

Profile:

Working to Keep Members in the Media

By Janine Roelens-Grant

Newly elected Public Relations Officer for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO), Mary Janes, says membership in the Women's Institute is very important to her. She remarked: "For me WI provides the fellowship of my community and information about a wide variety of topics, and it stimulates new interests. It also provides opportunities to take on responsibility and leadership, and to meet a wide circle of interesting people."

During her twenty years as a member of the Warwick Women's Institute Branch, Mary Janes has participated in many officers' conferences, workshops and conventions, and led workshops at all three levels. She has also held offices at Branch, District and Area levels. Her present positions include Tweedsmuir Curator at Branch level and Resolutions Convenor at District level. The resolution recently passed at Provincial Board concerning new reproductive technologies was researched and developed in her Branch as a result of a newspaper article Mary presented at a meeting.

As Branch President in the late 1970s, her first challenge was to come to an agreement with the local Township Council concerning the use of the local township hall. Mary's presentation to Council made her quickly realize that their Branch needed to change its image in the community before it would be taken seriously. During that time, her Branch had a chair lift installed to enable more people to use the hall. This, and other such projects, have raised the profile of the WI to the extent that members are now asked to participate on committees by Council.

As District President in the early 1980s, Mary helped organize members in Lambton North to make and present the Fairfield Family Puppet Kit to Lambton County schools. The kit was designed to encourage the teaching of agriculture related topics. To promote its use in the schools, she arranged a workshop for teachers during one of their professional development days. Two newspapers covered the event. Three radio interviews resulted and CBC TV Windsor came to Warwick Central School to televise the puppets in action at an assembly.

Having made a start promoting District activities, she became the District Public

Relations Officer. Her four-year term included bimonthly reports to four newspapers about District and FWIO activities.

The Area Program Co-ordinator's position provided a new challenge - how to make a long report interesting. Mary chose to create a composite WI member and show where her interests lay and where she could expand her interests in the future. This way, compiling the District reports was a more exciting task than just repeating program ideas.

This past year has been a particularly exciting time in Women's Institute work in Warwick. Mary chaired her Branch's Environmental Education Committee. Working in co-operation with Laidlaw Waste Systems and Warwick Township Council, the Committee helped plan an adult environmental education program for the community. The Warwick WI was invited to participate because of their involvement in establishing a recycling depot at the landfill site, and developing an ongoing public education program to use it.

The adult environmental education program organized three information evenings, which included displays and speakers on reducing, reusing and recycling, composting, household hazardous waste and the Lambton County Waste Management Master Plan.

After Mary Janes moved to Warwick over twenty years ago, a neighbour invited her out to a Women's Institute meeting. New to the community as a young school teacher, 'the Women's Institute was the place to meet people, she said. ... After leaving teaching to raise her three children, Mrs. Janes kept active in the Warwick Women's Institute and served at various levels until her election to the provincial Executive late in 1994.

- Excerpt extracted from an article in The Samia Observer, February, 1995.



Mary Janes

The finale was an environmental concert last November. Not only was there radio, television and press coverage, the Women's Institute was publicized in *The Spotlighter*, Laidlaw's international newsletter.

Mary remarked that over the past fifteen years, she has learned the value of public relations work and how to get publicity when it is merited. With assistance from her husband, Paul, she helped publicize - via radio, television and press - the first corn drive in the Watford-Forest area for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

And in 1992, after several years of research, Mary and her husband received approval from the Ontario Heritage Foundation for a provincial heritage plaque to commemorate the work of Joseph Russell Little, an early Methodist preacher in Lambton County. A song, Uncle Joe's Last Ride, was written and performed by James Gordon as part of his Hometown Tunes series on CBC Radio's Ontario Morning. The unveiling of the plaque in 1993 received radio, television and press coverage across Southern Ontario. Leading up to this event, Mary compiled the research material into a 74-page book, *Joseph Russell Little: Saddlebag Preacher*.

As Public Relations Officer, Mary commented that she "would like to return to the organization some of what she has received by promoting it throughout the province." In the future, she feels that the Public Relations Officer needs to work in two directions. She explained: "The work of the Women's Institute needs to be kept in the public eye through press, television and radio coverage. But, it is equally important to encourage and retain the enthusiasm of members, as their attitude does more than any press release."