

Tricks of the Trade

Tips for writing an effective media release

By John Shewchuk

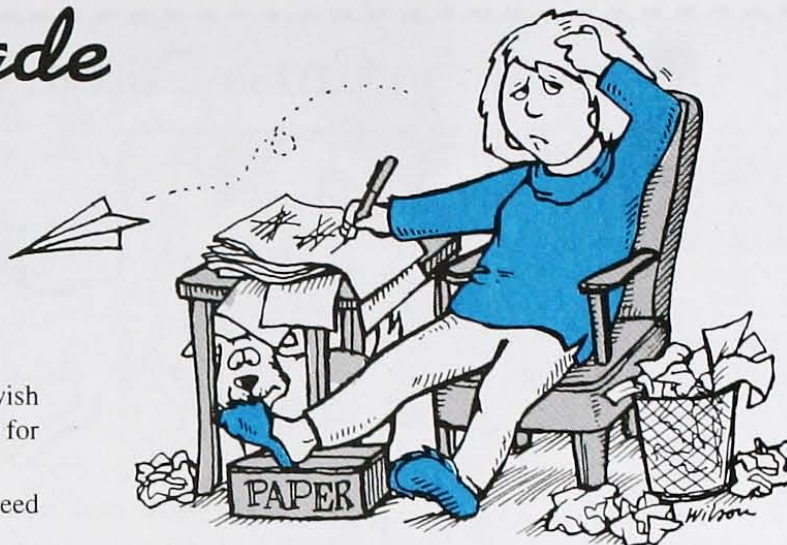
Nobody wanted the job, so you volunteered. Now you wish you hadn't. How could writing the regular news release for your WI group be so hard?

Well, it's not really as difficult as it might seem. All you need is a quick lesson on some of the 'tricks of the trade.'

The first thing to remember is that most local newspaper readers aren't Women's Institute members. So the nitty gritty details of your meetings won't interest them. It's a mistake to simply repackage your meeting minutes as a news release. The news editor will read that "Mrs. Brown volunteered to bake her famous pumpkin tarts for the next meeting," ask him/herself "so what," and toss the release in the garbage.

When you sit down to write your news release, ask yourself, "will anybody care about this information?" If the answer is "no," you need to find some information they **will** care about.

If, for example, your group raised \$1,000 for a local charity, you



do have something newsworthy to talk about and there are a few basic rules you need to follow in writing your news release:

- Make sure you address it to the right person (reporter or editor) and limit its length to a maximum of two pages (double-spaced). It should also have a title, date, and location for the announcement marked clearly at the top.
- Start with the most important information in the first paragraph followed by progressively less important information. Don't make the editor guess what the news is. And use short sentences.
- Try to use only one piece of information per paragraph, but by the end of the release, you should have answered the "5 W's and H": Who; What; Where; When; Why; and, How.
- Use direct quotes, but always ask the permission of the person being quoted. It's best to quote a person of authority on the topic or a Women's Institute official.
- Use the word "more" at the bottom of the first page if your release carries over onto a second page. Use the symbol "-30-" at the end of the release. This is a universal media symbol which means that anything above is suitable for publication. Any information below the -30- symbol is not for publication.
- You should give the name of your contact person and their phone number **after** the -30- symbol. If you don't use a -30- symbol or if you include the contact information before the -30- symbol an editor may publish this information as part of a story. And you probably don't want your whole community calling you.

If you follow these simple rules, being your Women's Institute media contact won't be much of a chore at all. And your group will get more positive media coverage than you ever dreamed — even more than if Mrs. Brown tried to butter up the local editor with some of those pumpkin tarts.

John Shewchuk is a Community Relations Co-ordinator with the Rural Development Secretariat.

"A Stitch in Time"



The Fordwich Women's Institute enjoyed a day at the Country Quilt Fest in August at the Ontario Agricultural Museum in Milton. Alma Hargrave (left) and Nelly Allan (right) added a few stitches to the community quilt.