

# WI today: Women Involved!

*The late, great Mark Twain once complained that the reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated.*

*Well, we at Home & Country feel the same way about recent press reports that have declared the Women's Institutes to be on their death bed.*

*We do not believe the WI is terminally ill — but we do think the organization could use a shot in the arm to keep it well and to help it grow in numbers and strength.*

*For that reason, we have prepared a special report on the state of the WI today. Our diagnosis is that the WI is as vibrant, capable and full of promise as ever — but the organization is suffering from an image problem. And, we think we have a remedy!*

*We hope this special report, prepared by Home & Country Interim Editor Ann Hauprich, will help you see the WI in a new light — and that the stories on the following pages will generate positive discussions and ideas for improving the WI's image in 1986.*

## New WI branch born in Greenwood

Some branches of the Women's Institutes may be dying out, but new ones continue to be born.

This is the story of the conception and birth of one of the province's youngest WI branches — Greenwood WI in North Renfrew District.

Sharon Cotnam is generally regarded as the "founding mother" of Greenwood WI. It was she who organized the first membership drive and planted the seeds from which the new branch was to grow.

Greenwood, explains Mrs. Cotnam, is a little community, just east of Pembroke, which belongs to Pembroke Township. The nearest WI branch was the Pleasant View WI — a group Mrs. Cotnam says she had admired from a distance for many years.

"I had never belonged to a WI — but I always read the accounts of their meetings in the newspaper and thought the Pleasant View WI was a worthwhile group," Mrs. Cotnam explains.

With a dairy farmer husband and four active children to keep her hopping, Mrs. Cotnam hadn't felt she had enough time to devote to the WI until last year when the youngest settled into high school and the oldest was at university.

Mrs. Cotnam was at a fork in the road, and she knew there were two things she wanted to do. One was to start her own business, an antique and crafts shop called The Calico Cat. The other goal was to join the ranks of the Women's Institutes.

### Special Report Ann Hauprich



When Mrs. Cotnam mentioned to her mother-in-law, Marjorie, a long-time member of Pleasant View WI, that she was interested in joining the group, something unexpected happened.

"I was told Pleasant View WI would be happy to have me — but that I might feel out of place because most of the members were so much older than I," recalls Mrs. Cotnam. It was then that the two women first began discussing the possibility of getting a new branch off the ground.

"I always thought very highly of the Pleasant View WI, and I didn't want to take anything away from their group, so I conferred with some of their members to find out how they would feel about having a new branch so nearby... as it turned out, most of them were excited about the idea, and they were very supportive," Mrs. Cotnam says.

In October 1984, Mrs. Cotnam phoned "a few friends" and bounced the idea off of them. When the women she contacted reacted positively, Mrs. Cotnam set about the task of arranging an information night at her home.

Roughly a month later, the meeting took place with then district president

Caryl Yokale and district secretary Viola Krause on hand to dispense information and answer questions posed by the 12 or 14 women in attendance.

Interest in forming the new branch intensified and by the time the inaugural meeting was held on January 15, 1985, there were 19 charter members. By September, the branch had mushroomed to about 25 ladies and it is reportedly still growing!

Once the election of officers had taken place, with Elaine Hennessy being sworn in as president, the Greenwood WI began planning its activities.

According to Mrs. Hennessy, most of the members of the new branch are married women in their 20s and 30s, who have school-age or pre-school children.

It was, then, not surprising that one of the branch's first projects was to organize a giant yard sale to raise money for playground equipment at a nearby park. "We took in about \$350. at the sale and donated half of it to Pleasant View Park," notes Mrs. Hennessy.

Another project that's captured the interest of the Greenwood WI is George Mathieson Park, situated on a waterfront property that was donated to the township in recent years. Greenwood WI members hope to provide the new park with picnic tables and flowers in 1986.

Mrs. Hennessy is delighted with the Greenwood WI. She says it provides members with a chance to meet