

# Thoughts About the Future of the Women's Institute

In 1997, the theme of the Women's Institute (WI) centennial celebrations has been *Indebted to the Past - Committed to the Future*. WI members have celebrated their past successes in a variety of ways throughout the year. At the same time, many people, both within and outside WI, have been thinking about the future prospects of this organization – some with trepidation, others with optimism. This column shares some of the ideas expressed from varying sources.

**Colleen Armstrong, Copy Editor, Country Guide (May, 1997)**

*The challenges inherent (to WI) are immense, especially in view of rapid change in the fields of technology and communications, as well as shrinking farm populations and declining membership numbers. But members are committed to facing the future 'with courage and faith.' We wish them well.*

**Arthana Hecker, President-Elect, Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, The Sault Star (March 15, 1997)**

*The WI is facing some of its biggest changes ahead. With the societal changes that are taking place, the changes in hospitals and the return of social assistance ... to the towns, the basics of life will be even more important. Cutbacks, no jobs, reduced funding – all mean that people will need to re-evaluate their lives. The basics, which are the backbone the WI has built its reputation on, will become even more important. Working together will be essential to survival.*

**Michael-Allan Marion, Reporter, Brantford Expositor (Feb. 19, 1997)**

*WI has a to-die-for record of influence and reputation, but its future is clouded by a dwindling membership base in the past decade and the folding of several branches. Work is being done on amalgamating branches ... on the assumption that greater influence and visibility can be brought to bear with bigger pools of resources.*

**Norman Rebin, CEO, Pinehurst Institute**

*The future of WI depends on long-term planning, building on the past record. WI can continue to plant the seeds of hope for the future by dreaming in technicolour and providing role models, relevance, recognition and roots to today's youth. An organization with values as its roots does not exist for men; in the future it is important for men to have a parallel organization with similar values to WI.*

**Charles Whipp, Reporter, The Bruce County Marketplace (Feb., 1997)**

*It is a question where the WI will be in the next century, if, indeed, they will even exist. It may be the need for the WI will be greater than ever and if it should ever disband, there will shortly be a demand for its replacement.*

**Editorial, Mount Forest Confederate (Feb. 26, 1997)**

*Their (WI) focus is the same today as it has always been – first the home. But in their quiet way, they have managed to change the world. And it's wonderful to see they have every intention of doing the same thing for the next 100 years. WI – they're the greatest thing since wrapped bread.*

**Charlotte Johnson, Past President, Federated Women's Institutes of Canada**

*WI will be a resource in the community to create an environment of trust, dignity and fairness. WI members must not be apathetic. We need to meet the challenge of getting into step with today's world with initiative, vision and optimism.*

**Claire Turrell, Reporter, National Federation of WI, Home & Country**

*The European Union is demanding that men be given entry to the WI ... Women's organizations must open their doors to men or risk breaking the fundamental laws of equal opportunity.*

**Dr. Linda Ambrose, Assistant Professor, Laurentian University**

*The WI is a great Canadian example illustrating that unity and diversity can coexist; they are not mutually exclusive. In the future, WI needs to welcome change, not be afraid of it, while celebrating their unity, recognizing their diversity and listening to each other's point of view.*

**Wendy MacDougal, Carluke WI, Hamilton Spectator (June 17, 1997)**

*Societal changes have resulted in reliance on experts to solve problems instead of finding solutions through the kind of self-help that is the very essence of the WI. The WI will have a role if someone recognizes what they are and taps into them. We have a good message.*

**Marg Harris, President, Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario**

*My wish for the future is that WI will continue to provide the value system on which a household is built and thrives; that WI will provide the potential for the realization of each individual's dream.*

**Rosalie Wysocki, Performance Motivator, Wysocki & Associates Inc.**

*WI has been a 'make it happen' group. Now WI needs to realize that we are never too old to make a positive difference. Winners like to be around winners. In the future WI can offer the opportunity to people to grow the easy way – invite people to meetings; tell people 'we need your help – we need people who are willing to get involved.'*

**Jeanne Hartley-Grover, President, HG<sup>2</sup> Project Management Solutions**

*WI needs to talk about 'who we are, what makes us unique.' 'Can't be done' is not in the vocabulary of WI. We can only write the future; the past is written.*

**Cleda Yachetti, Binbrook WI, from the Hamilton Spectator (June 17, 1997)**

*The WI represents what was stable and what we must get back to. I'm seeing at this time in my life a huge and wonderful role for the WI in a leadership capacity.*

**Deris Hollett, President, Newfoundland & Labrador WI**

*My wish for the future is to extend an invitation to all women and to let them know that WI stands for women informed, women invigorated, women indispensable, women inquisitive, women interested and interesting, women international.*

**Patsy Nagel, President, British Columbia WI**

*My wish for the future is that WI will continue to be an oasis of security in a world of change; that WI will preserve the ideals that our youth need and be the mentors so much needed by our youth.*

**Dr. Roberta Bondar, Astronaut and Photographer**

*It's important to be a role model for girls and for the attitudes of men and boys. We cannot afford to continue social distinctions; we need to understand and respect each other for the minds we have. It is important to keep the enthusiasm, to keep the dream alive.*

As we enter the second century of Women's Institute involvement we, as members, have a great deal to think about. There are many challenges ahead of us, as there were ahead of Adelaide Hoodless when she envisioned an organization where women could meet and learn from each other. Do we have the faith, the hope, the enthusiasm, the courage and the vision we need to continue carrying out the objectives set forth in 1897? I say, very emphatically, YES!

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