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HOME & COUNTRY

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"If You Build It, They Will Come" Revitalizing the Women's Institute

By Peggy Burris

Einstein is credited with saying "we jeopardize our future if we cling to old assumptions." What does that have to do with revitalizing the Women's Institute? In my opinion, it has everything to do with it. We cannot expect today's rural women to embrace the WI unless we truly understand who these rural women are and what is happening in rural Ontario.

The changes in the last five to ten years are unlike any in the previous 50 years. So, what are some of these changes: Canada's Baby Boomers, one-third of the population, are retiring earlier and moving to rural areas; smaller urban centres are growing at a rate ten times faster than larger cities; and, this country's elderly will double by the year 2008. So, is this good news or bad news? It all depends on your perspective.

First, we have a group of retirees, singles and couples, arriving in our rural communities. I'll call them "The Newcomers." These people retire at an earlier age, often with a comfortable retirement income and with less demanding family and other responsibilities.

The second group are also recent retirees from the pressures of child-rearing and balancing career and home responsibilities. They are equipped with the same kind of time management and life skills as the above group but they have always lived in our communities. I refer to them as "The Locals;" I belong to this group.

Senior ladies are the third group of rural women available for WI recruitment. They are also locals, but they have reached their golden years. Often, they have spent a lifetime working side-by-side with their families, managing the family farm. These "Oldie Goldies," as I call them, contribute time-honoured traditions and a lifetime of WI experiences to their communities.

And finally, the fourth group - young contemporary homemakers caught up in the frantic joys of balancing child-rearing, home responsibilities, minor sports, social activities, and the list goes on and on. You may find them working at a career away from home to provide the double income necessary to survive the harsh economics of the '90s. I'll call these young ladies "The Contemporaries."

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Thornhill WI Donates to "Water for All"



Over a period of three years, Thornhill WI member Helen Kingsley personally sold small homemade articles under the Branch name earning \$1010. The money was donated to the Associated Country Women of the World Project "Water for All." Helen was born in Vaughan Township in 1914 and has been a member of various Women's Institute Branches since 1926. Helen was also an Elementary School Teacher and is an accomplished pianist. Thornhill WI is proud of Helen's accomplishments.

Submitted by Pat Macdonald, Secretary-Treasurer, Thornhill WI, York East.