

it to communities

isn't always the case anymore. Harris says the women within the institute can help fill those roles.

And while there is a perception that the older members are resistant to change, they do in fact welcome new ideas and challenges, according to Harris.

In fact, Harris says she sees a new vibrancy to the group that wasn't there a few years ago. "When I've attended functions lately and looked around I've been so much more enthused, encouraged and positive about the Women's Institute than I was a few years ago," says Harris.

A case in point was the summertime turnout of more than 3600 people to the Institute's annual gathering at the agricultural museum in Milton. In fact, Harris questions

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why there was no media coverage of an event that drew so many people, but she was happy to see the response just the same.

"We're standing up and saying we're proud to be Women's Institute members. People used to be a little apologetic about it," she says. That new vibrancy is even extending to sports. Harris admits that she's already lost some sleep over throwing out the first pitch at a Toronto Blue Jays game next summer.

As the political climate in the province changes over the next little while, Harris says this is another area where the Women's Institute will be waiting in the wings. As more and more emphasis is placed on volunteer organizations, the Women's Institute is expected to play a role.

It is not clear exactly what that role will be, but Janes says it could centre on teaching life skills to young people. But for now, the Women's Institute will continue to do what it does best - reach out to others. And Harris hopes that she will bring a vision to an organization that has endured and survived many changes.

"As president I feel that it's important to inspire and to motivate. And I dream that one day the Women's Institute will become a household word. People need to be connected to something that has value and worth, and I believe the Women's Institute has that."