
Morden Says: Put Emphasis On Fun and Fellowship

By Lori Jamieson

Many surveys of volunteers show that most people join a group for a single reason - because someone invited them. Hilde Morden, Program Co-ordinator for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO), follows that same pattern. Her twenty-five year involvement in FWIO stems from a neighbor's invitation to join in a meeting at her house.

Morden's still going to WI meetings, and has served as Branch and District Secretary, London Area President, and in 1975, as Provincial Secretary-Treasurer. She is also the inaugural FWIO Program Co-ordinator, a provincial office set up in 1987.

She says that while there were job specifications when the Program Co-ordinator's role was designed, "they have changed a bit since then." Morden's approach to her job is particularly her own, and her interest is most often with the potential benefit for individual members.

"The branch still needs resources on a local level, because that's where it's going to happen. Quality programs are going to bring people to a meeting, and WI members aren't as concerned about a formal program as they are about what that program, on GST or AIDS or free trade, can do for the people in their communities."

Community action was behind the 'call to green' put out to members at the 1988 Ontario conference held in Kingston. A challenge for 100 environmentally-based community projects has reaped a harvest of about 300 to date, and put Morden on the podium at a Recycling Council of Ontario conference to talk about the program's success.

Morden acknowledges the ongoing changes in rural community

structures, and the new demands that this puts on rural organizations, including FWIO. "More and more women are working out of the home, and they are tired at night, and they really aren't going to go out again in the evening for a social time, because they've done that all day. You're not going to go to listen to the business - but you may go to hear a speaker, or a discussion on something that is of particular interest to you."

"If we emphasize that we offer, current information, fun and fellowship to people for one hour a month, for 10 meetings a year, we'll get interest, and we're open to anyone, member or not, or someone who's farming or not."

Morden's also happy to share her observations about the way groups work - she's seen many contributions through WI, and her involvement in a lay ministry, as a member of the Niagara Escarpment Committee, on the advisory council of Ridgeway College, and as one of the founding members of the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame at the Ontario Agricultural Museum in Milton.

"You join an organization to satisfy your own ego - and if the group has a good program, and strong support, you forget yourself and get involved. If that doesn't happen, the group wasn't very strong to begin with."

The mix in a group is always there, she says, some wide-eyed optimists, some middle-of-the-road, and some more pessimistic, who keep the free-thinkers "on the ground."

Morden credits parliamentary procedure with the support of meetings, and a chairman with the personality the group develops. "A good chairman doesn't run the meeting - she realizes that the meeting belongs to the members, and

delegates to give every member a chance."

"You've got to build group trust," she says, so that members feel their work is respected and appreciated, and their skills acknowledged. The length of time involved depends on the chairman, and on how skillfully she works with the committee members.

Juggling her own personal agenda is no small task. At times I have had as many as eight briefcases on the go, and I just grab the one for this meeting and off I go."

"I live by the 'do's,' d is for delegate, o is for organize, and s is for the support of my family - there's nothing I accomplish alone, and if it weren't for my support people, I'd get nothing done."

Morden says she's motivated by a "great enthusiasm for life and for people. I have never met anybody who couldn't contribute to their environment or to their life; they just have to be seen in the right light."

She wants WI members to see themselves in the light of what they contribute to their communities. "If the FWIO were to disappear by the year 2000, what would our rural communities do? Who would replace the work and the caring that they do? We still have to raise our own self-esteem - and remember that what we do as an individual matters."

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