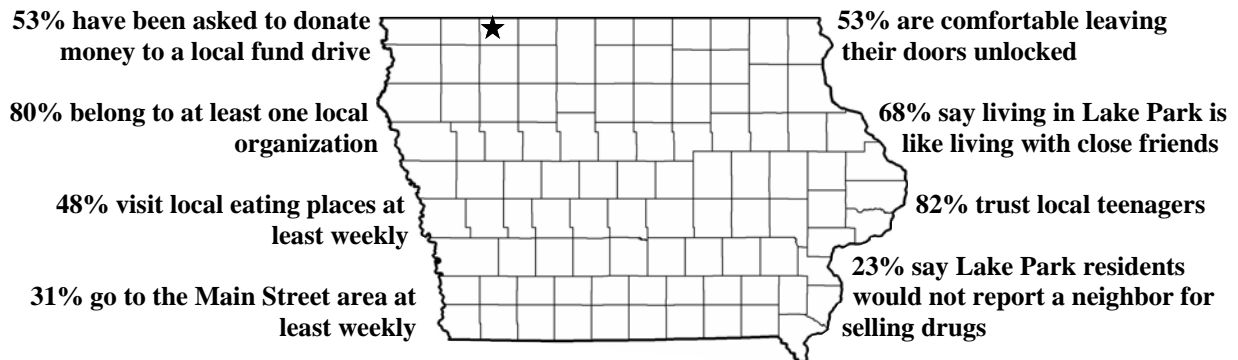


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN LAKE PARK

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 Lake Park. 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, 112 Lake Park residents responded to the survey, and 108 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Lake Park residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN LAKE PARK IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

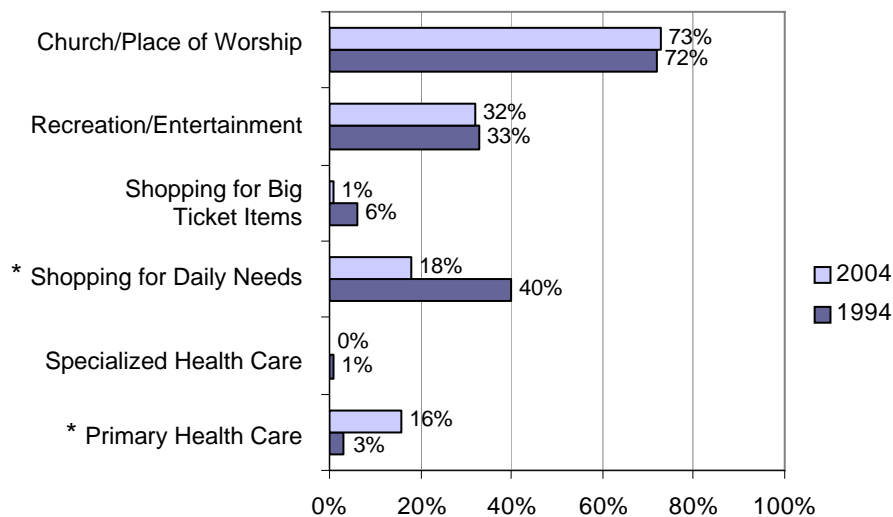


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Lake Park residents follow this pattern for many services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Lake Park. While most residents remained in Lake Park to attend church or a place of worship, only about one-third stayed for recreation or entertainment.

Eighteen percent of residents remained in Lake Park to shop for daily needs, down from 40 percent ten years ago, but only one percent stayed to shop for "big ticket" items. For health care, 16 percent reported obtaining primary health care in Lake Park—a significant increase from the 3 percent who did so in 1994. However, no one stayed in town to obtain specialized health care.

A Note on Interpretation: For Lake Park, 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

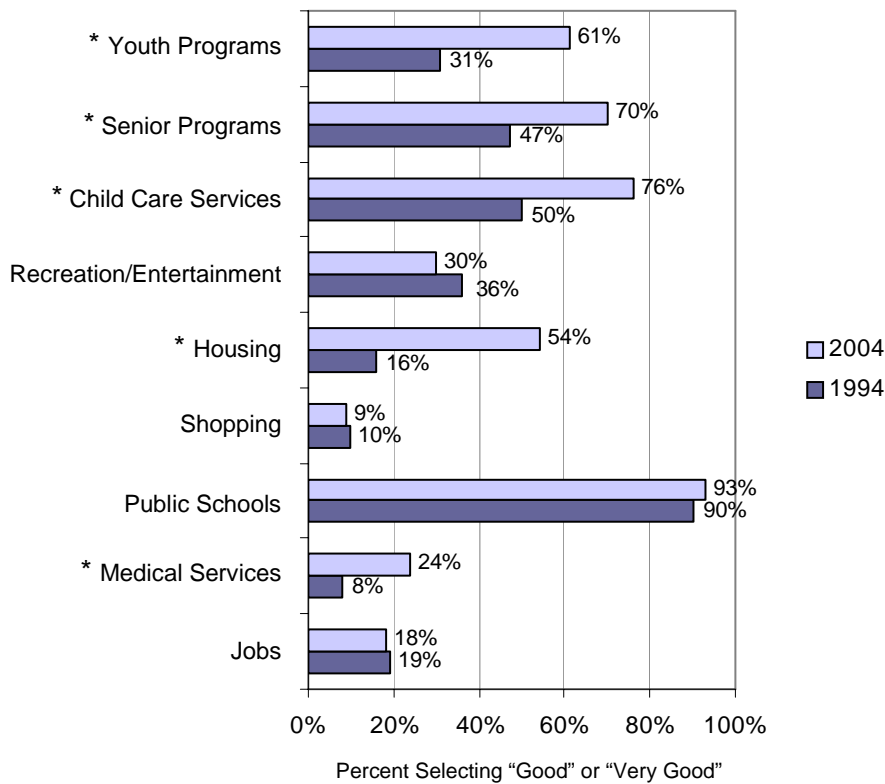


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. Nearly all Lake Park residents rated public schools as good or very good in both years. In 2004, over half gave favorable ratings to youth programs, senior programs, child care services, and housing, resulting in a significant increase in positive ratings for each of those services. Ratings for medical services also increased, from 8 percent in 1994 to 24 percent in 2004. Recreation received favorable ratings from about one-third of residents, jobs from 18 percent, and shopping from 9 percent in 1994. Ratings for recreation, shopping, schools, and jobs did not change significantly since 1994.

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, Lake Park residents reported being satisfied with most of their government services. A large majority rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, the condition of the parks and streets, and police protection as good or very good in both 1994 and 2004. Water services received positive ratings from 64 percent of residents, a significant increase from 44 percent in 1994.

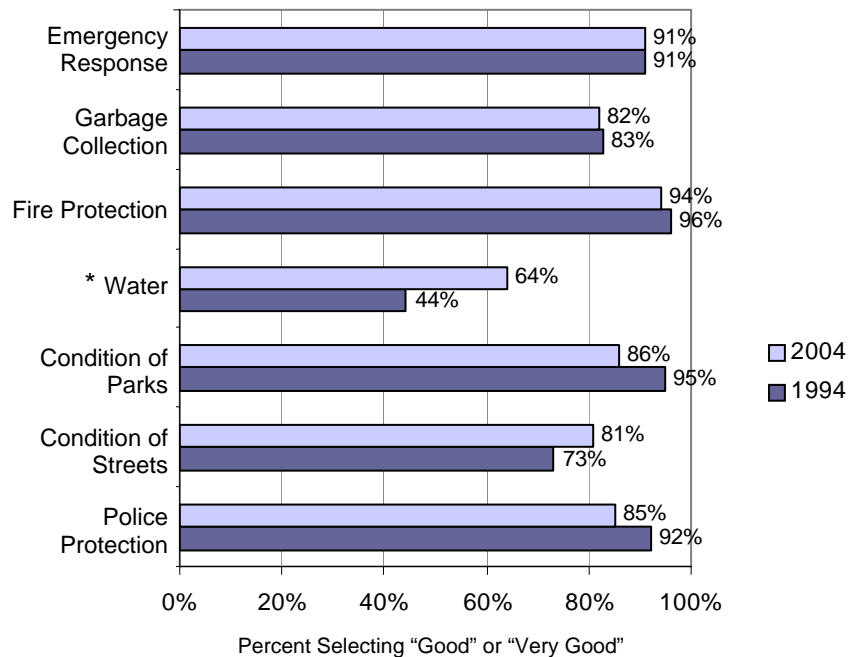


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

LAKE PARK'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.

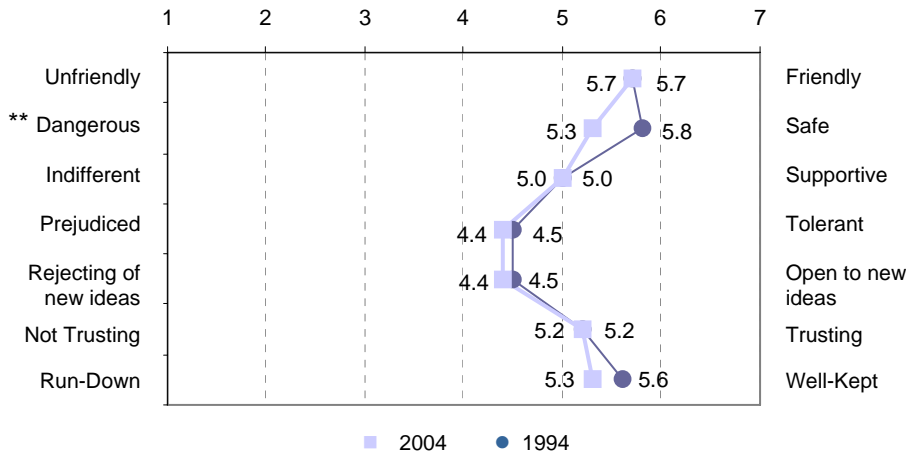


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 safety of Lake Park, followed closely by the friendliness and appearance of the town. In 2004, the highest ratings were also assigned to those three attributes. Tolerance and openness to new ideas received the lowest ratings in both years. The only significant change over the past decade is that residents viewed Lake Park as less safe in 2004 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, 60 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Lake Park, compared to 66 percent in 1994. Fifty-nine percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Lake Park, compared to 61 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 17 percent said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Lake Park, compared to 22 percent in 1994. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Lake Park residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, 92 percent said that they did (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 82 percent reported that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from Lake Park. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, indicating that most Lake Park residents remain attached to their community.

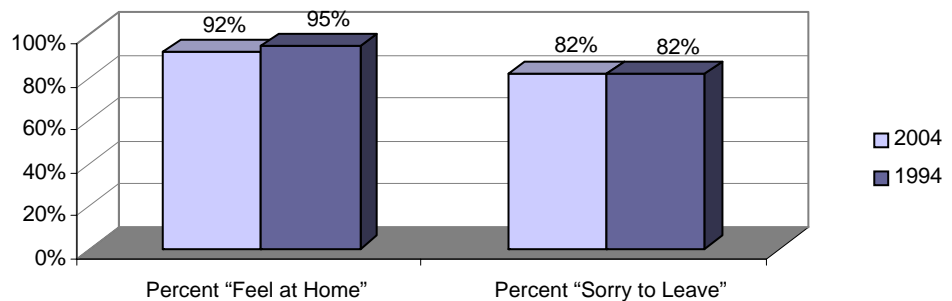


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For Lake Park, 82 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” Fifty-seven percent of residents reported participating in a local improvement project during the year prior to the survey, while 61 percent said they participated in a project in 1994 (see Figure 6).

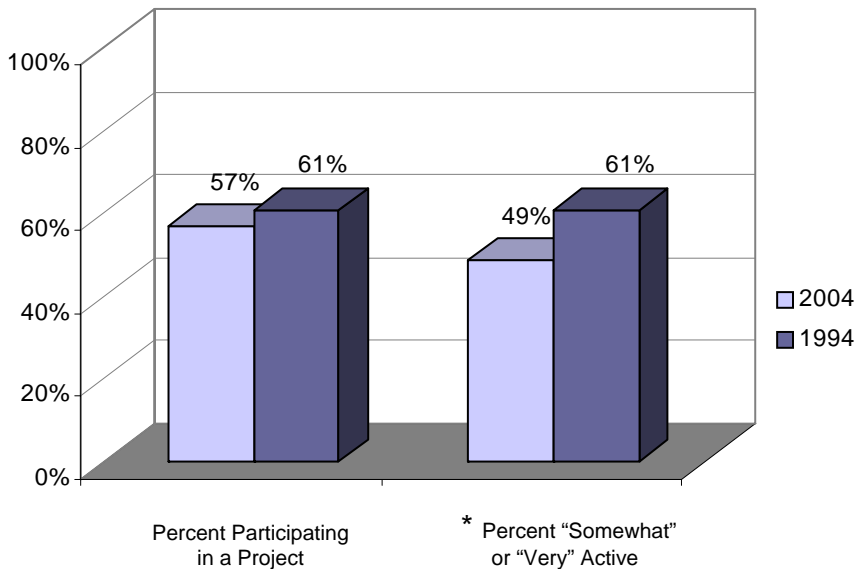


Figure 6: Community Involvement

Nearly half (49%) of residents described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, a significant decrease from the 61 percent who said they were active ten years ago. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in Lake Park projects, the top three factors selected were lack of time (51%), not being asked by others to volunteer (39%), 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 Lake Park over the past decade? A larger percentage of residents are staying in Lake Park to obtain primary health care, while fewer residents remain in town to shop for their daily needs. The evaluations of the quality of youth programs, senior programs, child care services, housing, and medical services increased significantly. Ratings for other local services remain unchanged. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, and there was an increase in positive ratings for water services.

The social environment has changed somewhat. Lake Park residents view their town as less safe now compared to 1994. Ratings for the friendliness, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, and appearance of Lake Park did not change. Lake Park residents remain attached to their community—that is, a majority feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave. Finally, participation in community activities is still important to Lake Park residents as over half reported participating in a local project. However, the percentage of those who describe themselves as active in the community decreased.

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

RDI

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