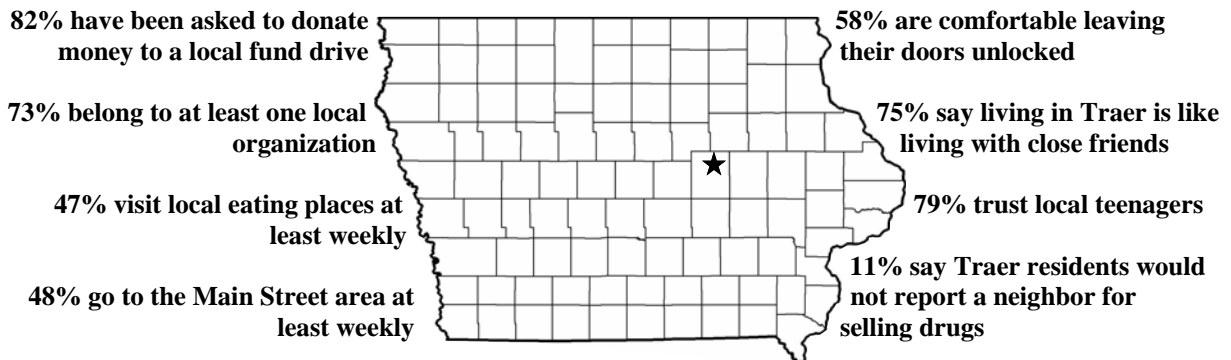


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN TRAER

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 Traer. 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, 119 Traer residents responded to the survey, and 114 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Traer residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN TRAER IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

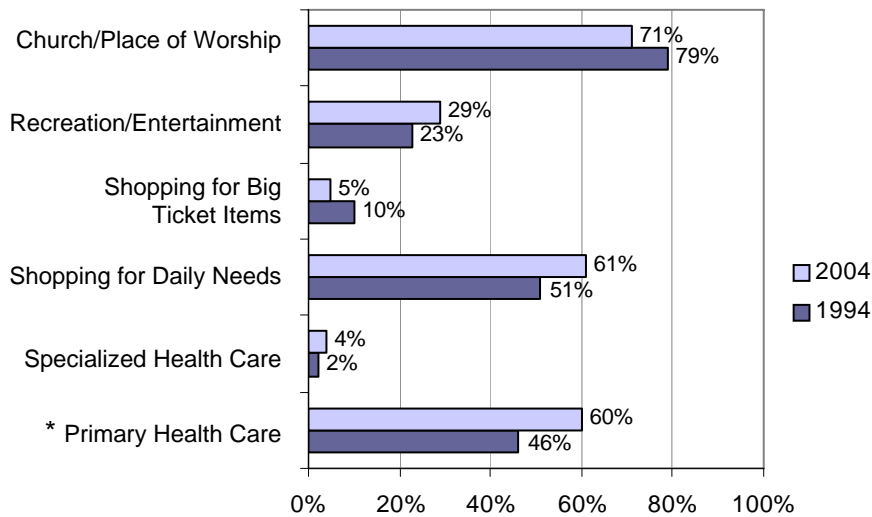


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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 Traer stay in town for some services, but travel for others. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in Traer. While 61 percent of residents said they shopped for daily needs in town in 2004, just five percent stayed local to shop

for big ticket items. Similarly, only a small percentage received specialized health care in Traer, while 60 percent, a significant increase since 1994, received primary health care in town in 2004. In both survey years, a majority of residents reported attending church or other place of worship locally, and about one-fourth of residents stayed in town for their recreation and entertainment.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Traer, 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

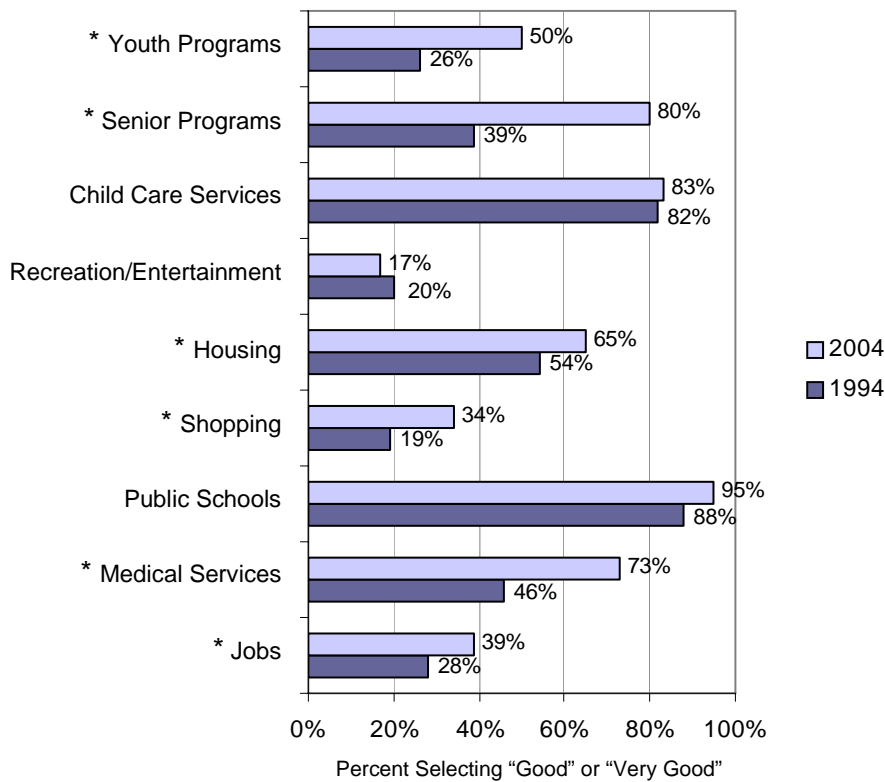


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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 Traer’s residents were satisfied with local schools in both years, and most gave favorable ratings to child care services. Housing received positive ratings from over half of residents, and about one-fifth of residents gave favorable ratings to recreation and entertainment. The percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to youth programs, senior programs, housing, shopping, medical services and jobs received significantly more favorable ratings in 2004 compared to 1994 ratings.

## 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 general, Traer residents reported being satisfied with many of their government services. Over nine of ten residents rated emergency response and fire protection services in Traer favorably. A large majority also gave positive ratings to garbage collection and the condition of parks. More than half of the residents in Traer view the water and the condition of streets favorably, and about 45 percent in both years rated police protection services positively.

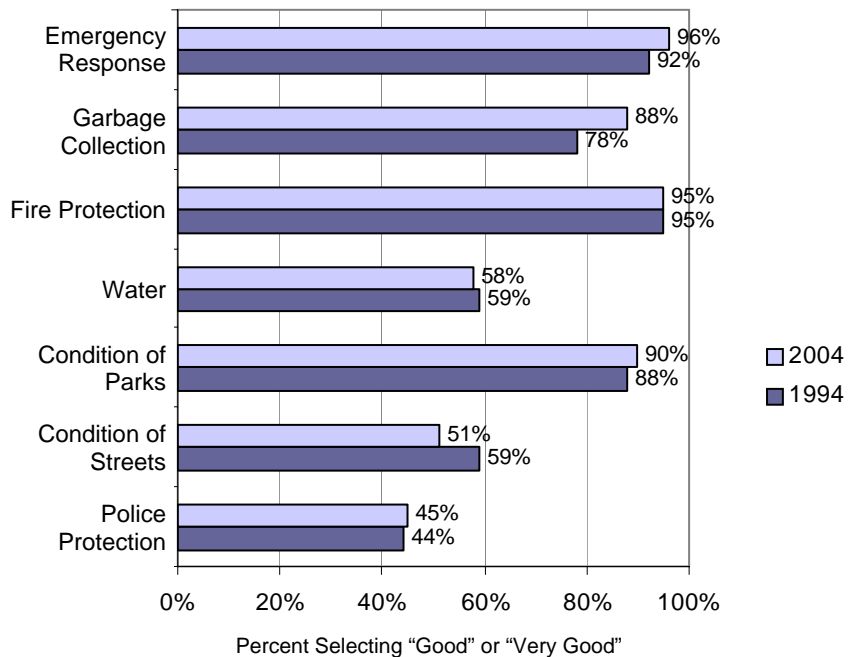
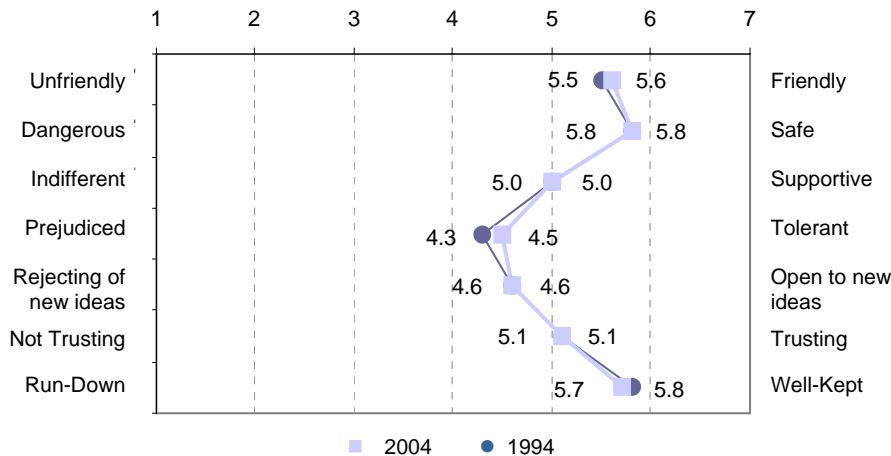


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## TRAER'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 and again in 2004, residents assigned the highest ratings to the appearance and safety of Traer, followed closely by the friendliness of the town. The lowest ratings for both years were assigned to the extent to which Traer is tolerant and open to new ideas. There were no significant changes in any of these qualities over the past decade.

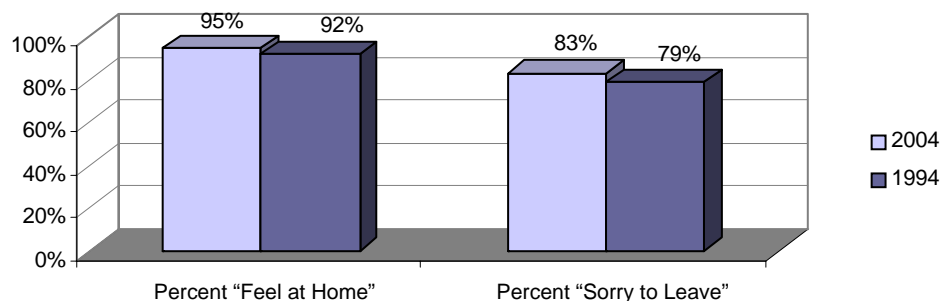
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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, 57 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Traer, compared to 56 percent in 1994. Similarly, 62 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Traer, compared to 60 percent in 1994. Twenty-seven percent of residents in 2004 and 22 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Traer. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Traer residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, almost all residents in both years reported that they do feel at home in Traer (see Figure 5). Furthermore, a majority indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from the community. These responses indicate that most residents of Traer 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 Traer, 85 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of participation is “good” or “very good.” Also, 70 percent reported participating in a local community improvement project in the year prior to the survey. This is a significant increase from 51 percent who participated in a community project in 1994. At the same time, in 2004, 42 percent described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events, compared to one-third of residents who described themselves as active in 1994. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top factors were lack of time (53%), not being asked by others to volunteer (37%), and not knowing how to become involved (26%).

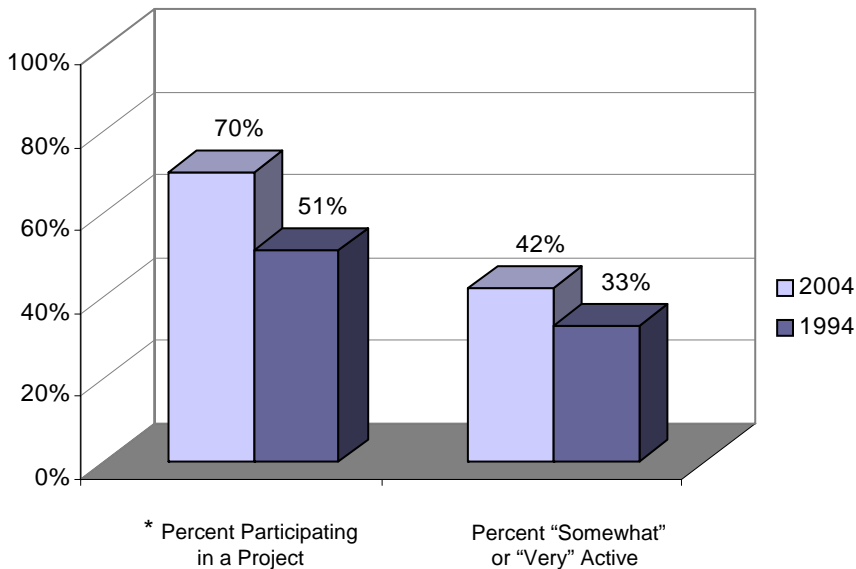


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## 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 Traer over the past decade? Residents are obtaining primary health care in Traer now more than ten years ago. The positive evaluations of the quality of youth and senior programs, shopping, medical services and jobs in Traer have increased. Evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, and no significant changes in favorable ratings were apparent over the decade.

The social environment has changed very little. There were no significant changes in the friendliness, safety, supportiveness, tolerance, openness to new ideas, trusting nature, or appearance of Traer over the past ten years. Traer residents remain attached to their community—that is, a majority feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave. Levels of participation in the community have increased since 1994, and most residents feel that the spirit of participation is good or very good. Still, it is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons people gave for not participating in community projects were that no one had asked them and that they didn’t know how to get involved.

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

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