

# WI president sees exciting future

By Carol Stewart-Kirkby

*"Women's Institute has always been my interest. It's an organization I really believe in."*

Peggy Knapp, a member of Ashgrove WI in Halton, became president of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) last November. After organizing a three-day planning retreat for her executive this spring, Peggy is very enthusiastic about the future of WI in this province.

"We looked at the issues facing our organization and our strengths and weaknesses. There are many challenges and opportunities facing us," Peggy said. She is confident FWIO can accomplish many things in the next decade, and explained the provincial activities, like conferences and programs, have been planned up to 1997--the centennial of WI.

Activities will continue to focus on the environment. "The environment is everything," emphasized Peggy. She hopes WI members can help to change people's perception of the environment being mainly air and water. We will be using the environment issue to personally develop our members; to enhance family and community life; and to improve world ecology, Peggy explained.

The environment thrust has captured the interest of many WI members over the last two years. In 1988, members were challenged to initiate 100 new waste management projects across the province in the next three years. There are over 200 projects to date, reported Peggy.

Peggy feels it is important to have one voice for rural women. "If we are silent, things go unaddressed," she said. Today, Women's Institute is one of the largest women's organizations in Ontario. FWIO is not a member of the recently formed Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN). "There is room for both us. The Network is raising the profile of farm women. WI is more involved with rural women. Rural issues are a little different than farm issues," Peggy said.

Born and raised in Perth County, Peggy and husband Wally farmed for 35 years in the Cambridge area and later Georgetown. While in Cambridge, Peggy belonged to Laura Rose WI, and fondly remembers the visits of one the founders of Women's Institutes. "I feel very fortunate to have met

her. Laura Rose had a better idea of what WI could and would be than anybody else," Peggy said. Other influential women, like Ethel Chapman and Dorothy Futcher, crossed Peggy's path. "Many of us don't realize our potential until we meet these women. It emanates from them," she commented.

Peggy has spent many years in volunteer positions, realizing her potential. Recently Peggy retired after a nine-year stint as public interest representative on the Ontario Veterinary Association. During her OVA tenure, she served on several committees including the executive, accreditation, complaints and chaired a number of ad hoc committees. "It was very interesting work and a good experience, but I realized I couldn't do the homework required as FWIO president and OVA representative," Peggy explained.

In Cambridge, Peggy taught mentally handicapped 18 to 25 year-olds in a Sunday School program, for the city. "It was a pilot project which lasted for about eight years, integrating them (the mentally handicapped) into the regular church school. It was a wonderful experience," Peggy said.

Peggy has chaired the boards of two churches and also wrote, produced and directed an outdoor nativity play featuring adult actors and live animals. This play, which Peggy considers one of her finer accomplishments, has continued on under the leadership of the City of Cambridge.

Peggy served three terms on the North Dumfries School Board, one as chairman, during the early 1970's. She was also a member of the Education Advisory Committee of the Grand River Conservation Authority from 1975 to 1979.

Wally, manager of agriculture for the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, was once a very busy international livestock judge. It was his involvement in travel which introduced Peggy to an interest she holds near and dear today. Since 1976, Peggy has been organizing WI exchanges to England, Wales, West Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Russia. So far, WI members from England and Wales have travelled to Ontario.

"When Wally was judging, we would often stay in people's homes. We discovered this was the best way to learn about a country, sitting around a fireplace in the evening. We feel we owe it to others to help them experience the same thing," Peggy said.



Peggy Knapp

This summer Peggy is leading a group of 25 Ontario WI members on a trip to England and Wales. "It is the 75th anniversary of the National Federation of Women's Institutes. Ontario Government House in London is hosting a reception for us and members of NFWI. It was their (Ontario Government House) idea," Peggy explained.

Certainly being FWIO President is time consuming. Peggy was the first ever president-elect for two years prior to becoming president. She feels the president-elect idea works well. "It's a different commitment to vice-president. You know you are going to be president. It's a decision you have to make with your family," Peggy said. As well, Peggy has a strong support system amongst her local WI members. "I don't think I would have sought the president-elect position without my district offering their support," she said. As president-elect, Peggy supported the president, an gained valuable insight into the finance, constitution, scholarship and executive committees of FWIO.

When Peggy and Wally aren't busy with their many interests, they are enjoying their family. Their daughter, Beth is dairy farming with her husband in Thamesford. She has two children. Bob teaches figure skating in Winnipeg. David is in the livestock export business and is assistant advertising manager for the Holstein Journal. He lives in Milton.