

# What's in our future?

Several requests have been made to *Home & Country* to reprint FWIO President Charlotte Johnson's 1985 area convention speech. Here it is.

Where are we going, and how are we getting there? I would like to consider with you the future of the Women's Institutes in Ontario, and where do we go from here? I would like us to think about the road we take to change, or to reform.

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Following a conference last year at Geneva Park, the theme of which was “Does Canada have a place in the future?”, I listened to a radio summary of that conference. In his summary, Sheldon Turcotte said, in response to the question, “Yes, but we must be competitive and aggressive in a changing world.” I would like to put it in another context. Does the Women's Institute have a place in the future? Yes, I think it does, but we must be competitive and aggressive in a changing world.

How many of us work in kitchens that have none of the amenities of the modern world? We want efficiency, we strive to co-ordinate our work areas, we use new appliances that will simplify the task at hand, and shorten the preparation period of whatever we are doing. We are the benefactors of a competitive and aggressive industrial society.

Belief is the basis of action! The provincial board and the executive of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario felt the time was ripe for a review of the structure of our organization. The ad hoc committee that was given the mandate to make recommendations has completed their job. You will have had the opportunity to study the recommendations, and I know that many of you have taken extra time to do this. I am pleased that you did. There was mixed reaction when we talked about change.

## Between the Lines Charlotte Johnson



Many welcome it, but others are much more reserved. To some of us our branch is probably a haven in a fast changing world. But what challenge does it hold for new members? What hope is there for growth?

Rural women want an organization that will address current issues now. Are we publicizing our accomplishments, and making concerned women aware that we do address problems and issues that affect us, through resolutions, letters, briefs. Our strength in the public forum lies in the size of our organization, and we are viewed with respect in that forum.

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Not too long ago I heard that the average age of farmers in Canada is 50. A more recent statistic is that one in every 11 farmers is a woman, and 1 in every 10 fishermen in Eastern Canada is a woman. What does that do to statistics in rural Canada? How many of our rural women are farmers? What problems do they confront? Is our organization a vehicle which will help them? Why are new groups starting up? Is our organization too structured, or are we leaving time at our meetings to discuss the problems of the moment? Are we tied to procedure? What is the priority we set? Is it a strict adherence to the handbook, or are our priorities the needs of the women we serve, and the community around us.

We must analyse before we act. Our family owns a retail business in Cochrane. Competitiveness is the name of the game in sales. Merchandising is a word used constantly at seminars and meetings. We must keep up with an ever-changing mar-

ket. We stock that which will sell, that which the public requires and desires, and that which is current.

Thirty odd years ago when we started, (following a farm bankruptcy, it isn't new, folks) chain saws provided us with enough profit to make a good living. Woods operators depended on men cutting pulp and logs with chain saws. Every man was equipped with one. Today chain saws are a convenience tool for home owners with wood lots, and wood burning stoves. Timber operators use large tree cutting machines called clippers, and haul the tree lengths with timber jacks. Over the years we have diversified, selling snowmobiles when there was a rich market for them. People got off their snowmobiles, and onto cross country skis. We changed as well. Today we sell the popular all terrain vehicle, the ATV's. The market has changed, to survive, we must remain competitive.

Machinery salesmen deal with merchandising. The time of stocking binder canvasses, mower knives and blades, and tines for dump rakes has long passed. Farm machinery dealers too, have become very competent in diversifying. The sophisticated machinery on the farms today is a far cry from the machinery used 40 years ago.

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... I don't think we can be totally agriculturally oriented. A vast number of our members live in a non-rural setting... ”

To keep up with all of this, dealers have to be continually attending service schools, studying and reading so that they will be able to give service to their customers.

What about this merchandising and marketing. What about farm merchandising and marketing. Successful farmers meet the demands of today's markets. Does a farmer continue to produce that which does not reap a profit? He studies the market, either personally or through a marketing group, and strives to produce that which is demanded. She/he enters