

A year with the Rural Organizations and Services Branch

More than 12 months ago, I took on the job of Director of the Rural Organizations and Services Branch and what a year we have had!

Looking back, there are several successful programs the ROS Branch and Women's Institutes were involved in. The Rural Seminars for Vital People (RSVP) were overwhelmingly received by over 50 different rural organizations and the WI attendance at these leadership training programs gave us a glimpse at the support your group has traditionally given Ministry of Agriculture and Food programs. A second RSVP is now being planned for the new year and we look forward to your participation.

Last spring, Joyce Canning and other ROS staff, helped to develop resource sheets for Women's Institutes aimed at improving program planning at your branch level. I hope you were able to make good use of that information.

During the "settling in" stage, field staff for our branch were placed and identified as Rural Organization

Specialists in the counties, districts and regions. Perhaps for them, the task of reorganizing was most difficult. I'm sure now that they have been identified, you will offer them your support and help as they get accustomed to their role. They have a lot of work to do, too much sometimes, but they are working hard to serve you and other rural organizations in Ontario.

Although the ROS Branch accomplished a lot in its first year, there is still much to do. We plan to continue our thrusts of leadership development and 4-H into 1984.

The 4-H program will undergo some changes in 1984, to consolidate agriculture and homemaking into a more efficient, single unit. A leaders' committee has been established to give us advice with these changes. First, the upper age limit will be 21 and second, a bicentennial award will be given to those completing projects in 1984. A two year "grace period" will be introduced to phase-in the new maximum age and options of



Ken Knox

obtaining silver spoons or adding bars to agriculture plaques will remain in 1984.

There are certain advantages to one 4-H program in Ontario. Administratively, one program will be easier to run, instead of two with different types of paperwork. One program will provide equal opportunities for boys and girls and improved leader training. It will cost less to the taxpayer in the long run.

One area I would like to pursue on behalf of rural organizations in the future is image. Are you interested in addressing issues which are pertinent to rural people? What role do you want to have as an organization? If it is to have a stronger voice in agricultural issues, then it is the ROS Branch's mandate to help WI's build a more meaningful voice. Developing an image will ensure an organization's rightful place among other rural groups. The image we have is so important, because after a while the perceptions of others become reality.

I welcome you to the second year of the Rural Organizations and Services Branch and I look forward to meeting many more Women's Institute members.

Kenneth W. Knox
Director
ROS Branch



Reflections from ROS with Joyce Canning (Rural Organizations and Services)

Why does the Federated Women's Institute of Ontario exist? What is their purpose? their objectives? What need do they fill today in the rural woman's life?

In the ten months that I've been in this job, these are the kinds of questions that I seem to get on a regular basis - from staff in other ministries who are involved with women's issues, from media people, from other rural women's groups, and from our own branch staff who are not familiar with the background of the Women's Institute.

How would you answer these questions? Are the objectives printed

on page 6 of the new handbook, the answer? Are they still pertinent? Do they tell the whole story? Is this really what Women's Institute is about in the 1980's?

What would you like me to be saying to people when they ask these questions? I'd like to hear from you. Tell us why you belong to the Women's Institute. What personal benefits or rewards do you receive by being a member? What benefits does your community receive because of your Women's Institute? This would make a great introduction to the Letters to the Editor section of the magazine.