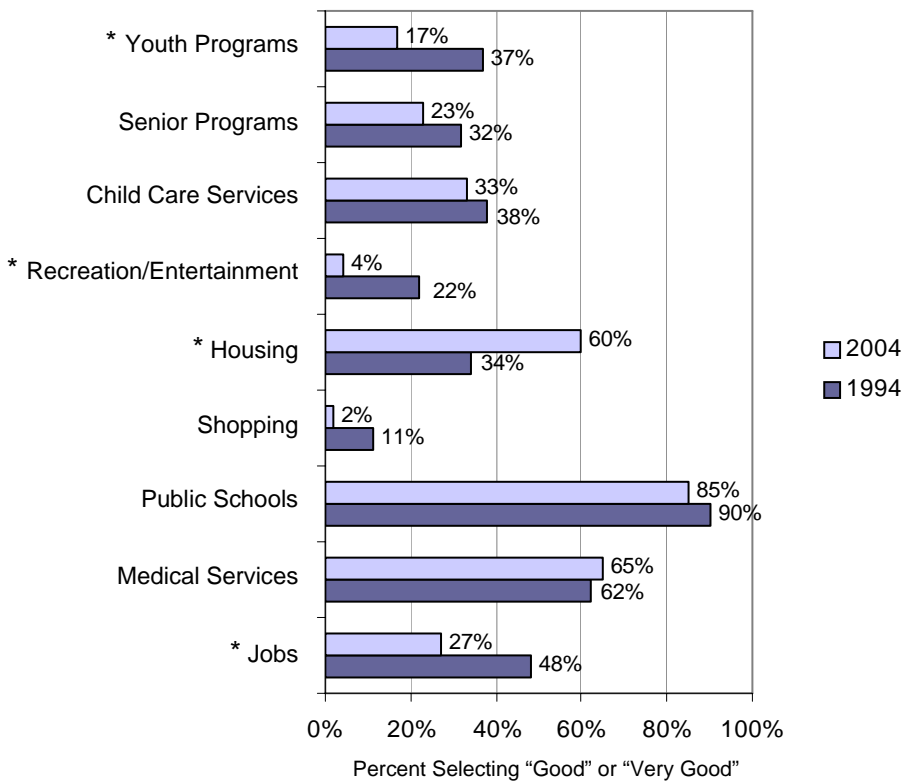


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. In both years, most residents gave positive ratings to the public schools in Hopers, while very few rated shopping favorably. The percentage of positive ratings increased significantly for housing, from 34 percent in 1994 to 60 percent in 2004. The largest decrease in favorable ratings occurred for jobs, followed by decreases for youth programs and recreation. Ratings for senior programs, child care services, shopping, public schools, and medical services did not change significantly 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. Overall, Hopers residents reported being satisfied with their government services. Emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, the condition of the parks, and the condition of the streets all received positive ratings from a large majority of Hopers residents in both years. About half rated police protection as good or very good. The percentage of favorable ratings for water services increased dramatically over the past decade from 6 percent in 1994 to 81 percent in 2004.

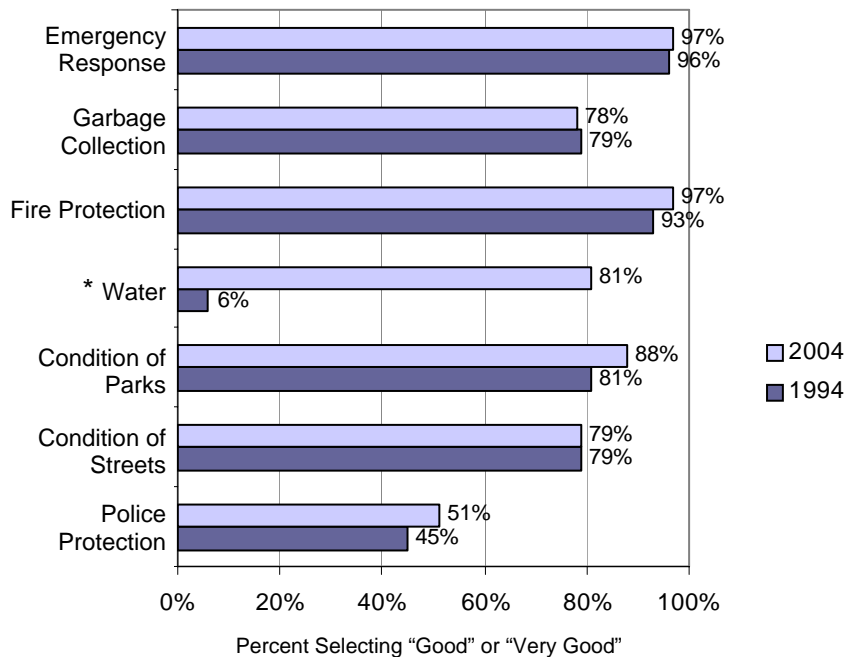
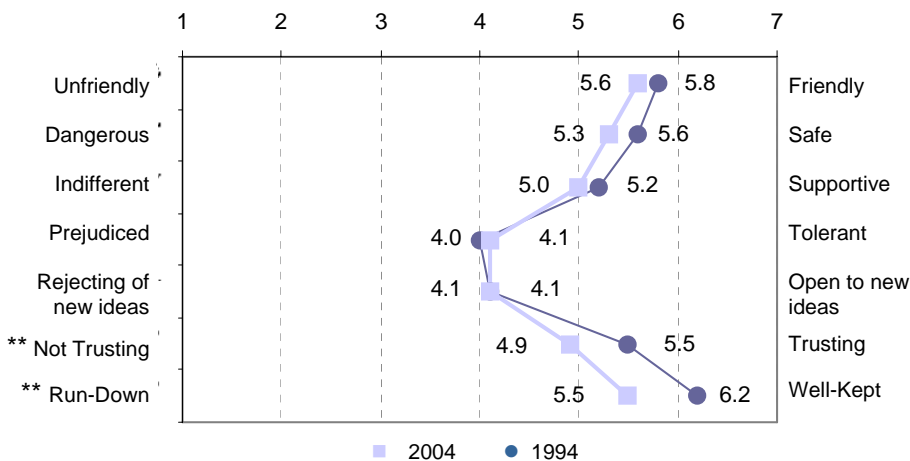


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## HOSPERS' 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. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, residents assigned the highest rating to the appearance of Hospers, followed closely by the friendliness and safety of the town. In 2004, those three qualities also received the highest ratings. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Hospers is tolerant or accepting of new ideas. Significant changes over the decade are that residents view Hospers as less trusting and less well-kept when compared to 1994.

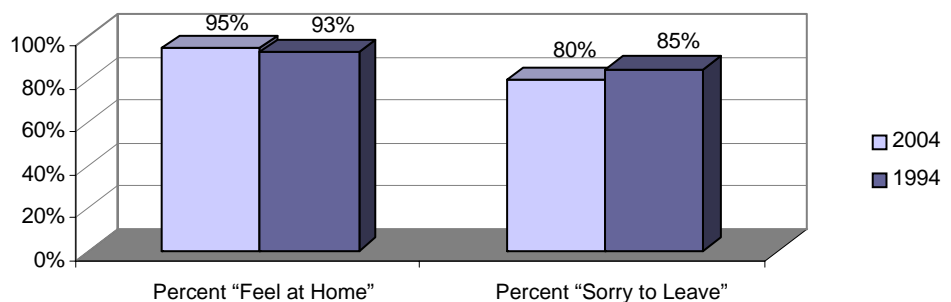
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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, 53 percent of Hospers residents reported knowing half or more of the people in Hospers—a significant decrease from 65 percent in 1994. The percent of residents indicating that half or more of their friends live in Hospers also decreased significantly from 63 percent in 1994 to 49 percent in 2004. As for their adult relatives and in-laws, 18 percent of residents said that half or more of them lived in Hospers in 2004 compared to 25 percent in 1994.

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Hospers residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, 95 percent said that they do (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 80 percent reported that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Hospers. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Hospers residents feel attached to their community.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Hospers, 66 percent of residents indicated that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Over half (57%) of residents reported participating in a local community improvement project in Hospers during the past year, and over one-third (38%) consider themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community events and activities (see Figure 6). This compares to 48 percent of residents participating in a project in 1994, and 43 percent rating themselves as somewhat or very active in the community. These differences are not statistically significant. When asked to consider factors that limit their involvement in community projects, the top three factors selected were lack of time (55%), not being asked to participate (51%), and lack of interest in participating (41%).

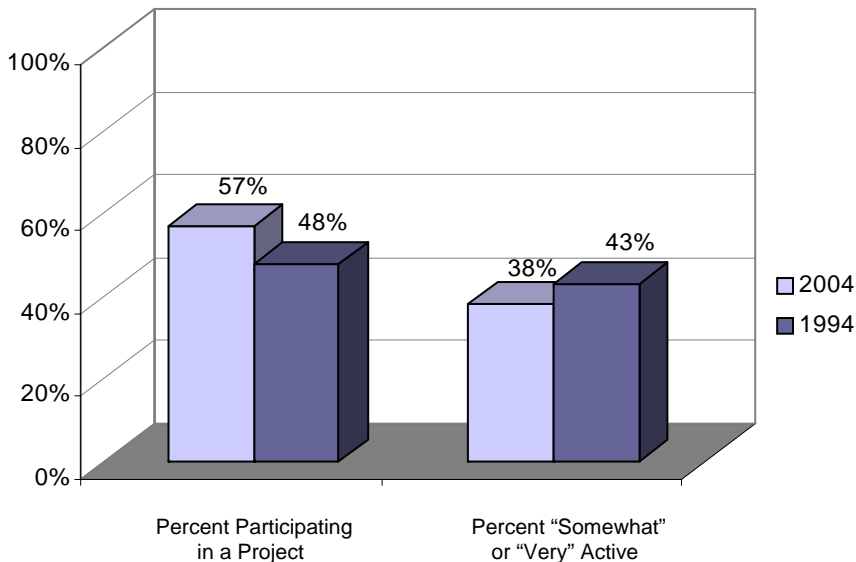


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## 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 Hospers over the past decade? Hospers residents are shopping for their daily needs and attending church/place of worship outside of the community more now than ten years ago. The evaluation of the quality of housing in Hospers increased, while the ratings decreased for youth programs, recreation and entertainment, and jobs. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, including a significant increase in the ratings for water services.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Hospers residents view their town as less trusting and less well-kept when compared to 1994. Ratings for the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, and openness to new ideas did not change significantly. Residents know a smaller proportion of community residents, and fewer of their friends live in Hospers. Hospers residents remain “attached” to their community—that is, a large majority feel at home in Hospers and would be sorry if they had to leave. Finally, levels of community involvement did not change significantly over the past ten years—approximately half reported participating in a community project and over one third considered themselves to be active in the community.

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

**RDI**

Prepared by: Kerry Agnitsch, Terry Besser, Laura Forster, Jean Friestad, Tom Rice, Vern Ryan, and Nick Recker, Department of Sociology, Iowa State University. For further information, contact Kerry Agnitsch, 515-294-4095, kagnitsc@iastate.edu or Terry Besser, 515-294-6508, tbesser@iastate.edu.

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