

"Geraldine gets us in print"

By Janine Roelens-Grant

The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) President, Peggy Knapp, made this statement at the recent August Board Meeting. And indeed, Geraldine Campbell has done just that - get the FWIO in print.

In response to why she took on the job as Public Relations Officer (PRO) for the FWIO, Geraldine Campbell proclaimed: "You've got to have a little bit of gumption and seize the opportunity!" Geraldine has lived up to this proclamation, and seized many opportunities within the FWIO.

Geraldine Campbell arrived in Ontario from New Zealand in February of 1977. In April, she accepted an invitation and attended her first WI meeting. "Outside of the church group, the WI was the only other women's organization," she explained. "I wanted to get out and meet people" and "get involved in the community." At the close of her first WI meeting, Geraldine had taken on a two-year term as Second Vice-President of the Cowal Branch in Elgin West.

Since that time she has served at all levels of the FWIO organization. At the Branch level, she has held the positions of First Vice-President, President and PRO of the Cowal WI. She later became Resolutions Convenor, President and PRO for the Elgin West District. And, Geraldine had just finished a term as PRO for the London Area when the provincial opportunity became available in 1987.

"Public Relations is something that I like doing and feel I can do. I didn't think that the Women's Institute was publicized enough at the provincial level. When I took on the job, there were only two press releases a year following the spring and fall Board meetings. I felt that there were a lot of things that could be done."

Geraldine has worked with a number of media contacts - press, TV and radio - to improve the visibility of the FWIO. The promotion of June as WI month in a recent summer edition of *Farming Today* is just one example.

"A PRO must be enthusiastic. To promote the organization, you must be knowledgeable about the organization." And, Geraldine added, "if you don't know something, you have to know where to find out. You have to be able to see what opportunities are out there and ask whether our organization can use them. You have to come up with new ideas." But, she admits, "not every idea is going to fly."

Three years ago, Geraldine asked that all Board Directors provide their Members of Parliament with information about the FWIO. The gesture will be extended to include visits to County and Township Councils from Area and District Presidents. Geraldine has since compiled an information package on the FWIO for this specific purpose. The intention is to make provincial and local politicians aware - at least once a year - of the activities and resolutions.

From this, stemmed the idea of designating June as Women's Institute Month. Again, at least once a year - during the month of June - all Branches are to find special ways to promote the WI. At the same time, Branch members make local politicians and leaders aware of what the FWIO is all about and what the WI has done for their community.

Another promotional idea stemmed from a June WI celebration - the planting of a tree in a local cemetery by a neighbouring Branch. Geraldine thought this was a really good idea. And planting a tree is something that all WI Branches can do - any time, anywhere! So, this past spring, she encouraged Branches across the province to find a spot, plant a tree, and make it a media event.

"The environment is a theme that we can focus on in so many different ways," explained Geraldine, "and at so many different levels. It is important that people realize that something you do here in Canada can affect some place else in the world. People have to see the environment in a more global way."

Geraldine acknowledges that only in the past few years has the FWIO received recognition for their work with environmental issues. A brochure -

Women and the Environment - promoting the commitment of the FWIO to a cleaner environment has helped in this regard.

Over the last several years, Geraldine has done a great deal to promote the FWIO, and make things run more smoothly from a public relations viewpoint. She has updated the FWIO membership brochure and arranged for the design and printing of a poster promoting the organization. And for all Public Relations Officers at all levels, she initiated the use of a standardized form for reporting information.

Geraldine's regular contributions to the *Home & Country Magazine* as Public Relations Officer have been greatly appreciated. In addition, she has been a valued member of the Editorial Committee for a number of years, and will chair the new committee when it comes into effect.

Along with the FWIO Program Coordinator, Hilde Morden, Geraldine initiated and sat on the Committee that rewrote the policy manuals for the FWIO. She also pushed to get the Centennial Committee organized, and then sat on the sub-committee that has chosen a site for the 1997 FWIO 100th Anniversary celebrations.

"I think it should be a celebration of a group of people honouring their achievements - past, present and future. And it is a celebration of hundreds of millions of hours of volunteer work. Work that is very important, but doesn't make front page news."

"In the future," explained Geraldine, "I think the organization has to come to the decision to finance a part-time Public Relations Officer. It can no longer be a volunteer job. It should be a paid position with someone who has the skills in public relations work."

In addition to being PRO for the FWIO, Geraldine is Resolutions Convenor for the Palmyra Branch in Kent East. "As a PRO you feel you should put in more hours, but twenty hours a week is as much as I can give." Geraldine's husband, Jamey, and their three adopted children from Korea - Trevor, Mary-Anne and Robby - happily agree.