

HOMES & COUNTRY

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On Tour with Mary-Lou

A WI fund raiser inspired a
member to become a tour agent

By Mary-Lou Leacock

I have been a member of the Women's Institute for many years. When I was growing up on a farm on Bennets Lake in Lanark County, my mother and my grandmother organized the Bethel Branch of the WI, along with several women from the area. Mother was the first President. Many of the daughters formed a Junior Institute, of which I was the first President.

After I was married I joined the Jasper Women's Institute. I have held most offices, including Branch President for several years and District President for six. Today, my daughter Karen is a fourth generation Women's Institute member, and is also a member of the Jasper Branch.

During my first term as District President, beginning in 1973, I suggested we take a bus trip to Niagara Falls as a WI fund raiser. I had never been on a bus tour until I organized this one. It was so successful that I organized an annual trip during my terms as District President. The proceeds partially funded the building of a kitchen and bathroom and the installation of electricity and running water in the two-room Jasper schoolhouse, which is now our Heritage Women's Institute Hall. Branch members participated in many other fund raising activities in their efforts to improve our WI Hall.

With the encouragement of Donna Healey of Healey Tours in Smiths Falls, I started my own travel agency and arranged and accompanied tour groups throughout Canada and the United States. Once I obtained my license, my tours were extended



*"My favourite places are Costa Rica,
Hawaii and Alaska."*

to include the British Isles, many European countries, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, as well as Mediterranean, Caribbean and other island cruises.

Last year I took a group to China and Hong Kong. And of course, I organized a bus load to attend the centennial celebrations in Hamilton. This year I am planning an exposition to Portugal, and then on to Africa. My favourite places are Costa Rica, Hawaii and Alaska.

My family is very supportive of my travels. My husband, Arthur, farms a 1000 acre century farm, which he seldom leaves. We have seven daughters and ten grandchildren, most of whom have travelled with me on at least one tour. Our daughter Eleanor, who lives nearby, assists me and escorts some of the tours.

This June I will have been in the tour business for 25 years. I have some clients who have literally been on dozens of my tours. I endeavor to make their holiday as pleasant as possible and many of them are just like family. My greatest pleasure, however, is the thrill of seeing first-time travellers have so many new experiences.

Mary Lou Leacock is a member of the Jasper WI, Grenville.

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