

FWIC convention reports from Victoria

Nearly five hundred WI members and day visitors from across Canada, more than one-third of them from Ontario, gathered at the University in Victoria, B.C., to participate in the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada (FWIC) Triennial Convention from July 11 to 15. The conference theme was "Today, A Legacy for Tomorrow."

Thanks to the several Board Directors from the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario who attended the conference and provided the following reports and highlights:

Thursday, July 11, 1991

The Twelfth Triennial Conference of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada began with a colourful ceremony - the parade of flags carried by 4-H Club members from British Columbia. The flags provided a wonderful backdrop for the opening session at the University of Victoria.

Mary Collins, Member of Parliament responsible for the Status of Women portfolio, commented that Women's Institute members are the fibre of the fabric that constitutes Canada. And, "the fibre has grown strong," she said. She expressed concern about the future of Canada and the Constitution. Women's Institutes share an affinity of values and family life and should ensure that these values are enshrined in the Constitution.

In her theme address, President Jennie McInnes spoke of Canada in this last decade of the century, faced with environmental problems and regions pulling one against another... Communities have lost their identity. Still, the Women's Institute values the family unit.

We live in a peaceful country without the threat of war and with the second highest standard of living in the world. Our medical system is renowned. We have numerous colleges and universities. We volunteer by the thousands. And families remain the backbone of the nation.

No one part of Canada is more or less important than another. Rather, we are

like a stir fry. Each entity retains its own colour, texture and, to some extent, flavour. But, we are wrapped up in ourselves when we must learn to reach out.

Women are concerned about the environment and their homes. Women must lead the change of focus. We, the Women's Institutes of Canada, have changed the focus of our aims. We have contributed to rural Canada.

Each one of us has been given a bag of tools. Will we make a stumbling block or a stepping stone?

- as reported by Laurie Curtis

Friday, July 12, 1991

The Friday morning sessions focused on agriculture with speakers and a question period.

Sandi McNabb, a grain farmer from Manitoba, reported on "Women in Agriculture." She reported that one farmer now feeds 200 people, while three out of four farm women work off the farm to feed their own family. And yet, farm women play a very important role in family farms. But this year, for the first time, the Census has included farm women's involvement.

Still, their input is masked by only one membership allowed per organization. And very few women are represented on Boards yet. Only recently, Sandi was the first woman appointed to a committee on grains and oil seeds.

There will be changes ahead - in heart and mind - to make better and more efficient farmers for the future, with a responsibility to save the soil. And women will continue to play a vital role in the survival of the family farm.

- as reported by Barbara Pinkney

Dr. Douglas Hedley, Director General of Agri-food Policy for Agriculture Canada, also addressed the audience, on "GATT and Its Effects on Canadian Agriculture." And, Don Knoerr, owner of a beef cow enterprise in Smithers, B.C., and Past-President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, spoke on an "Agricultural Economy

and Its Effect at the Provincial and Community Level."

The report of the FWIC resolutions was presented on Friday afternoon by Convenor Trudy McDonnell, who is young, dynamic, a mother of six, and a school principal. Her report indicated action on eleven resolutions. She stated: "If there is one area that clearly demonstrates the care and concern of Women's Institute members across this land, for both 'Home and Country,' it has to be found in resolutions."

She also mentioned recurring concern about alcohol advertising on prime-time television, the length of time required to process UIC claims, and the amalgamation and closing of rural post offices. Members have also pressured for a national AIDS prevention and control strategy. GST has been a major topic, with many resolutions dealing with its impact on single parents, low-income families and the elderly.

Resolutions carried at this convention included one urging members to carry out a pornography complaint campaign at the local level. Others dealt with victims of Thalidomide, the use of Bovine Somatotropin (BST) in Canadian dairy herds, and the initiation and support of educational programming in human relations and social skills.

One resolution will be addressed to the Ministry of Justice, who will be asked to ensure that judges be made accountable for their judgements and statements. The FWIC will also go on record as deploring the distribution and sale of the novelty item "Brat on Board."

- as reported by Corinne Croxall

Saturday, July 13, 1991

Janet Bangs, Estelle Lefurgy, Julie Krymen and Jean Johnson, from British Columbia, Shirley Thomas, from Alberta, and Camille Landry, from New Brunswick, spoke on "The Diversity of Women's Institute Membership."

These six Women's Institute members spoke from the heart. They urged members of Women's Institutes to en-