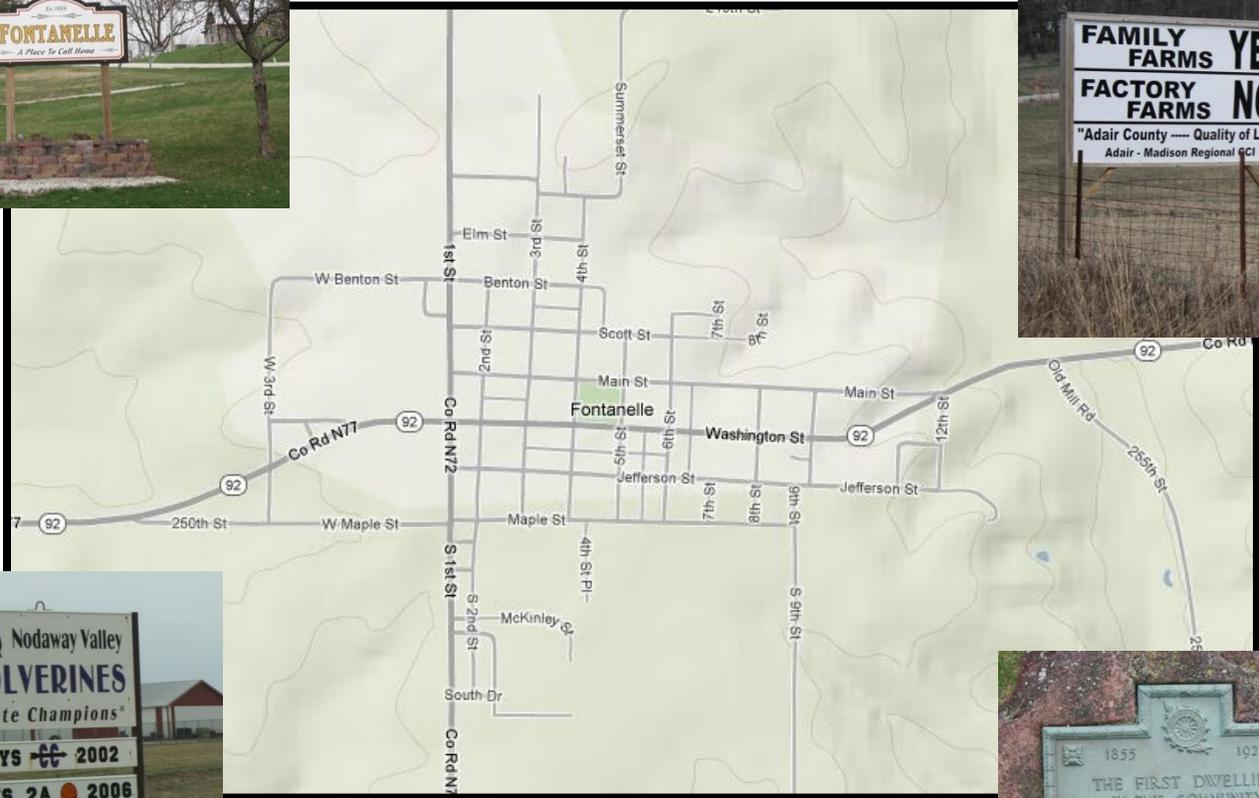


# Fontanelle, Iowa

## Community Profile



### Iowa State University

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## Introduction

This document was prepared by Steven Benne and Akshali Gandhi as part of the comprehensive plan update project, under contract with Adair County, Iowa. The information from this document was collected and revised with the help of local groups, business owners, and interested residents from the region. As part of this process, interviews were taken in the City of Fontanelle.

The purpose of this community profile is to provide a source of information for the many communities of Adair County, assist in their recommendations to local governments, and serve as a reference for decision in their policy making. This plan is also to be used as a resource for future planning and general public information, and will be updated on an on-going basis.

Contained within this community profile are a description of the City of Fontanelle and an overview of the basic characteristics of the region.

## Community Overview

The City of Fontanelle, Iowa is located roughly 65 miles west of Des Moines, Iowa in Adair County, and just 5 miles west of the county seat, Greenfield. According to the 2010 United States Census, Fontanelle has a total population of 615 people, spread out among the more densely populated city, and surrounding rural areas. The topography is dominated by flat farm land and scattered woodlands, with no major river or bodies of water near the town. Recreational areas located nearby include the Adair Wildlife Management Area to the west and Nodaway Park to the east.



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## History

When it was first founded over 150 years ago, the town of Fontanelle served as the county seat of Adair County. Elias Stafford and George B. Hitchcock were appointed as representatives to the Iowa General Assembly in April of 1855. Originally known as Summerset, the town's name was later changed to reflect the Native American heritage of the area. Chief Logan Fontanelle, of the Omaha Indian tribe, was the son of noted French trader Lucien Fontanelle and Omaha Indian woman. The land of Southwest Iowa and nearby Nebraska was given up for public domain, and thus attracted settlers.

Only a few decades after its settlement, the town square experienced a fire in 1913 that destroyed the newspaper office and four other places of business. Fontanelle's historic identity was rejuvenated in 1917, when the Red Cross decided to fundraise to raise money for American soldiers in World War II. The last rooster to be auctioned off in the town square, Jack Pershing, has served as a symbol of the town since. Additionally, the central square and park itself have been symbols of the town since its roots, and thus it is fitting that many historical events such as the rooster auction also took place there. A major renovation to the square was completed in 1939 with the construction of a new bandstand nicknamed "the band shell". Although there was initial fear that the removal of Fontanelle as the county seat would contribute to the decline of the town, it quickly died down due to "the live spirit of the citizens, their desire to make the town prosperous and to create a community of interest, civic improvement and financial welfare" (*History of Adair County, Volume 1, 1914*). Over the years, pride points such as having "the best ever parade held in the county" during the Fourth of July celebrations continued to build the self-esteem of the community (*Fontanelle Observer, July 7, 1955*). Downtown underwent phases of change, with service oriented businesses such as cafes, dry cleaners, clothing stores, car wash,

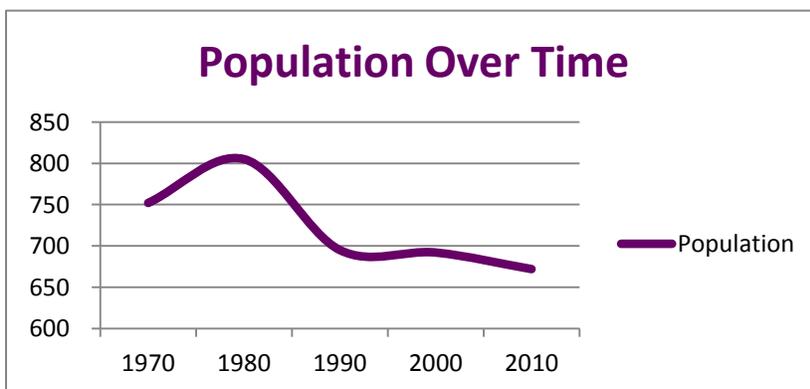
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department stores, bakeries, youth centers, electric shops, blacksmiths and galleries. In the 1950s, growth started away from the square in areas known as “business corridors” – these included large scale manufacturing and milling.

In addition to business growth, Fontanelle was also famous for its education. The town erected Adair County’s first ever high school in an old court house and later acquired a brand new building. Consolidation was forced to occur with the Greenfield school district in the late 1990s, however, when storms damaged school buildings. Despite the storms, a new \$1.92 million dollar junior high school was built in 2000, the same year the Bridgewater-Fontanelle Community School and the Greenfield Community School consolidated into the newly formed Nodaway Valley Community School District.

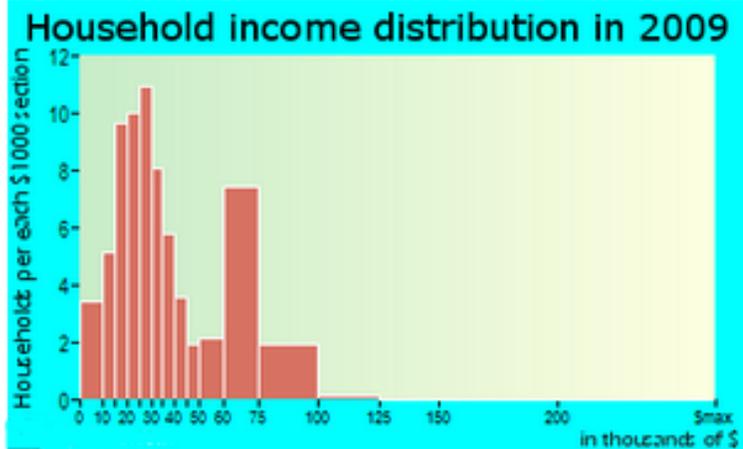
Most recently, new developments in the last decade include the community-led effort for Summerset Grocery (now known as Nodaway Valley Market) in 2005, Underground Specialty, LLC, Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Summerset Estates, a new vineyard, and the renovation of the public library.

## Demographics

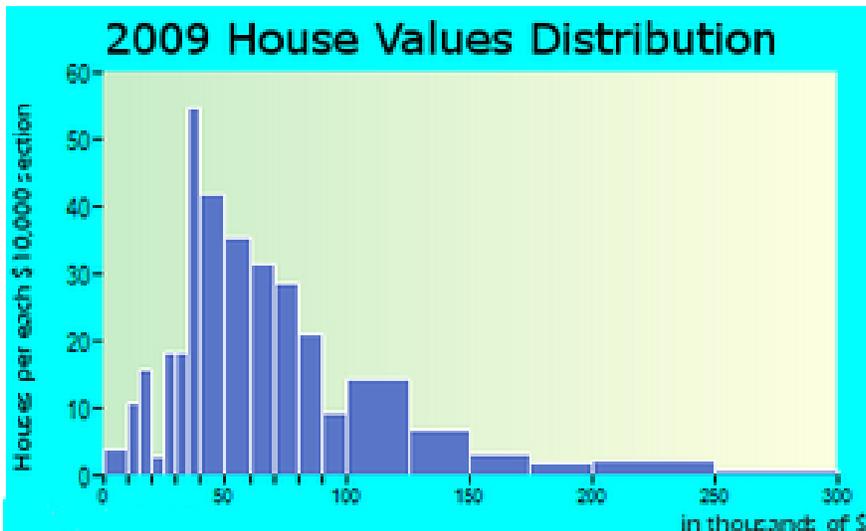


Fontanelle’s total population has declined over 10.5% since 2000, as can be seen on the graph to the left.

Of the 615 reported individuals residing in Fontanelle in 2009, 266 (43.4%) are male and 349 (56.6%) are female. The median age is 48 years old, much higher than the average for the state of Iowa, at 36.

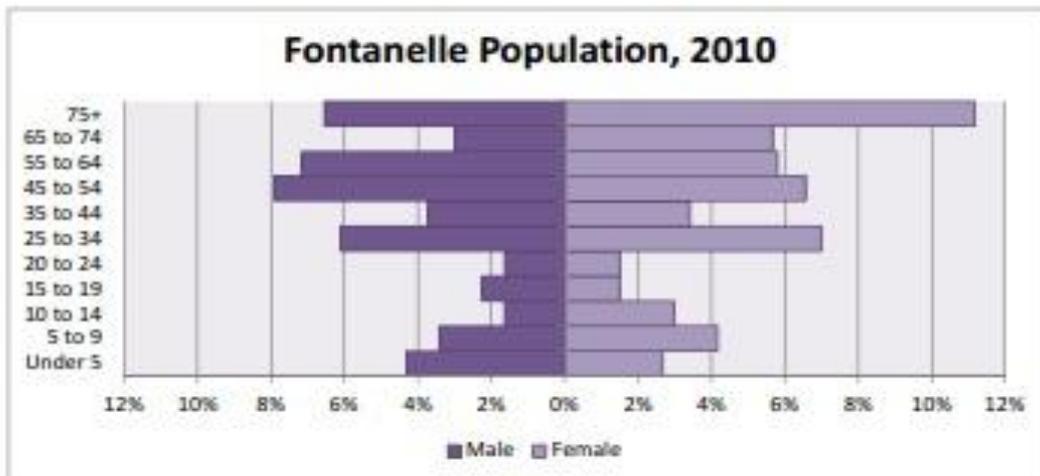
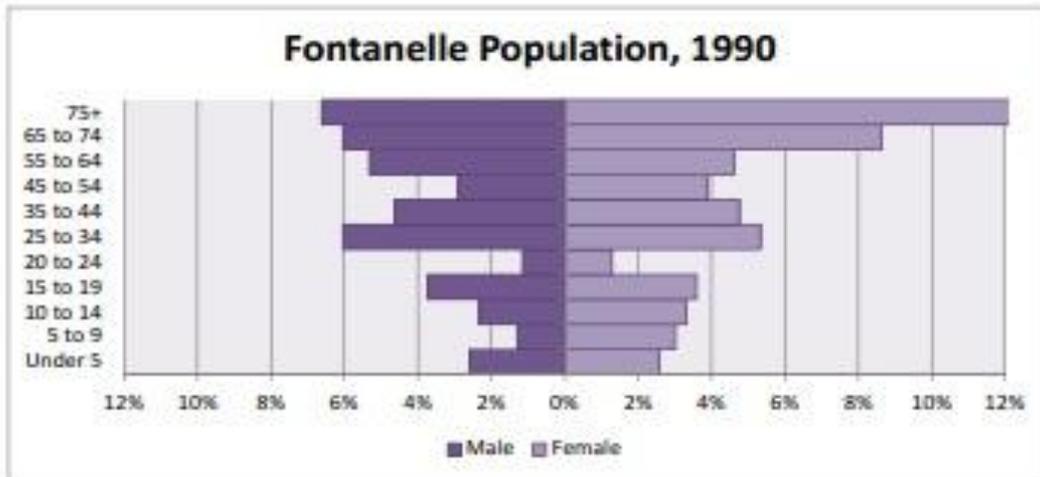
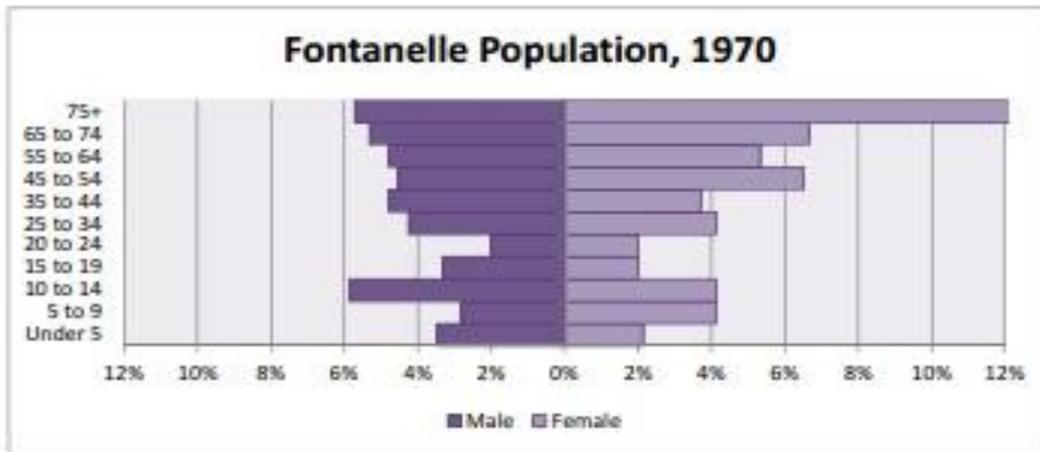


Like much of rural Iowa, the white population is the leading race demographic over 98% of the population (611 people), while Hispanic makes up 1.5% of the population (9 people). Of the number of residents who are 18 years and older, 81% have graduated from high school and only 6.8% of the population have Bachelor's degrees. The Nodaway Valley Middle School is located within the city limits while the Nodaway Valley High School is located in Greenfield. The average household income is \$34,402, which has risen over \$3,000 since 2001, however is still much lower than the average household income for Iowa of \$48,044. The average value of households in the area currently stands at \$63,845, nearly half of the average for Iowa at



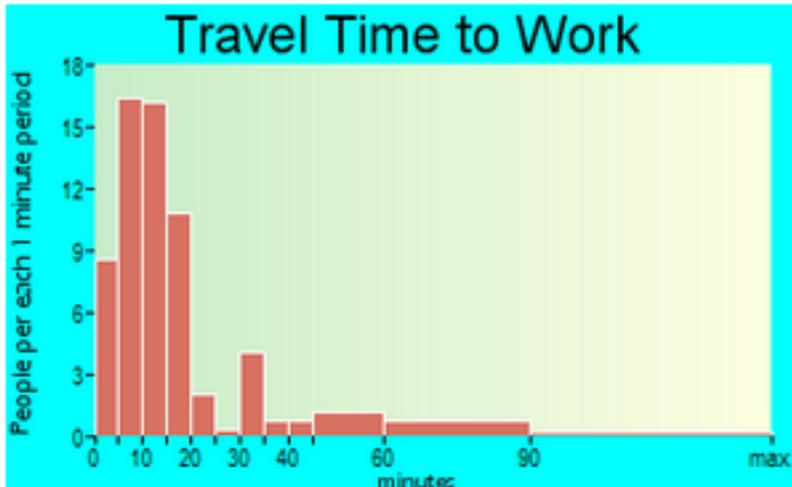
\$122,000. Average rent costs within the city are \$595 per unit. The graph to the left illustrates the distribution of home values in the area.

The population pyramids below show Fontanelle's growth and decline over the last forty years.



The pyramids indicate a slightly aging population and a longer living female population. Other than this, age cohorts have remained fairly stable.

## Transportation

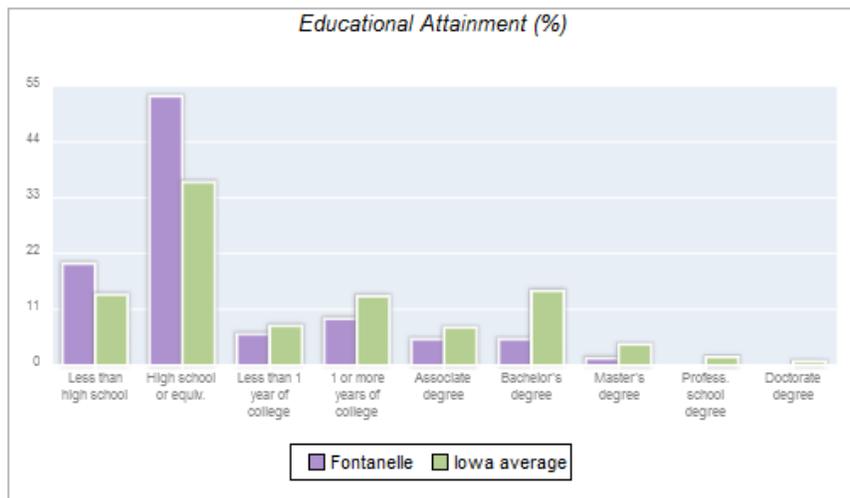


Adair County intersects with Highway 80 on its northern border, this is the main source of traffic flow into the county and Fontanelle. Dissecting the town into north and south areas is County Road N77, going east

and west. The main artery feeding Fontanelle from the north near Highway 80 is County Road N72 (Fontanelle Road). In addition, Washington Street also serves as an arterial roadway. The nearest alternative mode of transportation is located in Creston, Iowa at the Amtrak Station. 70% of the workforce travel over 15 minutes to work, while only 3% of the workforce works from home.

## Labor

The pool of labor in Fontanelle is very much based on blue collar jobs. Educational attainment for community member is relatively low compared to



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state averages. This trend of college educated and graduates, failing to return to the city is due to a lack of jobs and the attractiveness of the jobs which are available to those members who have higher educational attainment. This outgoing movement of the college educated in rural areas has led to the growth of the generation gap. The most common industries within the community of Fontanelle, Iowa are construction, health care, education, and manufacturing.

## **Methodology**

To gather our research, seven key person interviews were conducted, including residents, shopkeepers, businessmen, politicians and visitors. In addition, an 8-person focus group discussion was held with NVHS senior high school students from Fontanelle, age ranges 17-19. Lastly, an interview was taken with a professor in the Iowa State History department who specializes in the agricultural and rural history of small towns. In order to reach a broader segment of the population, purple “Fontanelle Could Be...” signs were placed around the town square in the newspaper office, the Bar & Grille, the pharmacy, the Post Office, the library and in the supermarket. To specifically target the youth, a different sign was also placed at the high school for students to write their future hopes and plans. Both the high school poster and the purple signs were meant to be anonymous visioning exercises through which anyone could express their wishes for the future of the town in an informal way. Below are the completed signs that were a result of this exercise.



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## **Analysis**

When gathering our data, many themes emerged across age and geographic boundaries. Chief of these themes included: a continued desire for community engagement in terms of events and local programming, preservation of outdoor recreation spaces, restoring the vibrancy of the town square, the neighborly atmosphere present in Fontanelle, regret over the change of the county seat to Greenfield, worry about its proximity to Des Moines, and the lack of cultural diversity. All of these themes are important for policymakers to take into account because they are the voices of the residents living in Fontanelle. Based off of our data gathering process, a S.W.O.T. analysis was created in order to further analyze the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the town.

## **S.W.O.T.**

### **Strengths**

- Only one vacancy in town square, building is scheduled to be demolished
- Very close community willing to participate in community action
- Tight knit population and safe neighborhoods
- Active bank loan program, allows for small businesses to start
- Housing prices are low, encourages people seeking affordable housing to move
- Proximity to Greenfield and Des Moines provides resources
- Community events, such as 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration, which attract tourists
- Grocery store located within the town
- Great place to raise a family

### **Weaknesses**

- Decreasing population
- Lack of cultural diversity
- Low-income population
- Bedroom community
- Roads, bridges, and infrastructure
- Low resident retention
- Only one place to sit down and eat within town (smoking ban hurt business)

- Most residents work outside the city limits
- Demand for fresh produce higher than supply

### Opportunities

- Small business and entrepreneurs
- Empty lot on town square to implement possible restaurants
- Promote community festivals to attract tourists
- Promoting service and other strengths to encourage population growth
- New couples moving in
- Main Street or other grants for square

### Threats

- Resident retention
- Opportunities in larger communities are greater --> contributes to sprawl
- Becoming a suburb of Des Moines
- Business retention
- College educated do not return
- Internet business
- Lack of housing availability
- Changing cultural habits
- Access to state and federal funding for special projects and improvements

SWOT Analysis			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong civic pride, neighborly atmosphere sense of community</li> <li>• History of successful grassroots efforts</li> <li>• Amenities (Post office, grocery, library, clinic, newspaper, park, etc.)</li> <li>• Outdoor Rec Spaces</li> <li>• GFCF</li> <li>• Family farms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diminishing traffic in the square</li> <li>• Businesses have limited hours</li> <li>• Bedroom community</li> <li>• Resident burnout</li> <li>• Lack of cultural diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forward Fontanelle Power, LLC</li> <li>• Growth of Des Moines</li> <li>• 1 vacancy in town square</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependency on Des Moines</li> <li>• Availability of housing stock</li> <li>• Costs of Maintaining infrastructure</li> <li>• Increased college bound young population</li> </ul>

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## Recommendations

Our recommendation strategy for the future of Fontanelle is two-fold: one based on physical restoration and the other based on programming.

1. Utilize physical remediation as a tool to restore downtown walkability vibrancy in the town square
  - Bring back local traditions in the form of public art, and maintain existing murals



- Maintain and better promote existing outdoor recreational spaces
- Conduct a retail analysis with maps of vacancies of storefronts and homes
- Increase visual signage along highway
- Continue research regarding wind turbine power
- Rent out the newly remodeled bandstand for visiting and local entertainment
- Invest in façade improvement grants or Main Street Iowa programs to restore and preserve the architecture of the town square
- Attract or develop a locally themed, family-style restaurant into the square vacancy on the northwest corner to draw upon the heritage of the area (see conceptual diagrams below)



*Before and After Cumberland Family Restaurant Concept*

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2. Develop creative local programming that will address the future needs of a tight-knit community and raise self-esteem in order to capitalize on the community character of a small town
    - Launch or participate in a city wide “indie-bound” campaign to encourage shopping locally
    - Research feasibility of a “farm2school” joint effort between middle school, local farms, and grocery store
    - Restore “Fourth of July Festival” back to an annual event, even if small in nature
    - Encourage families to volunteer for participation in “home-stay” foreign exchange programs for middle or high school students from around the world

## **Conclusion**

Overall, although Fontanelle, like many other small towns in the area, has experienced a 10.6% population decline since the 1970s, it has a resilient nature and community spirit that should be utilized to sustain the growth of the town into the future. The town square has many local amenities that are still preserved from decades past; the only main amenity lacking is a family restaurant. Although the strength of Fontanelle is a nearly filled business district, constant maintenance (both physical and programming) will be needed to preserve the atmosphere and community character. It is our recommendation that economic development and historic preservation should be placed at the forefront of future goals, so that Fontanelle does indeed remain “a great place to call home” for both current and new families and residents.