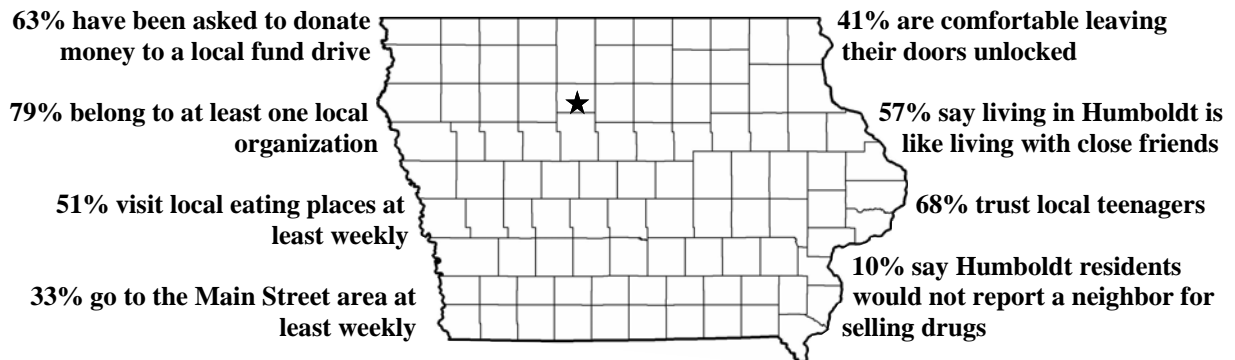


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN HUMBOLDT

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 Humboldt. 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, 115 Humboldt residents responded to the survey, and 100 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Humboldt residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN HUMBOLDT IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

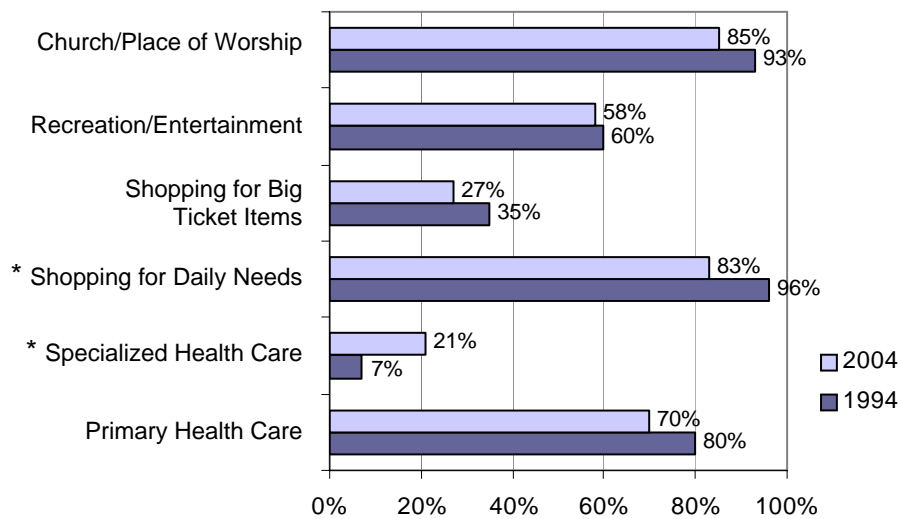


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Humboldt residents remain in Humboldt for many services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Humboldt. In both years, most residents said they stay in town to attend church, and over half stay for recreation and entertainment. Most resi-

idents also reported that they shop for their daily needs in Humboldt, although fewer are doing so now than ten years ago. About one-fourth said that they shop for "big ticket" items in town. Similarly, 70 percent of residents indicated that they stay in Humboldt to seek primary health care, while the percentage of residents remaining in town to obtain specialized health care increased significantly from 7 percent in 1994 to 21 percent in 2004.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Humboldt, 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

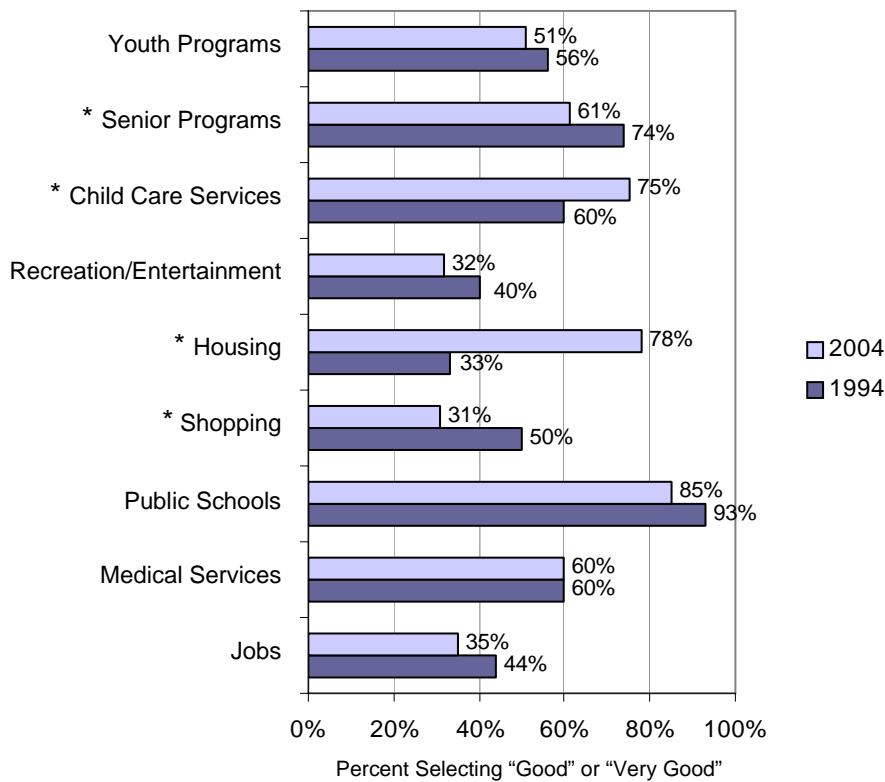


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 2004, at least three-fourths rated public schools, child care, and housing as good or very good, and over half gave positive ratings to medical services. Youth programs received favorable evaluations by 51 percent of residents, and senior programs by 61 percent. Approximately one-third of residents rated recreation, shopping, and jobs favorably. Compared to 1994, the percentage of residents giving positive ratings increased for child care services and housing, and decreased for senior programs and shopping.

## 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, Humboldt residents reported being satisfied with their government services. Nearly all residents rated emergency response, fire protection, and the condition of the parks as good or very good, while most assigned favorable ratings to garbage collection, water, the condition of the streets, and police protection. While the percentage of positive ratings declined for the condition of the streets over the past decade, ratings for other government services remain unchanged.

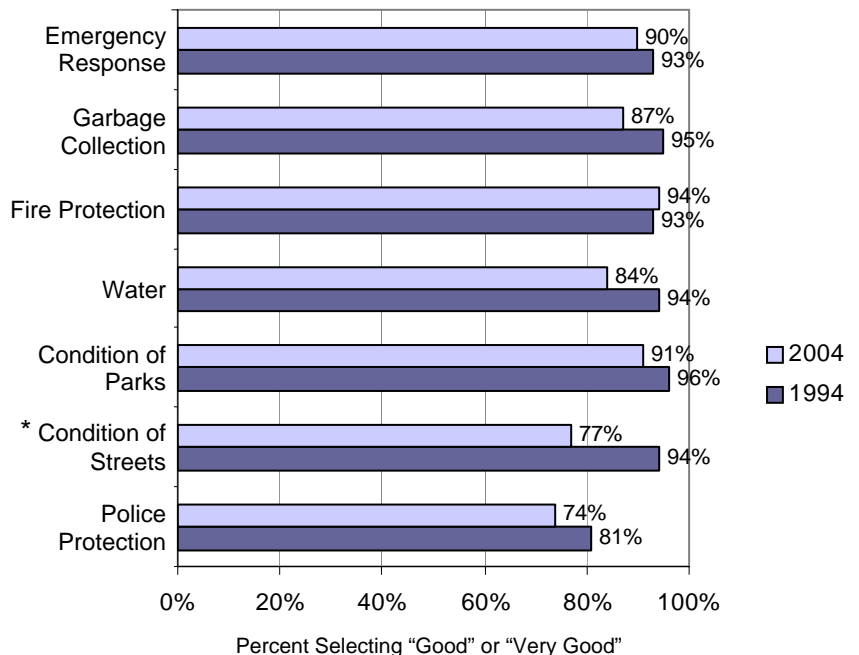
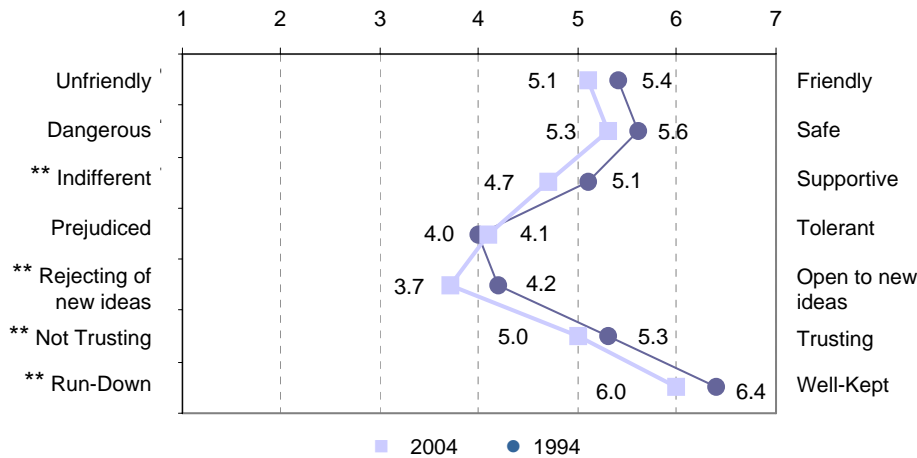


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## HUMBOLDT'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. The average ratings shown in Figure 4 reveal that in 1994, residents assigned the highest rating to the appearance of Humboldt, followed by the safety and friendliness of the town. Those three qualities also received the highest ratings in 2004. Ratings for tolerance and openness to new ideas had the lowest ratings in both years. Significant changes over the decade are that residents view Humboldt as less supportive, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and more run-down when compared to 1994.

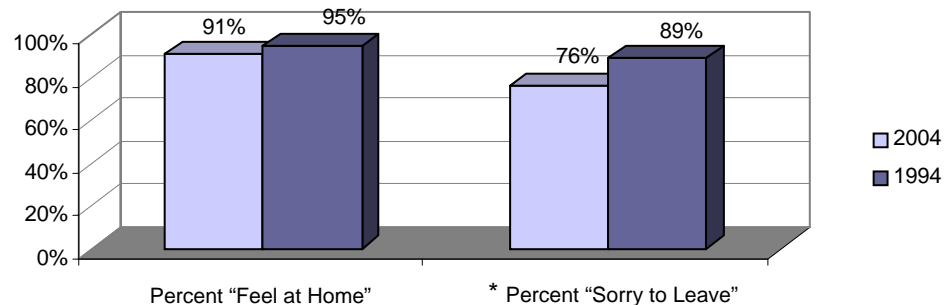
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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, 40 percent of Humboldt residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the other people in Humboldt, compared to 43 percent in 1994. When it comes to friends, 69 percent reported that half or more of their friends live in Humboldt, compared to 74 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 35 percent said that half or more of their relatives and in-laws live in Humboldt, compared to 28 percent in 1994. (Note: These differences are not larger than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Humboldt residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, 91 percent said that they do, compared to 95 percent in 1994 (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 76 percent said they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Humboldt, a significant decrease from the 89 percent who expressed this sentiment in 1994.



**Figure 5: Community Attachment**

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Humboldt, 72 percent of residents indicated that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, a significant decrease occurred in the percentage of residents who reported participating in a local project or being active in the community.

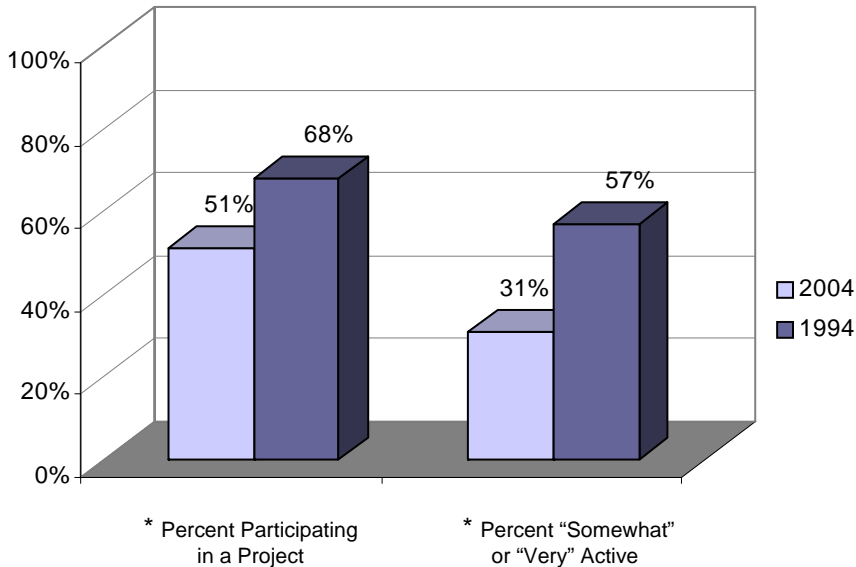


Figure 6: Community Involvement

In 2004, about half of Humboldt residents reported participating in a local improvement project, and 31 percent described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events (see Figure 6). This compares to 68 percent of residents participating in a project in 1994, and 57 percent rating themselves as somewhat or very active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement, the top three were lack of time (50%), not being asked by others to volunteer (36%), and not knowing how to get involved (34%).

## 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 Humboldt over the past decade? More Humboldt residents are shopping for their daily needs outside of the community, however, more are also obtaining specialized health care locally. The evaluations of the quality of senior programs and shopping decreased, while ratings for child care services and housing increased. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, although ratings decreased for the condition of the streets.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Humboldt residents view their town as less supportive, less open to new ideas, less trusting, and less well-kept when compared to 1994. Humboldt residents remain attached to their community—that is, most say they feel at home in the community and would be sorry if they had to leave. However, the percentage of those saying they would be sorry to leave decreased significantly since 1994. Finally, levels of community involvement have changed. Compared to ten years ago, fewer residents participate in community projects or consider themselves to be active in the community. It is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons residents gave for not participating was that they had not been asked. This suggests a possible strategy to increase levels of involvement.

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

**RDI**

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