



HOME & COUNTRY is published quarterly by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO). This newsletter has two objectives:

1. To provide educational material which cultivates more knowledgeable and responsible citizens and promotes good family life skills, leadership development and community action.
2. To provide a "communications link" among all members of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario and other related organizations.

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WISE WORDS:

A word to
the wise is
— unnecessary.



Letters

A Rose by Any Other Name ...

Dear Janine,

This letter is in response to the letter in the Fall 2000 issue of *Home & Country*, which suggests we need a name that better communicates our approach to education and keeps up to the changing times.

Since 1994, this is at least the third time the question of a name change for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario or Women's Institute (WI) has been proposed. I would like to draw to Ms Evans' attention what has happened to at least two other organizations that faced the same "problem." Several years ago in the United States, the National Extension Homemakers Council (NEHC) changed its name to the National Association for Family and Community Education Inc. (FCE) to better identify who they were. They continue to look for new members and a new identity now, the identity and recognition they lost when they changed their name.

In the January 17, 2000, issue of the *London Free Press* there was an article about the Victorian Order of Nurses headlined "Name a blessing and curse for 103-year-old VON." The article states: "On the upside, VON immediately conjures the familiar blue and white uniform of the home visiting nurse who personified the charitable organization since its founding in 1897." Then it continues: "Victorian sounds dated; the word order authoritarian; and nurses suggests that's the sole service provided." A name change was discussed, but the consensus was to keep the tried and true and stress VON's many other services.

I would also note that the name Women's Institute certainly has not hampered the British members from the Rylstone and District WI who had worldwide publicity in the past several months for their calendar in support of the Leukemia Association. If you read books written by British authors, you often find references to Women's Institutes in them as well.

At the WI centennial celebrations in 1997, theme speaker Norm Rebin admired the WI because they have developed strong "roots, relevance and recognition." We have built so much in the last 103 years, why tear it down and start all over again?

During my years as Public Relations Officer for FWIO, I discovered that in many circles Women's Institute has a distinct identity outside the organization. I also discovered that explaining to the "uninitiated" who we are (not an institution for the handicapped or jailed!) was an excellent introduction to an interview. The third thing I discovered was that in any discussion I had with professionals concerning the promotion of our organization, the first thing they recommended was to promote our

longevity and reputation. Longevity, reputation and recognition are extremely valuable in promoting the image and work of any organization and business. WI has these now.

It seems to me that the image of WI is what our members make it. If we as members stereotype ourselves as irrelevant, dated and passé, what should the general public think? If the promotional methods, programs, activities and outreach to our communities that our Branch members use have not changed with the times, why should we expect younger generations to know we are current, modern and up-to-date?

We need fresh, new blood in our organization. We need a new enthusiasm for the ongoing work of the WI. We need members who are interested in the whole organization and willing to accept its opportunities and its challenges. We need the desire of our current members to get involved, to reach out beyond themselves, their Branches and their communities. We need members who are passionate, not apathetic. We need to educate our current members about the scope of our activities, from local to global, and about the value of a positive attitude towards the WI at our own meetings and at outside meetings as well. A name change will not do any of this.

Only a concerted effort by our members to educate themselves about the value of our organization in today's society and a commitment to accentuate the positive will effect change in the attitude of the community towards WI. Think of the response if each member were to list the strengths of the current organization and speak positively about WI when asked, "What is WI?"

When is the last time the members of your Branch were involved in a thorough discussion of what being a WI member means? Has your Branch recently and regularly evaluated how its activities impact on the community?

A name change for an organization means as little or as much as members make of it. Remember, a rose by any other name smells just as sweet!

Sincerely,

Mary Janes, Warwick WI, Lambton North

Please Note:

Due to space constraints and the importance of printing member feedback and Branch news and activities, the address list of the Board, Coordinators, Provincial Advisory Councillors, etc., is included in this bundle of *Home & Country* newsletters as an insert. The Donations List is printed on the back of the insert. Please hang on to this insert and keep it in your Branch for reference.