

"If you build it . . ."

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So, it is from these four groups - The Newcomers, The Locals, The Oldie Goldies and The Contemporaries - now living in rural Ontario from which the WI can recruit new members.

But, how can you attract them to join the WI? Which of these groups would be attracted to your Branch? In my Branch, Hillier WI in Prince Edward District, we decided many years ago to continue with afternoon meetings. With this decision, we regretfully accept the fact that women who hold day jobs - The Contemporaries - cannot join us. But on the positive side, there are three available groups.

What does Hillier WI, a Branch that has swelled their membership to 35 in the last few years, do? What is their secret? Certainly nothing new! But I like to call it the PM Solution. In my WI vocabulary the P stands for Program, the M for Marketing.

In the movie "Field of Dreams" the message is clear: "If you build it, they will come." How simple! If you build an interesting, varied program, attractive to all these target groups, long-time members will remain, and new members - "they will come."

How do you devise this program? Not by a Program Committee as suggested by the *Handbook*, but by a "Committee of the Whole." Have your whole membership choose the program and have fun doing it. As Program Coordinator for the Hillier WI, I maintain a file folder of clippings, pamphlets and ideas (etc.) that I accumulate throughout the year. I write these topics on small pieces of paper and separate the 50 to 60 ideas into the six program areas as listed in the *Handbook*. Our May meeting is dedicated to choosing, by consensus, the next year's program. Our roll call "What activity would you like to see included in the coming year?" provides additional ideas.

Now what? Each member is given 15 pennies to place on the 15 topics she would enjoy. The only rule is that at least one of the pennies must be spent on one

topic in each of the six program areas. Program ideas with few or no pennies are discarded. The pennies are retrieved and by repeating the process with fewer pennies each round, you eventually end up with eight to ten programs from the diverse areas - programs that your members have literally "bought into!" With this method comes a willingness for more members to take responsibility for developing the ideas into roll calls and programs.

But remember, no matter how good a program you have, if you don't tell people about it, they won't join your group. Hence, M - which stands for marketing.

How do you market? If you are fortunate, like Hillier WI, you nurture one of your members who has the interest, skills and time to make sure that Hillier activities appear regularly in all the papers. Our PRO, Joyce Brown, doesn't recite the same old, tired reports that focus primarily on the business meeting. Her reports focus on the positive and interesting activities that have occurred. Joyce always highlights future plans, extends an invitation to new people to join and notes a phone number and contact name for each meeting. When you read her reports you say "Wow, this group sounds interesting and fun to join," or as Joyce puts it, "We are movers and shakers."

How do you market? You make sure you approach The Newcomers, The Locals, The Oldie Goldies and The Contemporaries. Tell them about your WI and leave them a copy of your program. If each member takes the responsibility to target a neighbour, friend, niece or cousin our Branches would be doubling in size.

How do you market? When visitors attend they observe a well-organized meeting with proper parliamentary procedures in use, a business session that doesn't interfere with the planned program, an executive that gives all members an opportunity for input, and a time to socialize (not gossip!) after the program.

How do you market? Get involved in community activities. As a Women's Institute, give back to your community in a

positive manner. Remember, "good feelings, good press!" If you are going to fund raise for your Branch or your community make sure they are not nickel and dime efforts. If the activity does not give you a good return for your efforts, discard it! Your time is valuable, so be one of the leading groups in your community.

So what is Hillier's secret to attracting new members? No secret at all. First, we have the program, an interesting and varied one that appeals to all members. And secondly, we market it - each member takes every opportunity to personally market it. Then, make sure your visitors feel welcome and valued. The Law of Attraction is very powerful. Whatever we are - we attract to ourselves. Are we dynamic or dismal? Out of touch or on-line?

It's up to you, not your executive or your District or the provincial level, to make your WI successful.

I issue you the same challenge that Sir Isaac Brock issued to his fighting forces: "Go Forth and Conquer!" If you do the Women's Institute will prosper at the Branch level.

Peggy Burris, Program Coordinator, Hillier WI, Prince Edward.

In Praise of the Women's Institute Rose



The first Women's Institute rose our Branch purchased in 1996 was planted at the local Senior's Centre where we held our meetings. It died over the winter.

Our second rose bush was planted in the same place. It gave us several blooms and lots of compliments for their beauty, aroma and size.

In 1998, we had 26 lovely blooms on the bush which grew nearly five feet tall. One bloom from the centre stem measured 4 1/2 inches across and was admired by all who saw it.

If our Institute membership could grow and produce such good results, we would be grateful. The Women's Institute Rose is a great tribute to us all.

Submitted by Helen Rumble, Aurora WI, York Centre.