



Keeping Up with the Times

"When I attend a WI meeting today, I am attending a meeting of a group that has not changed radically in its organizational structure or the conduct of its meetings since the organization was founded in 1897..."

"This is part of the great success of the WI as an organization. This is what creates the feeling of sisterhood and bonding at County, Provincial, and FWIC conventions..."

"So what has happened to the Women's Institutes? Basically, nothing has happened to it. It is what has happened to the society in which WI functions. The society of 1995 is light years away in its differences from the society of 1897..."

"Many of the young women who have been the next generation of WI members are too busy, too tired [or] too occupied to belong to an organization which they feel is no longer relevant to their life. They don't have time to sew, to quilt, to cook, to make jams, jellies, and preserves. More importantly, this is not a source of pride to them. Their careers or self-fulfillment are more important."

The preceding quotations are taken from Success at a Great Price by Jean Cogswell, as printed in the Winter, 1995, issue of the Quebec Women's Institutes Newsletter.

After reading this article, I read a quote in *Ontario Farmer* from FWIO President Marg Harris: "When I've attended functions lately and looked around I've been so much more enthused, encouraged and positive about the Women's Institute than I was a few years ago." She went on to speak about a new vibrancy in the group that was not there before.

Which of these views more accurately reflects the Women's Institute organization today, on the eve of its centennial? Are we stuck in the traditions of the past and consequently irrelevant, or are we keeping up with society as it now functions and meeting the needs of our members?

Is it possible that part of the problem lies in the fact that many of our members are not aware of just what the Women's Institute is and what it stands for? The Women's Institute is a spirit of caring and fellowship for our members in the local and worldwide community — an organization where groups of all ages can learn from each other by working together.

Have you ever stopped to reflect about the Branch meetings you attend or plan? If you were evaluating your meeting, how would you respond to the following questions?

1. When a guest comes to a meeting, what is it about that meeting that makes it stand out from any other club, church or social gathering?
2. Did members discuss what is happening at

the District, Area, Provincial or National and International levels of Women's Institute and how they are affected by events in other parts of the world?

3. Did the meeting meet the objectives of the organization, as printed in the *FWIO Handbook*?
4. Did the group talk about any of the information in *Home & Country*, *Federated News* or *The Countrywoman*?
5. Did members share any ideas about the focus of the Women's Institute on Safe and Healthy Communities?
6. What current issues were discussed at the meeting?
7. What do community members and WI members know about the local history recorded faithfully by WI members?
8. Were good leadership skills used at the meeting?
9. Did the meeting provide variety and interest for members who attend regularly?

Is the Women's Institute relevant to and needed in today's society?

Cogswell, in the same article, states: "If a WI should disband, what organization or group would step in, judge public speaking contests, contribute to and volunteer in the local library, promote school fairs, provide judges and prizes for 4-H Achievement Day, provide volunteers for Meals-on Wheels, collect or volunteer for the Red Cross, volunteer at schools, hospitals, senior citizens' homes, contribute to or volunteer at youth centres, provide help to families who have been burned or flooded out, hold bake sales, suppers, teas and other activities too numerous to mention? When a WI disbands, a hole is left in the community which no other organization can quite fill."

Is there a new vibrancy in Women's Institute today? Judging by the enthusiasm experienced at the "Marketing the WI" Workshop in January, 1995, the increase in the number of new members shown in the annual reports, and the spirit and interest shown by the Board Directors at the 1995 annual meeting, the Women's Institute is definitely a vibrant, vital and active organization. We are fortunate to have intelligent goals that have passed the test of time. By adapting them to our times we are ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century!

Mary Janes is the Public Relations Officer for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.

MARKETING MATTERS



Members from Subdivision 9 gathered last fall at Hornings Mills for a one-day workshop on marketing the Women's Institute. P.J. Wade, a member of the New Toronto Branch helped facilitate the day's program with Margaret Richardson, Board Director for Subdivision 9. From left to right in the back row are Ann Tupling - Secretary, Dufferin North District, Margaret Richardson - Board Director, Subdivision 9, Evelyn Coe - President, Dufferin North, and Joan Falkard - President, Central Ontario Area. In the front row from left to right are Vivienne McLeod - President, Ruskview WI, Dufferin North, P.J. Wade - President, New Toronto WI, York East District, and Billie Power - Past President, Dufferin North.

Submitted by Billie Power, Past President, Dufferin North District.