

Learning is Lifelong

By Joan King

As I write this column for the summer issue of the *Home & Country*, it doesn't seem possible that one-and-a-half years have gone by since I became Education Coordinator for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO). So far, I have treasured this experience.

Speaking of time marching on, I wrote this column before District Annuals. But as you sit reading it, District Annuals are over for another year. I trust that all the thought, time and preparation that went into these events across the province was worthwhile. And that each of you enjoyed the opportunity to look back on the past year, to renew friendships with neighbouring Branch members and to look forward to the coming year.

Following the annual meeting of my own Branch, the Aberarder WI, I had a conversation with the Lambton North District President. She told me that two members from the District had been invited to attend a meeting in Sarnia, our nearest city. The meeting was with many local health professionals and volunteers from the city and county area. During the course of this meeting, everyone told whom they represented, their reason for attending and what they hoped to accomplish by attending.

The Institute members in attendance proceeded with an excellent commentary on our great organization. They talked about how we educate our communities on many topics and the volunteerism of our Branch members. Following this discourse, the other participants responded: "If you have done and do all that, how come we have never heard of the Women's Institute?" Indeed, this is our biggest drawback! The WI does not publicize enough. Although WI members volunteer in every aspect of the community, they do not tell the public about their accomplishments.

Four members from one Branch in my area have received Ontario Volunteer Service Awards this year. Some of these awards were for multiple years of volunteer work. Does your municipality hold a forum to honour the volunteers in your area? If not, maybe your Branch could encourage them to sponsor such an event? Even better, your Branch could sponsor or co-sponsor a volunteer recognition forum along with the municipality. In 2001, National Volunteer Week was from April 22 to 28. What better time to be planning for 2002.

Does your Branch use volunteerism to attract potential new members? I would like to share with you an excerpt from a 1997 Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Fact Sheet: "Volunteers are the most important resource available to community organizations. The ability of people to work willingly together for the betterment of their community and themselves is a valuable resource. Ideally, volunteers find the donation of their

time and energy a meaningful experience for themselves, as well as for the organization, a true win/win situation."

As a Branch we must not forget the recognition component of volunteering. Yes, there is formal recognition as mentioned above with some type of forum, banquet or press release. But there is also informal recognition, which I believe is more important. It takes place on a one-to-one basis and is done through personal meetings, phone calls and letters (etc.).

Recognition can be likened to an iceberg. Formal recognition is visible by those above the water line. But informal recognition is the large mass below the water and can provide a much greater area of response. Recognition and encouragement are essential to stimulating and maintaining active involvement in any organization. So remember, you need to be:

- spontaneous – express appreciation and recognition on the spot. If you wait, until later in the day or year, you've lost most of its motivating force.
- sincere – be sincere because phoniness is worse than saying nothing!
- specific – don't speak in generalities; let people know what they've done is important.
- thankful – offer a handshake or pat on the back.
- expressive – use non-verbal communication. Your facial expression and body language should smile and applaud.
- creative – use a variety of approaches to find ways to recognize volunteers.

Remember, there are thousands of ways to recognize people for their efforts - a thank you, a press release, a letter of appreciation, a report in a newsletter, a banquet or picnic, or just a simple smile.

Joan King is the Education Coordinator for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario. She can be reached at 6487 Oil Heritage Rd., Camlachie ON N0N 1E0, Phone: 519-899-2642, Fax: 519-869-8261, Email: bjking@xcelco.on.ca

Mar WI Gets a Piece of the Pie



Twice a year the Mar WI holds a Fish Dinner in their community hall, feeding around 300 people. Once an old schoolhouse, the hall requires continual maintenance. Proceeds from the dinner go towards the upkeep. The latest renovations include a recycled dishwasher and a new dish cleaning area. Plans are now underway to upgrade the basement windows and finish the basement renovations. Marion Clark and Kathy Peacock are busy cutting pies in the new dish cleaning area for the Fish Dinner.

Submitted by Martha Martell, Program Coordinator, Mar WI, Bruce County.