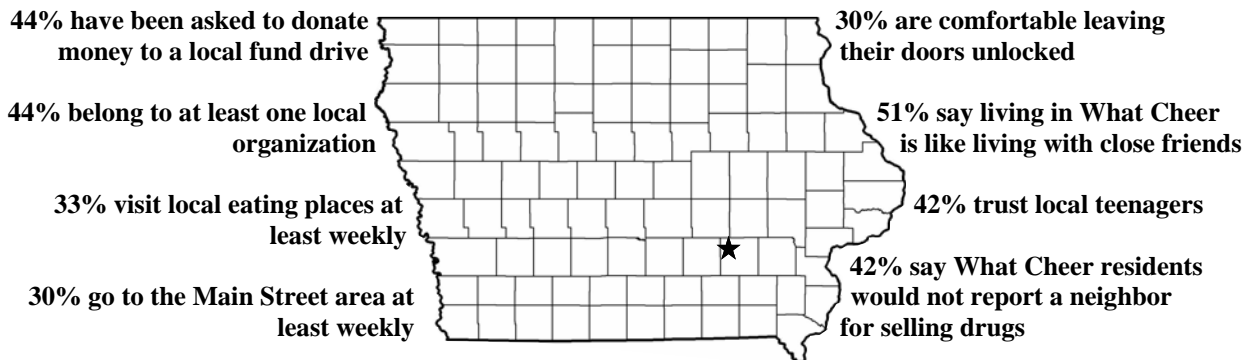


A DECADE OF CHANGE IN WHAT CHEER

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 What Cheer. 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, 103 What Cheer residents responded to the survey, and 98 responded in 2004. This report is a summary of the results, including how the opinions of What Cheer residents have changed over the past decade.

LIFE IN WHAT CHEER IN 2004



LOCAL PATRONAGE PATTERNS

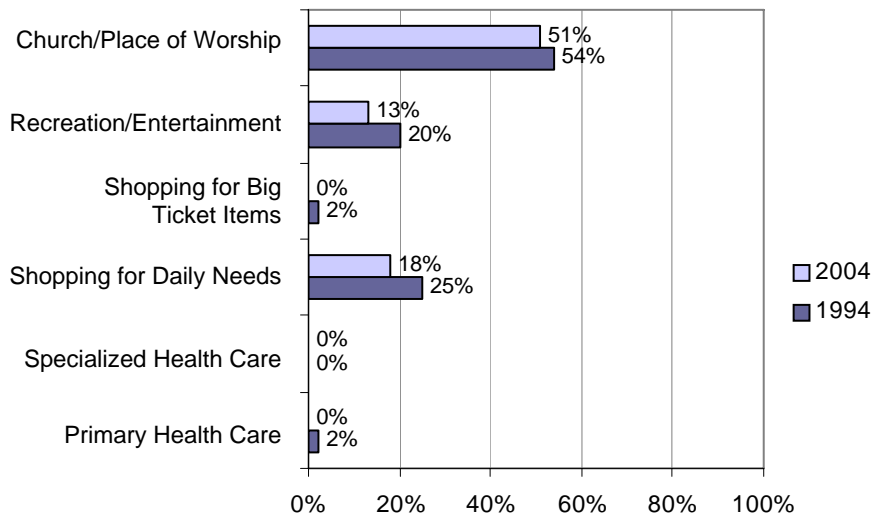


Figure 1: Percent Selecting "Local"

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 What Cheer followed this pattern for most services in 1994 and 2004. Figure 1 shows the percentage of residents who reported patronizing various services in What Cheer. About one-fifth of residents stayed to shop for their daily needs, but there were virtually no reports of

shopping for big ticket items in town. Similarly, most residents did not remain in What Cheer to receive primary or specialized health care. Thirteen percent in 2004 stayed in What Cheer for recreation and entertainment, and about half of residents attended a local church or place of worship.

A Note on Interpretation: For What Cheer, differences in percentages between 2004 and 1994 of less than 12 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 12 percent are statistically significant and are indicated with an asterisk ().

RATINGS OF LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

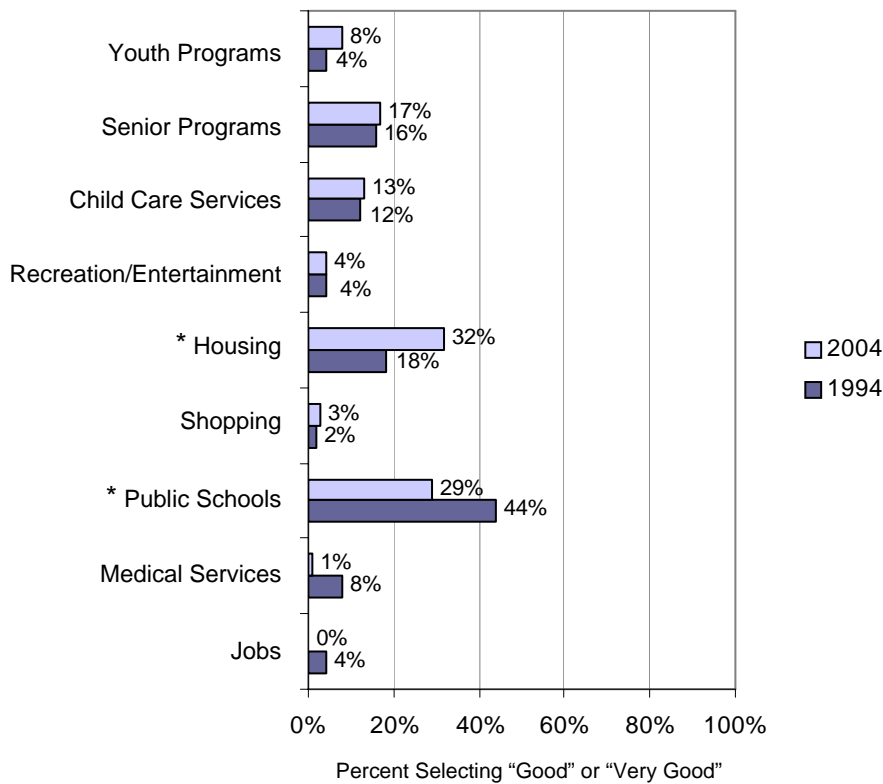


Figure 2: Ratings of Local Services and Facilities

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. None of the services received a favorable evaluation from more than half of residents in either period. The percentage of residents assigning a positive rating to public schools decreased significantly from 44 percent in 1994 to 29 percent in 2004. Housing, although, was rated more favorably in 2004 with 32 percent of residents giving positive ratings, compared to 18 percent in 1994. Overall, ratings changed very little for other local services and facilities over the past decade.

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. Most residents rated emergency response and fire protection favorably in both years, and about half also gave positive ratings to water. The percentage of residents assigning positive ratings to the condition of parks decreased significantly from 44 percent in 1994 to 32 percent in 2004. The condition of streets and police protection received almost no favorable ratings in 2004, both significant decreases from 1994 ratings. However, favorable ratings for garbage collection increased over the decade.

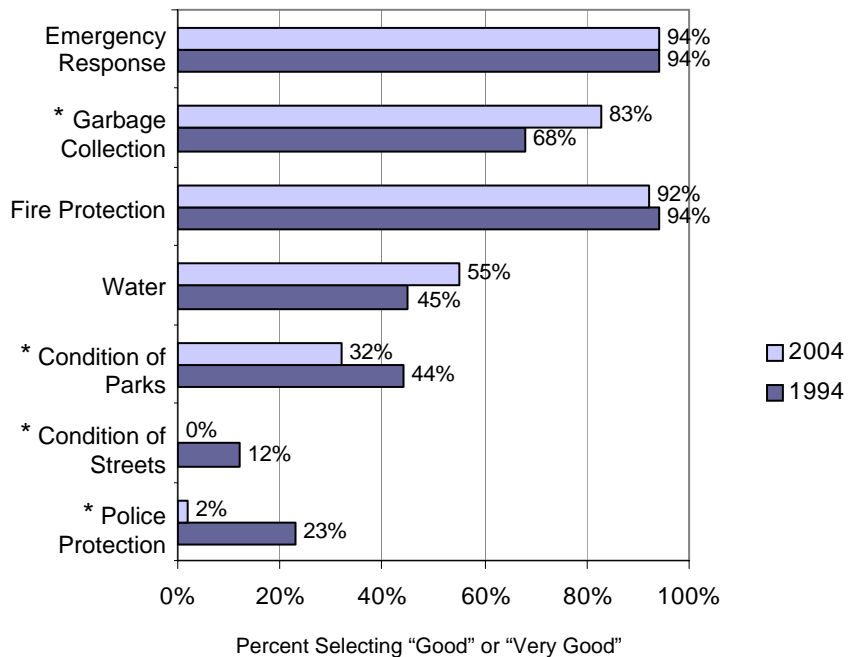


Figure 3: Ratings of Local Government Services

WHAT CHEER'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.

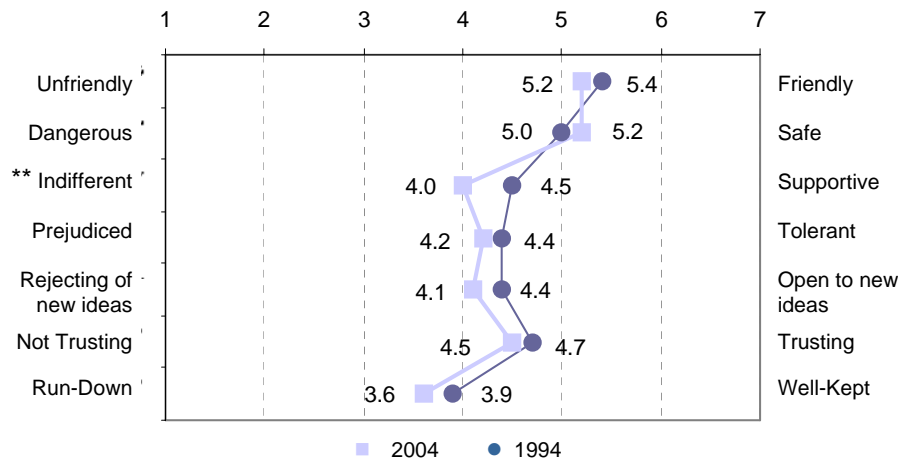


Figure 4: Average Rating of Social Qualities on a 1 to 7 Scale

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 friendliness of What Cheer, while in 2004, friendliness and safety received the highest ratings. The lowest ratings in both years were assigned to the appearance of the town. Findings indicate a decrease in residents' ratings of the supportiveness of What Cheer compared to 1994 ratings. There were no other significant changes in the other 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, 60 percent of residents reported knowing the names of half or more of the people in What Cheer, compared to 57 percent in 1994. Thirty-seven percent indicated that half or more of their friends live in town, a significant decrease compared to 58 percent in 1994. As for relatives, 19 percent in 2004 and 28 percent in 1994 said that half or more of their adult relatives and in-laws live in What Cheer.

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

Do What Cheer residents feel at home in their community? When asked this question, a majority of residents in both years reported that they do feel at home in What Cheer (see Figure 5). Furthermore, nearly three-fourths said that they would be sorry to leave if they had to move away. These responses indicate that most residents feel attached to their community.

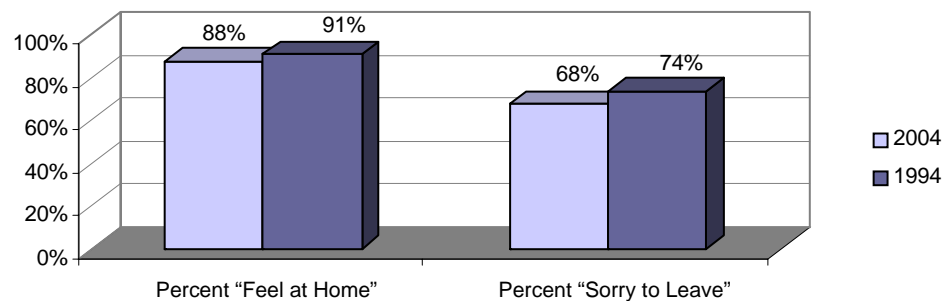


Figure 5: Community Attachment

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Citizens working together to accomplish local goals is an important feature of small towns. For What Cheer, 62 percent of residents indicated in 2004 that the spirit of community participation is “good” or “very good.” At the same time, half of What Cheer residents said they had participated in a community improvement project in the year prior to the survey, and 34 percent considered themselves to be “somewhat” or “very” active in community activities and events (see Figure 6). This compares to 48 percent participating in a local project in 1994 and 38 percent describing themselves as active in the community. When asked to consider a variety of factors that limit their involvement in the community, the top three factors mentioned by residents were lack of time (53%), not being asked by others to volunteer (35%), and not knowing how to get involved (24%).

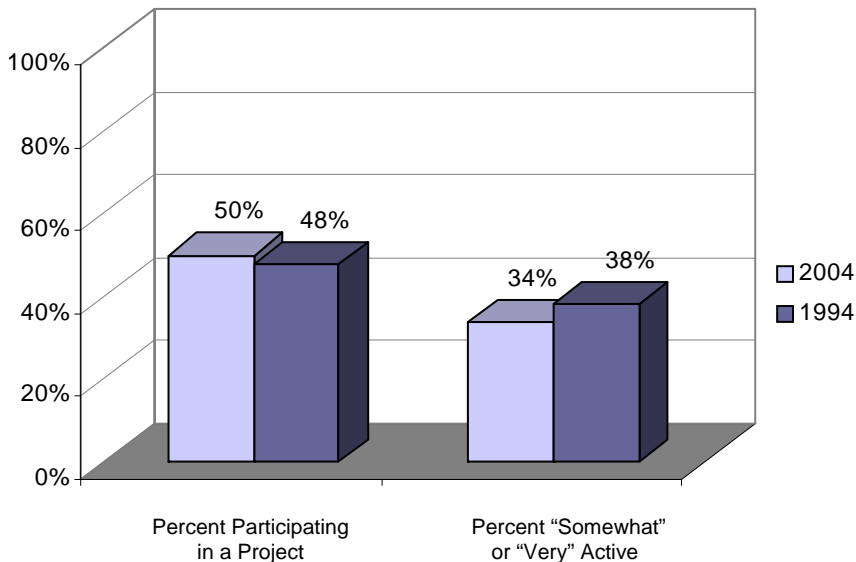


Figure 6: Community Involvement

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 12 percentage points. Using this standard, what has changed in What Cheer over the past decade? Residents continue to go outside of town for services such as shopping and healthcare. The evaluations of the quality of local public schools decreased. However, positive ratings increased for housing in What Cheer. The evaluations of the quality of local government services remain high for emergency response and fire protection, and ratings increased significantly for garbage collection. However, favorable ratings decreased for police protection services and the condition of parks and streets in What Cheer.

The social environment has changed very little. What Cheer residents still describe their town as friendly and safe, but view it as less supportive than it was ten years ago. What Cheer residents remain attached to their community—that is, a majority feel at home in the community and many would be sorry to leave. Finally, participation rates have not changed since 1994, and it is interesting to note that one of the top three reasons people gave for not participating in local community projects was that no one had asked them.

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

RDI

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