

# *Every Women's Institute member can change community image*

It is hard to believe I have been editor of Home & Country for over a year now. I have done many different things and visited many different places in that year thanks to invitations from organizations such as the Women's Institutes, to be a guest speaker or to participate in a rally. However, some of the opportunities have come directly from my employer, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

One such opportunity arose in February and March when I took to the road and participated in the RSVP (Rural Seminars for Vital People)

Program as a speaker. I was glad to see so many of you also seized the RSVP opportunity and attended the seminars to learn about communications.

My particular topic was Improving the Image of Your Organization in the Community. During the session, participants worked in pairs to discover their organization's image in the community at present. It was an enlightening exercise! I would like to share some of those discoveries with readers, particularly those who couldn't make it to an RSVP.

In most cases, Women's Institute

members heard a general lack of knowledge about their organization from other RSVP participants. Some people would know nothing about WI - which totally surprised members - but occurred in settings where an urban population was nearby and members of urban organizations were in attendance. The majority of instances involved knowledge of Women's Institutes as caterers, as 4-H club supporters, as quilters, as socializing tea-drinkers.

WI members at the RSVPs soon realized that not enough accurate information about their organization is reaching the community. Residents are not aware of the educational programs, the myriad of opportunities and policies within Women's Institutes. And, members realized that is the information which best reflects what Women's Institutes are all about today. Yes, many groups do quilt and cater, but they also initiate resolutions which influence governmental decisions; raise money to help bring clean water to Third World countries; provide programs which teach members about the computer age, crime prevention, better eating habits and Canada's other cultures.

At one RSVP an interesting comment was made by one man. "No," he admitted, "I don't know anything about Women's Institutes, and my wife is vice-president of a branch." Perhaps there is a lesson in that statement. At the RSVP I talked about different ways to promote your group in the community, but one way every Women's Institute member can help in this project is to start at home. Do you talk about your WI activities to your spouse? your children? your grandchildren? your neighbours? your friends? If you do, and you talk about resolutions and other special programs, that's great. If you do, and you talk about the banquet you catered on the weekend, remember to add what you learned at last month's meeting. If you don't, perhaps you could start today.

