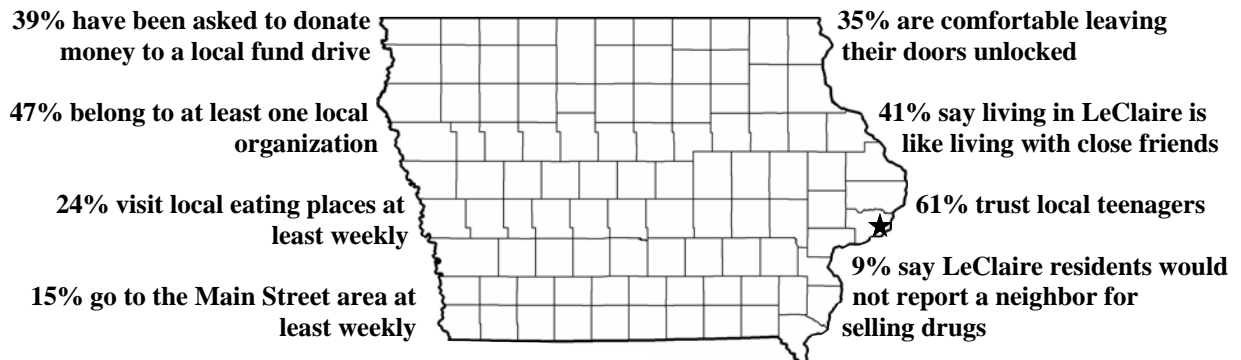


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN LECLAIRE

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 LeClaire. 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, 116 LeClaire residents responded to the survey, and 106 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of LeClaire residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN LECLAIRE IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

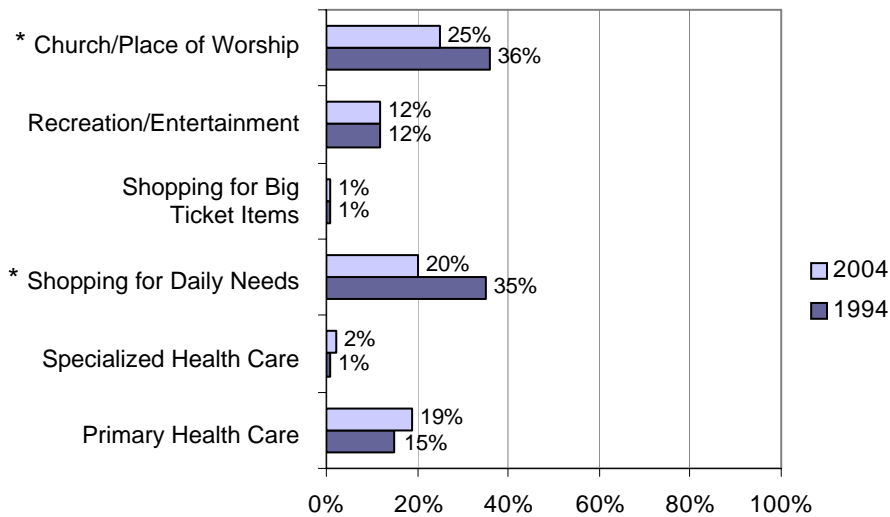


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that residents of LeClaire follow this pattern for most services. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in LeClaire. One-fourth of residents stayed to attend church/place of worship, down from 36 percent in 1994, and 12 percent indi-

cated that they remain in LeClaire for recreation and entertainment. Twenty percent of residents shopped for their daily needs in LeClaire, down significantly from 35 percent in 1994. Only 1 percent stayed to shop for "big ticket" items. Similarly, 19 percent said that they obtained their primary health care locally, while only two percent used specialized health care services in LeClaire.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For LeClaire, 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

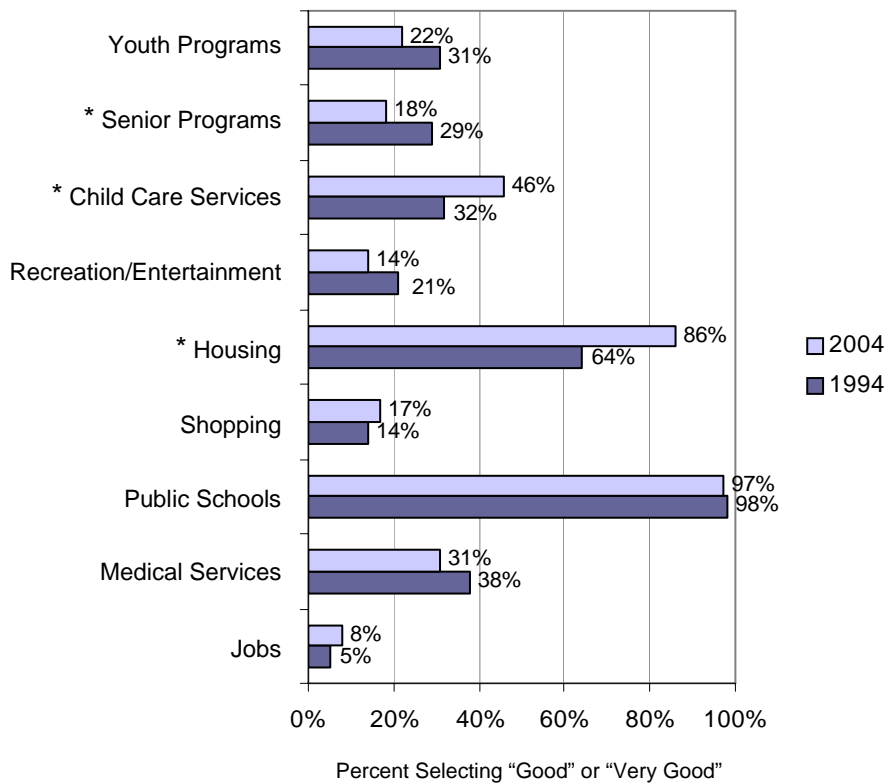


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 of LeClaire’s residents rated local schools as good or very good, and most gave favorable ratings to housing in both years. Far fewer assigned positive ratings to senior programs, recreation, shopping, and jobs. The percentage of positive ratings increased significantly over the past decade for child care services (from 32% to 46%) and housing (from 64% to 86%). However, ratings declined for senior programs, from 29 percent in 1994 to 18 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. Overall, LeClaire residents reported being satisfied with many of their government services. A large majority of residents rated emergency response, garbage collection, fire protection, and police protection favorably in 1994 and 2004. Water and the condition of the parks received positive ratings from half of the residents, and the condition of the streets was rated as good or very good by one-third. Compared to 1994, there were increases in the percentages of residents giving positive ratings for water services and the condition of the parks and streets.

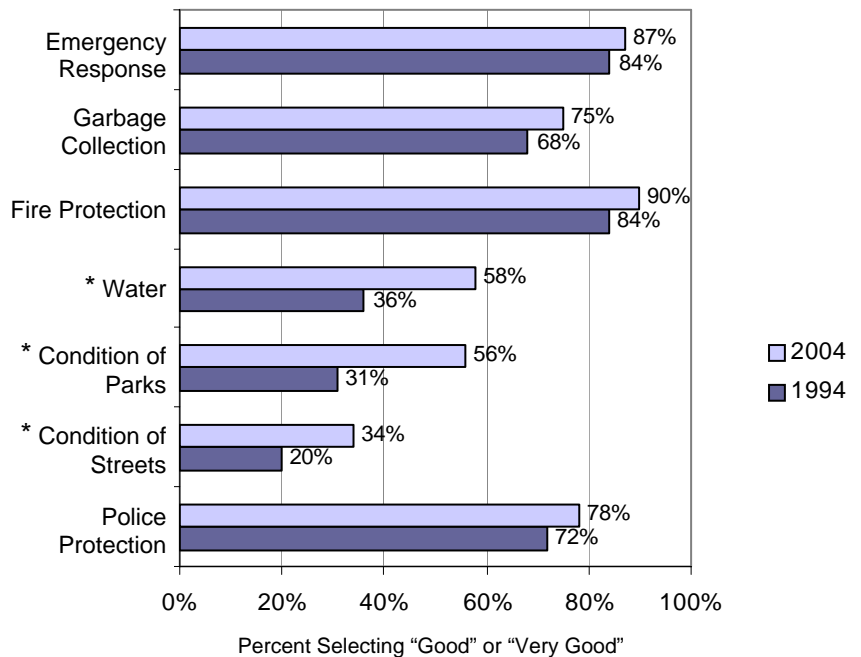
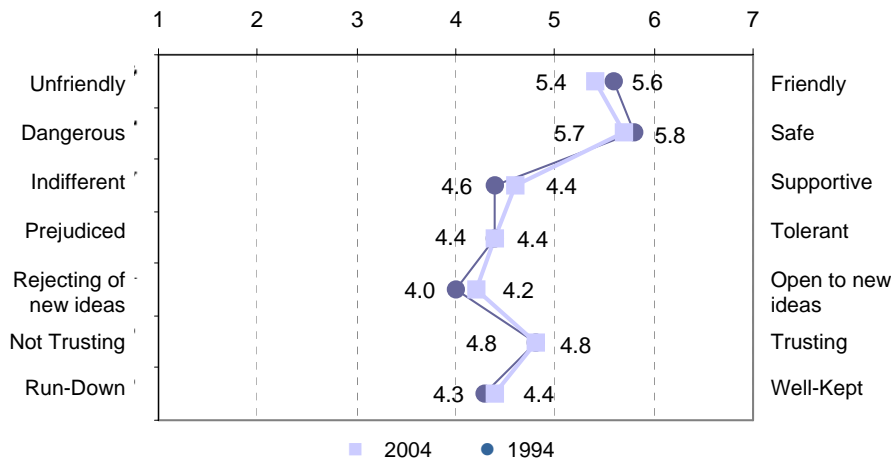


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## LECLAIRE'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 both years, residents assigned the highest rating to the safety of LeClaire, followed closely by the friendliness of the town. The lowest ratings for both years were assigned to the extent to which LeClaire is open to new ideas, tolerant, supportive, and well-kept. There were no significant changes in residents' assessments of any of these qualities over the past decade.

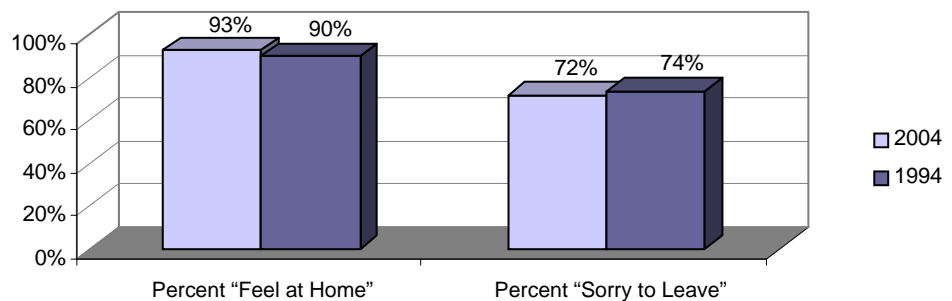
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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, 13 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in LeClaire, compared to 21 percent in 1994. For both years, 30 percent said that half or more of their friends live in LeClaire. As for relatives, 14 percent of residents in 2004 and 15 percent in 1994 reported 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 LeClaire residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question in 2004, 93 percent said that they do (see Figure 5). Furthermore, 72 percent said they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from LeClaire. These responses are similar to those reported in 1994, and indicate that most LeClaire 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 LeClaire, 66 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, 31 percent of LeClaire residents said they had participated in a community improvement project during the year prior to the survey, and 24 percent considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events (see Figure 6). This compares to 38 percent participating in a project in 1994, and 30 percent describing themselves as active in the community.

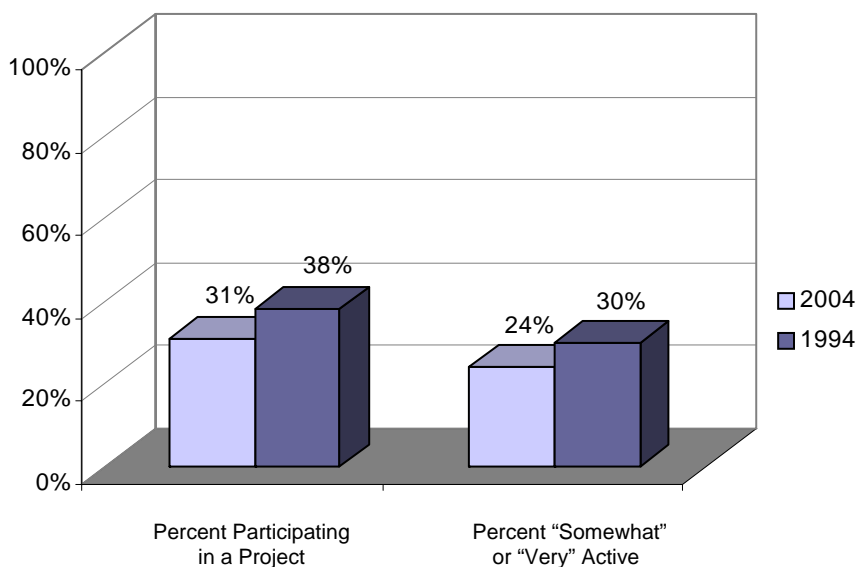


Figure 6: Community Involvement

When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top factors mentioned by LeClaire residents were lack of time (68%), not being asked by others to volunteer (40%), not knowing how to get involved (30%), and lack of interest in participating (30%).

## 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 LeClaire over the past decade? Fewer residents attend church or shop for their daily needs in LeClaire than did so ten years ago. The evaluations of the quality of local senior citizens programs decreased, while the ratings for child care and housing increased. Ratings for other local services remain unchanged. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high—there was an increase in positive evaluations for water and the condition of the parks and streets.

The social environment has changed very little. There were no significant changes in reports of the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, or appearance of LeClaire over the past ten years. LeClaire residents remain attached to their community—that is, most feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave. Levels of community involvement have not changed significantly since 1994—about one-third have participated in a local project and one-fourth 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 in community projects is that they have not been asked to get involved.

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

**RDI**

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