

FWIO Hosts ACWW Area Conference

By Margaret Atkins

Saturday, August 13, 1994

For three days, the shores of Lake Couchiching in Simcoe County was a hive of activity as nearly three hundred delegates registered for the Associated Country Women of the World Area Conference held at the YMCA Conference Centre at Geneva Park near Orillia. Women's Institute members from British Columbia to Newfoundland assembled to share ideas and learn from speakers and from each other. By the sharing of challenges in their world, the delegates hoped and dreamt of an improved world and they were inspired to reach out with a helping hand to those women of the Third World, who are facing great challenges within their societal structures.

Following is a brief outline of the three-day agenda:

Friday, August 12, 1994

As is usual, the first afternoon dealt with registration, viewing displays and exhibits, networking, renewing past friendships and meeting other members.

On Friday evening, following the parade of flags and a rousing rendition of "O Canada," Conference Chair Florence Downing officially opened the conference by welcoming the delegates. After words of welcome from the platform guests, Donna Russett, FWIO President, Charlotte Johnson, FWIC President, and Peggy Knapp, ACWW Area President for Canada, extended greetings.

The keynote address was given by Peggy Knapp (see reprint of her opening address on page 16). Entertainment followed and the evening wrapped up with a reception - including food, fun, fellowship and exchanges of ideas - hosted by the Simcoe County Women's Institutes.



A special spot at centre stage was reserved for Gene Spry, Officer of the Order of Canada, and Canada's ACWW Member of Honour.

Saturday morning began with a keynote address by Dr. Patricia Chuchryk of the University of Lethbridge on "Making a Difference: Women and Global Change." "The message I want to bring to you," Dr. Chuchryk said, "is one of hope." She said that in spite of the cruelties and injustices of armed governments in Latin America, and particularly in Chile, women in these countries are challenging military regimes with courage and unfailing determination. Even at the risk of torture and death, these women parade through the streets with only their "clean hands" to resist the military system and move toward justice for all. She concluded that "these women have made a difference," and that we too have to rise to the challenges in our own environment.

Following a short nutrition break, Conference delegates participated in a panel discussion entitled "Know Your WI - Today and Tomorrow." The panel discussed how the organization fit together. Delegates fielded questions to representatives of the four levels of the Women's Institute - Margaret Eberle, FWIO Past President, spoke on behalf of the Branches, while Donna Russett, FWIO President, Charlotte Johnson, FWIC President, and Peggy Knapp, ACWW Area President for Canada, represented their respective levels of the organization. The panel encouraged delegates to recognize the differences but to join hands with all the women of the world, remembering that unity is strength and with a united focus we can challenge those changes needed to make a difference across the planet.

Designated workshops followed the luncheon - with eager participants being offered choices in challenges, changes or crafts - and gave participants a wide range to choose from. The leaders of the "Financial Planning," "Good Stress - Bad Stress" and "True Colours" workshops challenged participants to strive towards equality that directly affects the lives of women.

Changes that affect women were offered in the ACWW Workshop led by Peggy Knapp and the "Third World Issues" workshop led by Dr. Keith Morley. Both stressed the contributions of others that create changes in the lives of women, families, communities and, ultimately, the global village. Stressing the importance of the Canadian involvement within the parameters of the Third World countries, both workshop leaders told how WI members can create a legacy of change to meet the challenges in a changing world.

Of course, no conference would be complete without a craft workshop or two. Delegates enjoyed the hands-on experience and the creativity of making lace pot pourri dolls and earrings. And for the environmentalists, there was "The Green Workshop."

On Saturday evening, everyone enjoyed the music, dance and poetry of the Ojibway of the Rama Reserve, on whose territory the Conference was held.

Sunday, August 14, 1994

Sunday began with an Interfaith Service written and conducted by Simcoe Area WI member Helen Coutts. In their own language, three Ojibway women sang at intervals, and a WI choir, formed during the conference, concluded with "The Hymn of All Nations."



At Sunday's Interfaith Service, three Ojibway women sang in their own language, and a WI choir formed during the conference, left few dry eyes as they closed the weekend experience with the "Hymn of All Nations."

Closing remarks by Conference Chair Florence Downing and a summary by Peggy Knapp gave us hope, belief and a sense of accomplishment by concluding that the Women's Institute has always taken a leadership role and been able to adapt and to meet the changing challenges in its ongoing support for women, families and the nations of the world.

With broad smiles, an inner feeling of contentment and a strong motivational awareness, the conference delegates departed the peaceful surroundings, knowing in their hearts that the work has just begun in facing the challenges of our changing world.

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