



Last year, the Elma Area Community Foundation awarded almost \$7,000 to area non-profit groups and organizations.

Elma 'Shrink Smart' Iowa community

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be adjacent to a city with 50,000 people or more. One town was randomly selected in each county in Iowa.

The study noted whether towns grew or shrank in population between 1994 and 2014, and each town was classified as shrink smart (12), shrink poor (14), grow smart (seven), grow poor (four) or other (62). Towns labeled "other" had roughly average rates of change in population and quality of life.

"Shrink smart" towns were found to have low population densities and geographically more land. Those towns also had more children under the age of 18, fewer single-headed families and more college graduates than "shrink poor" towns. There were no differences in elderly, minority or low-education residents.

Smart shrinking towns had more people employed in agriculture and fast growth in manufacturing, constructing or mining since 1990. Smart towns were behind poor ones, though in terms of full-time and full-year jobs; had slower job growth in transportation services, telecommunications and utilities; and slower growth of jobs in professional services, education and healthcare. The study found no differences in incomes or inequality between shrink-smart and shrink-poor towns, something the study's authors believe suggests quality of life is not driven by wealth differences.



The Boy Scouts are just one of the many local groups that have helped Elma to keep thriving. (Picture submitted)

searchers found nearly half (46.6 percent) of residents said they participated in a community improvement project in the past year. They were also more engaged in local organizations and groups outside the community.

Residents in shrink-smart towns rated their communities as safer, more trusting, better kept-up and more open to new ideas than shrink-poor towns. They also tended to be more supportive and tolerant of others. In general, they are viewed more positively than poorly-shrinking ones.

The study also included two suggestions for improving quality of life in shrinking towns - bridging social capital and creat-

ing a culture of openness and support.

"In summary," the study said, "Shrink-Smart towns have a unique combination of social and physical infrastructure that has permitted quality of life to grow despite depopulation. We find social infrastructure to be more important in understanding smart shrinkage, because it is actionable by the community in the near-term with little expense.

"While physical infrastructure linked to agriculture and manufacturing is also important, its main limitation is that small towns have little control over policy and economic conditions that impact those industries at the national and global levels."