

Neighbours to the Far North

Mrs. Geo. Wilson

INUVIK Institute is one of four formed in the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories as the result of a northern tour by Mrs. William Hough of Stratford, Ontario, in the fall of 1960. The trip was sponsored by the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada and the Departments of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, in the interests of a fuller community life for the northern settlements. In addition to Inuvik, the three other communities that now have Women's Institute branches are Fort McPherson which is also north of the Arctic Circle, Discovery and Fort Providence both of which are in the Great Slave Lake area. Not so recent in origin but also one of the Northern Canada Women's Institutes, is Haines Junction in the Yukon.

It is hoped that eventually all these Institutes, and others still to come, will reach out to the Indian and Eskimo women of their communities, and develop into a common meeting-ground. At present, Fort Providence is the only one with a mixed membership. An Indian woman is vice-president and the members include Indians and non-Indians.

The Fort Providence Women's Institute has been very successful in planning projects to bring the women of the community together. One of particular concern was the provision of a club house, a place where the Indian girls could meet during the summer when they were home from boarding school. A log house was available if it could be fixed up. The roof leaked and it needed paint and a general cleaning up. Here is the story as related in letters from the secretary, Mrs. Dorothy Lamoureux, last summer:

"A place was needed where the girls could gather to read, play games, sew, or work at their crafts. The girls put on a Bingo, looking after it themselves. They baked for two days so they had cupcakes and coffee to sell. It turned out very well. Mrs. Randolph (the president) and myself supervised and helped where it was needed, but it went off smoothly and they are all anxious to try it again.

"The first thing they did with the money was to buy roofing and, with some of our native girls and boys, and a few husbands to help, we put on half a new roof and patched up the old part left. We hope to get it painted this week."

When Institutes in the provinces heard of this venture they started sending books. Mrs. Lamoureux goes on:

"There are a lot of books coming in from

Granton, Ontario, and that spurred us on. A carpenter from Northern Affairs is going to put up some shelves for us with scrap lumber and plywood. These girls will only be here until school starts and then we won't be so active.

The mothers use the club house too as a centre for their crafts. Mrs. Lamoureux continues:

"Our handicrafts are coming along nicely. An old woman here, Mrs. Tom, made a quill belt that is on the mace used to open our Territorial Parliament. She is eighty-eight years old. She has made another belt and is working on one more. They are lovely. I would certainly like to have them on exhibit somewhere. Each one is worth \$25, if we could only find a sale for them.

"The Indian women are now picking berries. These are made into jam and sold in gaily decorated jars. This, and their home cooking, find a ready sale and are proven money-makers."

Quite a successful business is being established in crafts. Cushions from moose hides, beaded moccasins in all sizes from infant's to men's, quill work, embroidery, and colourful aprons are typical of the handicrafts being sold to tourists and people of the community. Some outside outlets have also been arranged.

At Fort McPherson, too, a craft program is under way.

Discovery is a small place, half an hour's air distance from Yellowknife. The Women's Institute has undertaken to collect magazines for the Yellowknife Hospital. Home-baking sales are popular due to the presence of numerous single men in the community who have to do their own housekeeping. The Discovery women intend to compile a history of the settlement to be entered in the national Tweedsmuir competition of the Women's Institutes.

Haines Junction in the Yukon had the first Women's Institute north of the sixtieth parallel. This pioneer branch was organized by Mrs. Hough in 1956 while her husband was Superintendent of the Experimental Farm there. It has been successful in getting a new school for the community, a library, a community hall and an active recreation program that includes "Sourdough Shindigs" and curling bonspiels. The institute has also sponsored health lectures which were attended by the Indian homemakers as well as their own members.

Garden demonstrations at Haines Junction led to home gardens and a fall fair that has become annual.