

# Women's Institutes do change with the times

# Provincial WI group is involved in community action

Their motto is "For Home and Country" and for over 40 years Women's Institutes have faced the ever-changing problems and concerns of home and country head-on.

Women's Institutes have kept up with the changing times, and at the same time they have upheld the traditions of home and country. They are just as likely to discuss and make resolutions about child abuse and pornography, as they are to encourage women to acquire tried and true homemaking skills.

"People don't give enough credit to Women's Institutes," says Mary Seip, who has twice been president of Hanover WI. In the 35 years she's been a member of the organization.

"People think of us as old ladies getting together, but the issues we deal with are not old lady issues," she says.

Indeed, throughout this century, WI's have carried out research on the problems of family and society, and have challenged governments to pass legislation for the benefit of all Canadians.

It was a Grey County WI that hired the first County Public Health Nurse in Ontario, says Seip. Other Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) have successfully lobbied for consumer protection legislation that ensured the wrapping of bread for sanitary reasons and the banning of dioxin-restricted bacon wrappers.

"Our objectives change with the times," says Seip. "Pasteurizing milk is no longer an issue."

More recent resolutions, submitted by the FWIO to appropriate provincial and federal departments, include: a request to allow the use of heroin in Canada for terminally ill patients; an appeal for government funding of shelters for battered women; and a statement of concern regarding the adverse health effects of non-refillable soft drink containers.

In January, the Campbell's Corner WI prepared their annual resolution on the health effects of leaded gasoline.

"Let it be resolved that the FWIO will give much support as possible to the phasing out of the sale of leaded gasoline," concludes the resolution. It will now be passed up through various provincial organizations for approval before being submitted to the government, says Florence Schmidt, who is resolutions convener for the group as well as the district.

But despite their commitment to stay on top of current issues, some WI's are finding it difficult to attract new members. As Seip pointed out, people have old-fashioned views about the organization and are reluctant to join. There are other reasons for declining memberships as well.

According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, membership in WI's across Canada has slowly declined as the country becomes more and more urbanized.

In Hanover, the WI has 16 or 17 members, says President Emily Whiston, down from about 50 in earlier years.

"Our members are dying off and getting old, and it's hard to get new members," says Whiston. She says one problem for townswomen is that the organization is only open to rural or farm members.

Another problem, says Seip, is that meetings are held during times which is inconvenient for women who work or who have small children to care for. Meetings are held on afternoons for the convenience of older members, some of whom are over 50 years of age.

Seip also attributes declining membership to there being more women's groups for young farm women to choose from. She gives the example of the newly formed Concerned Farm Women, centred in Chesley.

And farm women who retire in Hanover, says Seip, often return to their old WI, like Campbell's Corner WI, rather than join the group here.

Campbell's Corner has quite a few young Whiston, says Whiston, while many members of the Hanover WI have belonged to a number of years and are over 50 years old.



Women Institutes in Hanover and area have spearheaded numerous projects over the years in the community and this was obvious last June during the 6th Anniversary party for the Campbell's Corner Women's Institute. Here, Mary Mackey, left, and Edna Kunsenbauer, two life members rekindle some memories at the party. (Post Photo)

Membership in Campbell's Corner WI numbers about 30, says President Gloria Magwood. "The oldest member is 82 and the youngest is in her late 20s."

Magwood says her group has been able to attract new members, largely Bentinck Township farm women, "because they're used to working with groups and promoting good causes."

Young women first became involved with WI's as 4-H Club members, since 4-H leaders have traditionally been institute members.

While Hanover WI no longer leads 4-H clubs because of the advancing age of its members, Campbell's Corner WI remains very active in this area.

"We presently sponsor about 25 girls from Hanover, in two clubs," says Magwood. And two of its members, Diane Magwood and Donna Kobe, are 4-H leaders.

Aside from 4-H involvement,

Campbell's Corner WI continues to chronicle local history in its award-winning Tweedsmuir Histories.

Historics of community life were first undertaken by WI's at the suggestion of Lady Tweedsmuir, wife of John Buchan (who was governor general of Canada from 1925 to 1960). The first Campbell's Corner Tweedsmuir History won first prize in 1964, at both the Grey South WI District annual meeting and the American Convention in Lunenburg, says Gladys Kobe, the group's Tweedsmuir curator and press reporter.

Over the years, the FWIO has maintained close ties with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food. OMAF publishes the FWIO's quarterly magazine, Home and Country, and sponsors numerous workshops and short courses for WI members and other rural groups.

Hanover WI members try to get involved with OMAF courses, says Whiston, but it can be difficult for the older women because many do not have cars.

The workshops focus on the changing rural scene. "They're trying to move out into new areas," says Gloria Magwood, of Campbell's Corner WI. From homemaking skills to farm management, rural child care, and farm complexes in transition, she says.

"Nothing's saying the same," says Magwood. "The Women's Institutes are changing; moving on, more into areas other than homemaking skills."

"Women no longer stay right in the home," she says. "That's a basic change with the world. She's a part of her husband's farm business, and other wives have to get outside work."

"That's the direction we're going," says Magwood, reflecting on the changing concerns of Women's Institutes.

## Bruce South WI met at Bervie

The District Directors meeting of the Bruce South WI was held at Bervie Institute Hall on Tuesday, March 25, 1986.

Mrs. William McPherson presided. The Opening Ode was sung and the Mary Stewart Collect was repeated.

Please note the change in date for the District Annual to May 8. The theme for the day is "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with Me".

Mrs. Fred Friar as alternate board member gave us the highlights of the board meeting last fall.

Mrs. Dave Ireland gave us a report of the workshop she attended at Good Plains in Toronto in February. A delicious lunch was served by the Bervie WI.

Mrs. Perin Lowry  
PRO for Bruce South WI.

## W.I. of the future outlined to executive

Mrs. Fred Friar, alternate Director for Sub Division 17 of the Women's Institute, was hostess for a meeting of the executive members of the Grey Bruce Area at her home on Feb. 10.

In the absence of Mrs. Irvan Thomas who has been in hospital, Muriel Busch and Louise Long chaired the meeting. The summary of the recommendations for the committee for the W.I. of the future was explained. In 1987 it will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of W.I. work. Plans are being made to hold a convention to commemorate the anniversary but plans are not complete at this time.

There will be two scholarships given at county level in 1987 only, to celebrate the anniversary.

Members are reminded of the day for the Lee on June 2. Plans will be made for a busload from this district. Each member is reminded that she is to have a craft item valued at \$1 to \$10 to be sent that day to the Lee. There will be no more Christmas at the Lee. Instead it will be Harvest at the Lee on Oct. 1 and 2.

Members are reminded of the District Directors meeting on Mar. 25 at the Bervie W.I. Hall. Please note the change of date for the District Annual on May 8 at the Teeswater Community Centre.

Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) is an educational organization for personal growth and community action. During the semi-annual provincial board meeting in Toronto, activity reports showed that FWIO is also an organization that relates to, and interacts with, other groups studying the same concerns.

Upon request, FWIO presented a brief on Future Directions for Ontario Agricultural Industry to the task force of Ontario Institute of Agrologists.

Ruth Gross, provincial agriculture convener, represented FWIO at the Farm Women's Program Planning Day. After much discussion, those attending agreed there was a need for a conference for farm women to develop an action plan which would create better understanding between consumer and producer.

Mrs. Gross also represented the organization at a seminar on Safe Use of Pesticides, sponsored by the Canadian Agricultural Chemical Association with representatives from government, special interest groups, community interest groups, producers and academic professionals.

Provincial president Charlotte Johnson attended the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues when concerns such as child care, pensions for women, pay equity, transition houses, crisis centres and women business owners were discussed. The group decided no one issue could be given priority because all were equal concerns. Fifteen junkin, regional vice-president, represented FWIO at

another meeting of the group when discussion centred on pay equity.

Barbara Temple and Winnie Wilson, FWIO provincial board directors, attended the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair Association of Canada board directors' meeting. The Women's Institute was the only women's organization represented.

Jane Hawkins represents FWIO on the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame board of directors. Eight outstanding agriculturalists will be inducted into the Hall of Fame Gallery at the Ontario Agricultural Fairgrounds in London. Five FWIO candidates have been inducted since the first unveiling in 1980.

For 1987 FWIO has nominated Dorothy Fothergill as a candidate for recognition into the Hall of Fame.

FWIO volunteer members will act as hostesses on special activity days in the designated WI hall within the agricultural museum.

Women's institute members in Ontario, continue to develop good programs, encourage leadership and study topics relevant to the concerns of its members. Next year will mark 90 years of continuing progress.

Dynamics of Change was the subject chosen by Mrs. Johnson, when she spoke at the seventh seminar of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program at Geneva Park, sponsored by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.