

Volunteering Broadens Your Horizons

By Janine Roelens-Grant

When she married her husband, Ross, a beef farmer from Perth County, Donna Henderson admits: "I was a town girl and didn't know about Institute or 4-H." But that soon changed. Donna has been a member of the Junior Women's Institutes of Ontario for the past fifteen years and a 4-H leader for the past twelve.

In the spring of 1979, the charter meeting of Maple Keys Junior Women's Institute was held. "I joined that night," explained Donna, "and was very happy to sit in the back and say nothing. Volunteering for lunch duty was my contribution to meetings."

She recalled that, in their second year, a few of the members went to the fall conference and annual meeting. "This was a great learning experience and lots of fun," said Donna, "so we made it an annual tradition." And, she added, "I haven't missed one since."

At one of the first conferences she attended, Donna was asked to sit as her group's representative on the Provincial Executive of the Junior WI. This was only the beginning, she explained. She spent the next five or so years in different aspects of provincial work.

In 1987, Donna began a two-year term on the FWIO Board as a Junior Director. About these experiences Donna remarked: "The organization was so impressive, and I learned so much. The women I met had the same concerns as me. I could now stand in front of a group or large audience and give reports or talk off the top of my head and just be nervous. Believe me, a few years before it would have been life threatening!"

Following her term on the FWIO Board, Donna was elected Public Relations Officer for the Junior Women's Institutes. She claims that compiling the JWIO Newsletter and the articles she wrote for the *Home & Country* made her computer literate and familiar with fax machines. As PRO, she visited with many Junior Branches. "I found them diverse and exciting," she said;

"they all had their own focus and were doing their best for each other and their own communities."

"The work done in each Branch and with each individual is the most important aspect of WI," proclaimed Donna. "The friendships and confidence you gain ... are the rewards. What the JWIO and the FWIO have done for me is give me a network of friends across Ontario that I wouldn't have had otherwise." And it's important to remember, she commented, that "each member makes a difference - [whether it's] with a smile, a report, leading a meeting, or going on to a provincial position."

Donna openly stated her concerns about the future of volunteer groups, including the Women's Institutes. "There are so few people like myself," she said, "who are able to stay home and do volunteer work." Her concern is that if children don't see their parents actively volunteering, they won't realize it's a possibility that broadens their life.

"Each member makes a difference - [whether it's] with a smile, a report, leading a meeting, or going on to a provincial position."

However, Donna's children - Lynn and Paul - have always been immersed in the philosophy of volunteering. In 1980, when her daughter, Lynn, was little and had few playmates, Donna and a few other moms got together once a week so their children could play; and the moms could have some adult conversation and do hobbies together. One mom was in charge of the children, while the others had the morning off. Before long, the gathering expanded into the Molesworth Creative Play Group, arranged to meet in the Church and hired a teacher. Today, the group still fills a need in the community.



Donna Henderson

In addition to her Institute and 4-H volunteer work, Donna is the Past President of the Ladies Aid for her church and the current President of the Women's Missionary Society. She also collects for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. And, recently, Donna was asked to sit on the Program Planning Committee for Conference '97.

It was evident from talking to Donna that she is an enthusiastic volunteer. But she is equally enthusiastic about some of her hobbies. She is an avid quilter; this past winter she and her neighbour have made five quilts. She claims, however, that decorative painting is her favourite craft and she has several projects on the go. Once again, Donna has volunteered her time by teaching both quilting and stencilling classes to local Institute members.

Something to Think About

- A lot of people are like wheelbarrows - no good unless pushed.
- Some are like trailers - they have to be pulled.
- Some are like kites - keep a string on them or they fly away.
- Some are like balloons - full of wind and ready to blow up.
- Some are like footballs - you can't tell which way they will bounce.
- And then some are like a good watch - open face, pure gold, but quietly busy and full of good works.

Submitted by the Grey-Bruce Area.