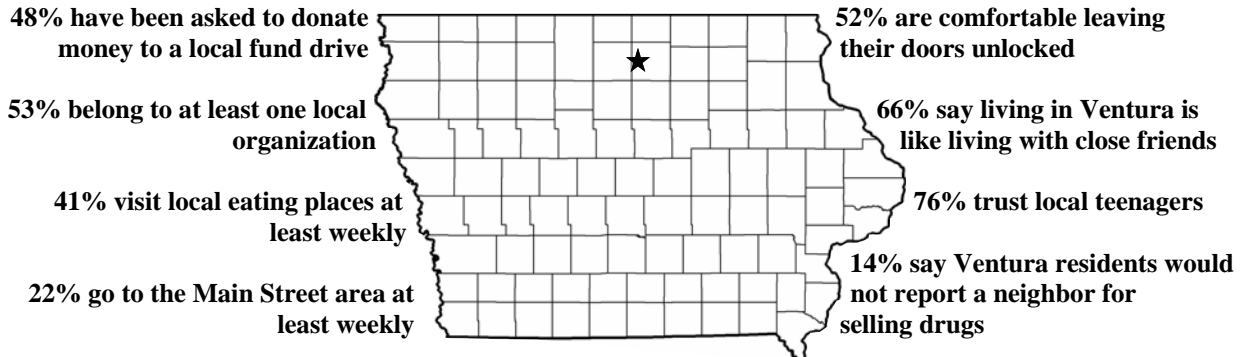


# A DECADE OF CHANGE IN VENTURA

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 Ventura. 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, 113 Ventura residents responded to the survey, and 111 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of Ventura residents have changed over the past decade.

## LIFE IN VENTURA IN 2004



## LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

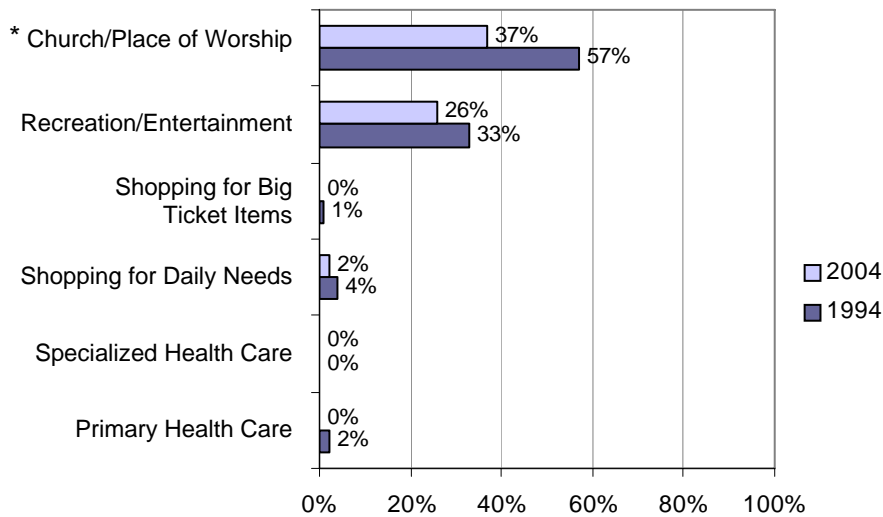


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

For a variety of reasons, many residents of Iowa's smaller towns rely on neighboring cities for services. Results from this survey suggest that Ventura residents followed this pattern in 1994 and 2004. Figure 1 shows the percent of residents who reported patronizing services of various types in Ventura. There were virtually no reports of residents staying in town for any shopping or health care needs. In 2004, 26 percent

of residents stayed in Ventura for recreation and entertainment, compared to 33 percent in 1994. More than half of residents remained in Ventura to attend church or place of worship related activities in 1994 which declined significantly to slightly more than one-third of residents in 2004.

\*A Note on Interpretation: For Ventura, 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

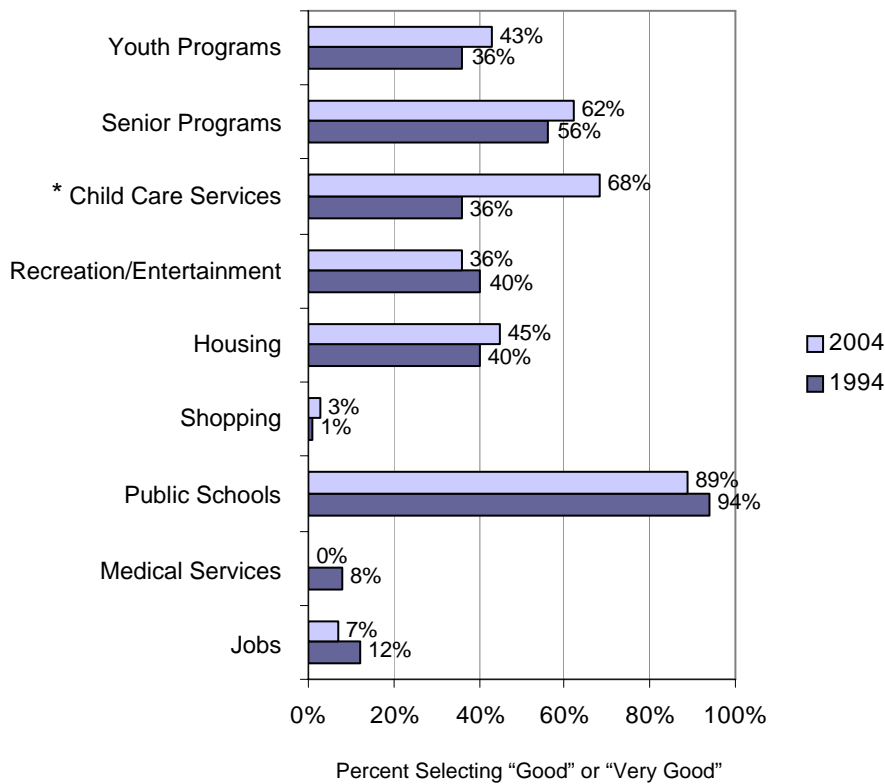


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. A vast majority of residents rated public schools favorably in both years. Less than half of residents gave positive ratings to youth programs, recreation and entertainment, and housing in Ventura. A small percentage rated shopping, medical services and jobs positively. For the most part, ratings for services changed very little since 1994. However, the percentage of positive ratings for child care services increased significantly from 36 percent in 1994 to 68 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, Ventura residents reported being satisfied with their local government services. Almost all residents rated fire protection favorably in both years, and a large majority gave positive ratings to emergency response, garbage collection, water, the condition of parks and streets, and police protection services in Ventura. There were no significant changes over the decade in the percentages of positive ratings for these local government services.

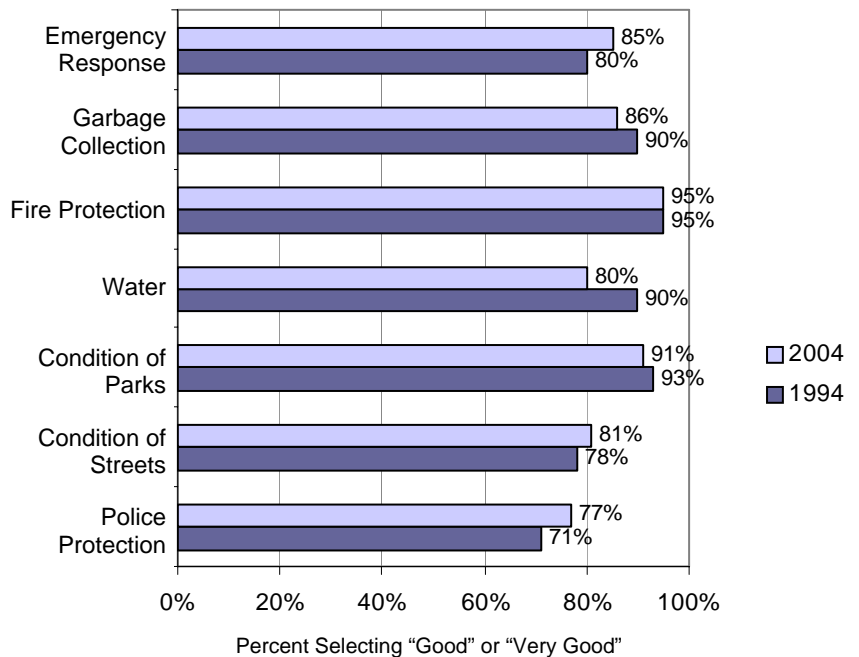
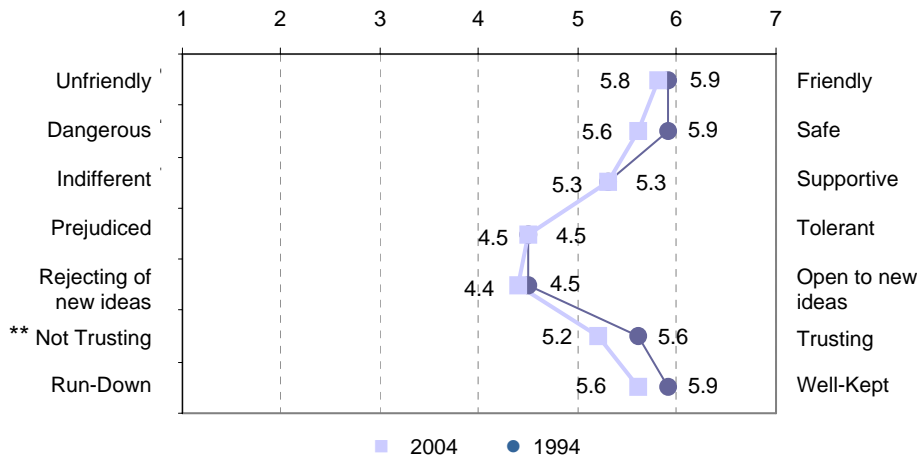


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

## VENTURA'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, friendliness, and safety of Ventura. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the extent to which Ventura is tolerant and open to new ideas. One significant change over the decade is that residents view Ventura as less trusting than it was ten years ago. The assessment of other qualities remained unchanged over the study period.

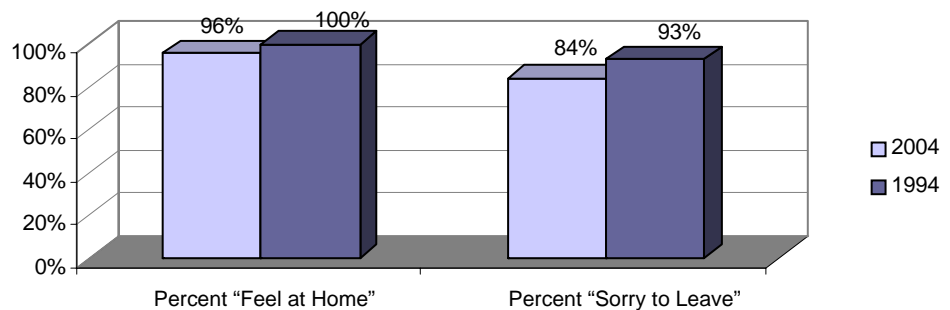
\*\* The margin of error is calculated differently for averages, and will sometimes vary from question to question within the survey depending on how many people answered each question. Thus, changes of the same size may exceed the margin of error for some items in Figure 4, but not for others. Only 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 1994 and 2004, 52 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in Ventura. Similarly, 32 percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in Ventura, compared to 33 percent in 1994. Twelve percent of residents in 2004 and 13 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in Ventura. (Note: These differences are not greater than the margin of error.)

### COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do Ventura 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 Ventura (see Figure 5). Furthermore, a large majority indicated that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away from the town. These responses indicate that most Ventura 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 Ventura, 83 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, about half of residents reported participating in a community improvement project in the year prior to the survey and 39 percent described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” active in local community activities and events (see Figure 6). This is essentially unchanged from 1994 when 46 percent reported participating in a community project and 40 percent described themselves as active. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in community improvement projects, the top three factors mentioned were lack of time (61%), not being asked them to volunteer (38%), and not knowing how to become involved (24%).

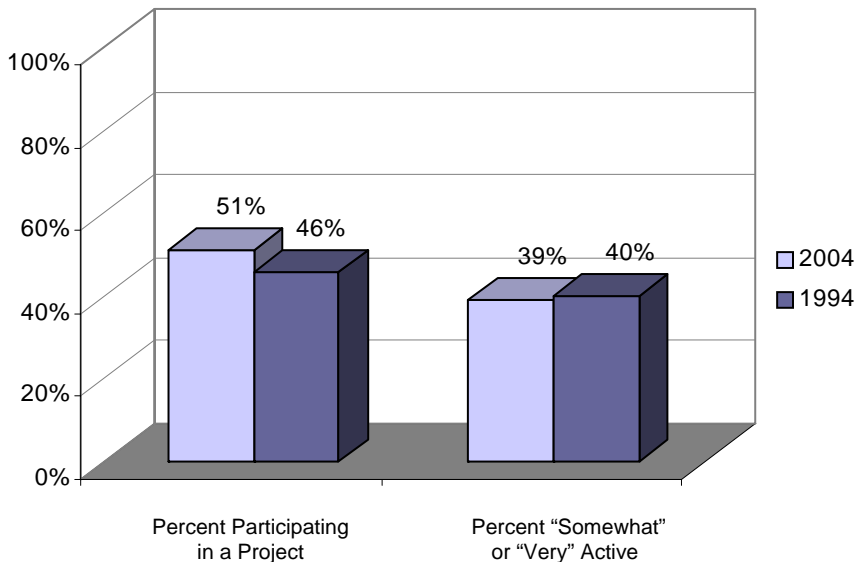


Figure 6: Community Involvement

## 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 Ventura over the past decade? Ventura residents are attending church or place of worship inside of the community less now than ten years ago. The evaluations of the quality of most local services and facilities did not change significantly. However, positive ratings for child care services increased. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high, and there were no significant changes in ratings.

The social environment has changed very little. Residents still describe Ventura as friendly, safe, and well-kept, but view it as less trusting than in 1994. Ventura residents remain strongly attached to their community—that is, a majority feel at home in the community and would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. Participation rates have not changed since 1994. It is interesting to note that two of the top three reasons for given by residents for not participating in community projects were that no one had asked them and that they don’t know how to become involved. These responses suggest potential strategies for increasing community participation.

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

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