

Who are your volunteers?

By Chuck Bokor

Look around the room at the people attending your group's regular meeting the next time it gets together. Most, if not all, are volunteers. Some get their expenses or an honorarium paid, but for the most part, they provide their time and effort voluntarily. How well do you know your volunteers?

In one group I belonged to, I remember an older fellow who never said too much when decisions were needed or problems solved. But he did say a lot during the breaks in the business of the meeting, and usually about something not related to the organization at all. The distractions grew, and so did the frustrations among other group members. "Who is this fellow?" "I wish he'd pay attention!" "We sure are wasting time listening to his stories (which really aren't very funny)."

In a detailed survey of volunteer organizations in Canada, done between Nov. 1, 1986 and Oct. 31, 1987, some interesting facts were revealed. Did you know that 5.3 million Canadians volunteered their time and skills to groups and organizations? Or

that over half of those volunteers were from Ontario? And in Ontario, 29 per cent of all women volunteer, but only 22 per cent of men get involved with volunteer organizations?

Health groups and agricultural organizations, environmental, religious and cultural groups were all surveyed. Also included were sports and recreation organizations, social services and those groups concerned with law and justice.

From this survey trends were revealed which are worth noting.

- 74 per cent of all volunteers rated "meeting people or companionship" as an important reason for volunteering.
- 63 per cent believed strongly in helping others as their most important reason.
- 60 per cent felt "helping a cause they believed in" was their motivation for volunteering.
- Enjoying the work (55 per cent) and a feeling of accomplishment (54 per cent) were also cited as being very important.

Do you know the volunteers in your

organization? What motivates them?

But, you ask, why should I know these people or why they're here? Because you may also have distractions at your meetings--the people who are not matched well with jobs to meet their personal needs. They may be bored, or frustrated, or not interested.

Both your organization and the individual will lose out. The older gentleman was a recent widow and looking for a "night out". He wanted to meet people and make new friends. But none of us knew him very well, and it took a while to understand his needs. He eventually found a home on both the hospitality and membership recruitment committees.

Do you know your volunteers? For more information about volunteers in Canada, please contact Statistics Canada for a copy of *Giving Freely: Volunteers in Canada*, by Doreen Duchesne. The cost is \$28. Write to Publication Sales, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, K1A 0T6. The toll free order line is 1-800-267-6677.

Chuck Bokor is a rural leadership consultant with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Guelph.

Concern for environment put into action

By Helen Anderson

Women's Institute members are concerned about the environment in their home communities and are taking to heart their theme for the 1990's, Women and the Environment--Family and Community.

Elmhurst WI put their concern into action. Members decided to plant three white spruce trees on a property where their Institute began in 1926, just outside the city of Stratford in South Easthope township. A rural school house was built on the property that year, and a charter member of Elmhurst WI, the late Miss Mary McPherson suggested the name Elmhurst for the school because of the elm trees on the new school property. Thus the name for the community's newest WI became Elmhurst as well.

Since no elm trees were available for planting in the '90s, Elmhurst WI members chose to plant white spruce trees to sustain and improve the environment in the community where the Institute began. The

planting of these trees prompted many more trees to be planted by individual members and their families around their

homes and out in the community.

Helen Anderson is program coordinator for Elmhurst WI.



Planting trees from left to right are President Heather Schlotzhauer, Curator Irene Anderson, Secretary-Treasurer Beatrice Lowe and Helen Anderson.