

PROFILE:

Mary Lou Norton: Working with Expertise, Energy & Enthusiasm

Mary Lou Norton's first recollection of Women's Institute was attending the meetings with her mother as a young girl, and playing under the quilt with friends at the Quilting Bees.

Mary Lou was actively involved in 4-H, Junior Women's Institute and Junior Farmers work in Prince Edward County, where her parents owned a large farm which included dairy and large acreages of tomatoes, sweet corn and pumpkins. After completion of high school, she attended Macdonald College at Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, and graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor of Science in Home Economics in 1958.

She was fortunate to be employed by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food working for six years as a Home Economist, first in Bruce and then in Perth County. It was here that she learned a great deal of information about the Women's Institute from Jean Scott and the late Helen McKercher, Florence P. Eadie and Dr. Ethel Chapman. Being a true supporter of Prince Edward County, she returned to teach school at Prince Edward Collegiate Institute.

In 1968, Mary Lou and Grant were married and moved to the Norton homestead. Mary Lou has been a voice in Prince Edward County working with Girl Guides, 4-H, church and seniors. Because her mother and mother-in-law were widows when she married, Mary Lou was aware of their needs and loneliness. Consequently, she and Grant, with the support of the Bloomfield United Church, organized a Seniors Club.

As a result of this organization and other meetings in the County, Mary Lou wrote a funding proposal and carried out a study of the needs of the seniors in the County. From this emerged Community Care for Seniors, which is the active organization serving seniors today. At present, Mary Lou is the Chair of the Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Ontario Breast Screening Advisory Committee, Vice-Chair of The Hastings and Prince Edward Council on Aging and President of Bloomfield Women's Institute.

Mary Lou is the current Program Coordinator for the Federated Women's Institutes

of Ontario. She has been a Women's Institute member for twenty-three years. During this time, she has held numerous positions at the Branch, District and Area levels. Mary Lou was Board Director for Subdivision 5 from the fall of 1993 to 1995. She participated on the provincial Resolutions Committee and helped organize the "Marketing the Women's Institute" Workshop in January of 1995.

As FWIO's representative on Ontario's Provincial Health Committee in 1994 and as Chair of FWIO's Health Committee since 1995, she has kept the Board of Directors and Executive current on health issues. In January of 1996 with the help of the Health Committee, she wrote a brief in response to Bill 26 to express the concerns and the work by the Women's Institute through the years regarding hospitals, health units, first aid kits and caring for family and friends. This was forwarded to government members, critics and health agencies to make heard the voice of all Women's Institute members.

Her research skills enable her to keep informed on local Women's Institute issues, as well as greater global issues. She believes that the WI must be a forceful voice to municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments - to protect women from abuse, poverty, inadequate health care, lack of educational opportunities, poor housing, unsuitable transportation and reductions in income. She also believes that the Women's Institute is the means through which women can educate themselves to lobby for action in all these areas.

Mary Lou's confidence has enabled her District to generate large sums of money for the organization at all levels, as well as for community projects. Her leadership has brought all the Branches of Prince Edward District together for fun, fellowship and learning. Mary Lou tells us that her volunteer work would not be possible if it were not for the support of Grant.

Mary Lou has the ability to stay focused and to motivate people to get involved, from start to finish. She can work untiringly towards an end, as demonstrated by the variety



of projects she has undertaken over the years. The Prince Edward District Women's Institute Arts & Craft Sale began through her untiring efforts. She has efficiently promoted the annual event for the past dozen years. Her limitless energy and enthusiasm has allowed the District to prepare the groundwork for an accessible transportation system to benefit the frail, elderly and disabled. Prince Edward District Women's Institute is now recognized by Councils and other organizations in the County. During the month of June a banner across Picton's main street reads "June - Women's Institute Month."

The Women's Institute, she believes, has a wealth of knowledge and expertise to help women cope - with children and teenagers, budgeting, meal preparation, work and other routine activities. The members expertise in arts and crafts must be passed on to the youth and women of today.

The individual Branch members, Mary Lou stresses, are the most important members of the organization. They are the ones who have raised funds for provincial scholarships, for the FWIO Headquarters Fund and for the new Nutrition Building at the University of Guelph. At the same time, she stated, we need to recognize and give credit to members who have raised money at the local level - for schools, halls, libraries, community care for seniors, day care and numerous other community activities.

Mary Lou states that the WI members she worked with in the early years (as 4-H leaders, at special events, training schools and WI functions) taught her as much as she taught them. Their commitment, enthusiasm, work ethic, comradship, friendship and value of community are just as important today as yesterday. Mary Lou would like to remind members that the Women's Institute is an organization for all women in their communities in Ontario, in Canada and throughout the world.