

## Profile:

# Eberle says the WI is about anything and everything

By Janine Roelens-Grant

**M**arg Eberle was born and raised, and still lives, near Highgate, Ontario, in Kent County. Marg and her husband, Jack, operate a 200 acre cash crop farm. The farm includes maple syrup production, a long-standing Eberle tradition. Marg and Jack have three daughters - Jackie, Nancy and Kathi Lynn - and four, soon to be five, grandchildren. In addition to farm life, Marg taught sewing and needlecrafts in the area for both St. Clair and Fanshawe College. Today, Marg works part-time as an Assistant Librarian for the Highgate Branch of the Kent County Library.

Marg's first involvement with the Women's Institute began 25 years ago. Since that first meeting, Marg has received her Life Membership from the Palmyra Branch. She has held all of the convenorships at the Branch level, as well as positions at other levels, including District President and Area Resolutions Convenor. At the Area Convention in 1989 she was nominated and elected to the position of President Elect. Her Presidency of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario began in November of 1991.

Marg explained, "It's up to me to help the members get what they think is best. It's up to me to try and make these things happen. Ideas should come from the members at Branch level for the good of the organization."

This realization has come from Marg's development of and involvement with various projects over the years. Along with Cindy Boyd, the then Rural Organizations and Services Specialist, Marg co-founded Women's Development Day in Kent County in 1984. "We felt there was a need for something that linked all the rural organizations in the County together. We needed an informa-

tion exchange on women's issues." Since 1984 Kent County women have gathered together at these workshops and seminars to discuss a variety of topics.

One year the focus of these workshops was day care initiatives. Guest speakers from model day care facilities spurred several participants to work towards a similar program for Kent. Marg claims that it was because of her WI background that she got involved and sat on the committee that helped organize public meetings and formulate a questionnaire about the day care needs in the area. The eventual outcome was Ridge K.I.D.S. (Kids Incorporated Day Care Services) in Ridgetown, Ontario. With several part-time spaces available on relatively short notice, this facility offered a partial solution to the rural farm community and their need for day care during peak work seasons.

In part, Marg's involvement with the establishment of Ridge K.I.D.S. stems from her close tie to farm safety in Ontario. She has been an active member of the Kent County Farm Safety Association and was President for three years. In addition, Marg was a 4-H Leader for twenty years and wrote a 4-H Safety Manual in 1988 entitled "Looking Out For No. 1."

Beyond her WI and farm safety connections, Marg has done a great deal for her community: she was on the committee working for the establishment of the Orford Township Clearville Park, an 89 acre Municipal Park on Lake Erie; she was Secretary for the Sesquicentennial celebrations of Orford Township; and, she was Chair of the Committee for the Ladies Program when the Plowing Match last took place in Kent County. And when Marg was elected to the position of President Elect, she resigned her position on



the Chatham-Kent Community Futures Committee; a federal program geared to developing jobs in communities with high unemployment.

About her hopes for the future of the Women's Institutes, Marg had this to say: "I hope to see the membership increase and more Branches formed. We have so much to offer. The need for this type of organization is greater than ever. We've looked after everybody else and kept quiet while doing it. We need to tell people about what we do - and we do everything from serving lunch at a funeral to lobbying the government to change legislation."

And, she added, "we have the people, the ability and the support of one another to do anything. WI is about anything and everything - about fellowship, about learning, about opportunities. I don't know where you start and stop with the adjectives to tell about the Women's Institutes."

When asked about her thoughts on the 100th anniversary celebrations in 1997, Marg responded: "This is going to be a very exciting time. How many organizations are as active and progressive, are as old as we are, and are still going strong. And yet our basic principles are the same as when Janet and Erland Lee wrote them down. I often wonder what Janet and Erland Lee and Adelaide Hoodless would think if they walked in on our anniversary celebration in 1997," Marg concluded.