

by Mary Janes

Recognition of Volunteers



The Value of Voluntarism

The third week of April is National Volunteer Week. It is the time when communities and organizations recognize that each of us is richer for the presence and participation of volunteers. It is a time when we recognize that volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Although this article will not appear until the Summer issue of *Home & Country*, it is being written in April, when the focus of the media is on voluntarism.

In 1995, Canadians volunteered an estimated one billion hours – the equivalent of 617,000 full-time positions! That year, Women's Institute members in Ontario alone volunteered approximately a half million hours to Women's Institute projects. If Ontario's 2,000,000 volunteers were paid for their efforts, the value of their volunteer work would be \$4.6 billion a year, based on the average wage in the service sector. Is it any wonder that voluntarism is recognized today as big business?

The Need for Recognition

Support, training and recognition are three integral parts of voluntarism. Support comes from the team that works together to get a job done, as well as the organization, which originally decided to undertake the project. Training may be in the form of a written job description or in working together, learning to do by doing. These two components of voluntarism are generally accomplished successfully during the course of a year.

Recognition, the third integral part of voluntarism, is usually overlooked. Volunteers need to know their efforts are valued, even though they are not expecting a reward for doing the job. Saying thanks effectively reinforces a volunteer's commitment, inspires others and creates a sense of well-being in our communities at the same time.

Recognition may be given for reasons such as initiative, interest, dependability, quality of work or extraordinary service. At the local level, it may be something as simple as verbal praise, a written thank you note or letter, a gift, honour rolls or plaques, banquets, or other creative ways of saying "Well done!" During the centennial year there were special centennial awards to honour WI members for their contributions to WI. FWIO offers Certificates of Merit, Erland Lee Awards and Friend of WI Awards to recognize members and non-members for their service.

Provincial/Federal Awards for Service

Various organizations and government bodies offer other forms of recognition as well. Every year the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario is asked to consider nominations for the following awards.

- The *Governor General's Caring Canadian Award*, "to honour unsung heroes in Canadian communities," recognizes unpaid voluntary contributions made behind-the-scenes, which provide extraordinary help or care to families and community groups over a long period of time.

- The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation offers three categories of awards. *Volunteer Service Awards* acknowledge the time contributed on a volunteer basis ongoing with the same group. The *Outstanding Achievement Award for Voluntarism in Ontario* commends leadership, innovation and creativity at the community level. These are acts of superlative calibre, which touch and inspire others by example. The Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers acknowledges those young people who make a difference by improving the quality of life of those they touch through leadership and innovation.
- The Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph, hosts a *Recognition Banquet* annually to pay tribute to "outstanding unpaid volunteers who contribute time and effort to keep agriculture, food and rural affairs relevant to society and deserve recognition regionally and/or provincially." The banquet recognizes contributions from individuals in a wide range of activities connected to agricultural research, education and service.
- The *Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame* publicly acknowledges contributions made by residents of Ontario to the growth and development of the Ontario agriculture and food industry at their annual induction ceremony in June. Peggy Knapp was the fourteenth WI member to be inducted since its beginning in 1979.
- *Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame* nominees must have made an outstanding contribution to Canadian agriculture, which, over a period of time, has made an impact on the national economy. They are recognized annually in November for their vision, skill and enthusiasm. Five women have been inducted into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame since the 1960s.

Continued on page 8