

LOCAL NEWS

Women's Institute re-elects president

'Our motto is For Home and Country,' said Marjorie Thompson

By Christina Varga
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LIKE RIPPLES SPREADING FROM A thrown pebble, a global women's group spread from two women's efforts in Stoney Creek more than 100 years ago.

On Saturday, the Frontenac District group of the Women's Institute chose their new executive in the Glenburnie United Church, re-electing Marjorie Thompson as their president. Norma Abrams, of Sydenham, was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

"Our motto is For Home and Country," said Thompson, describing the organization's work as beginning on a personal level, but having effects on a far wider scale.

Women traditionally have taken on the role of knitting together communities through actions that affect people on the most personal level.

"We do charity work and help out anyone who is in need," said Thompson, emphasizing the work the area Women's Institutes do for senior citizens.

Members entertain seniors and care for people who are unable to leave their homes, said Thompson.

The group is planning an education

GLENBURNIE

campaign to make people aware of telephone scams, especially those that target seniors.

The Women's Institute was started in 1897, after the 14-month-old son of Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, along with several other babies, died from drinking contaminated milk.

Hoodless, together with Janet Lee, organized a largely rural Ontario movement to prevent tragedies like Hoodless'.

"The objective of the institute ... is to promote that knowledge of Household Science ... with a view to raising the general standard of health," wrote the founders of the Women's Institute in 1897.

By 1919, the group had grown into a provincial organization, and rapidly became a national one. In 1930, the Associated Country Women of the World was formed.

GOALS HAVE EXPANDED

Though the goals of the group have expanded to keep pace with the times, the original notion of enacting wide-reaching changes to create healthier, safer communities through a tight focus on family and neighbourhood needs have remained.

Since those early beginnings, a publication of the organization states



ABRAMS



THOMPSON

some of the group's achievements, including:

- Mandatory stopping by other traffic for school buses with flashing lights;
- signs at railroad crossings;
- enforcement of handicapped parking;
- funding for battered women's shelters.

The rural emphasis is felt not only in community development projects in developing countries, but in eastern Ontario as well.

Each year the group presents the Bernice Ballantyne scholarship, named after a member who died, to young woman. The \$200 prize goes to a 4H member who demonstrates scholastic achievement, community involvement and leadership.

Last year, the area Women's Institute groups were heavily involved with the International Plowing Match in Sunbury.

The Family Lifestyles section included a quilting competition, arts and crafts and a raffle prize of a painting by a local artist, who happened to be none other than Thompson herself. In addition, Women's Institute members made gifts for the event.

"We made more than 500 gifts for the Plowing Match door prize draws," said Thompson.

Another project of the organization is to preserve local history.

Thompson is well-placed to be part of that link to the past, as her grandmother was the first president of Glenburnie Women's Institute and her mother was, like Thompson, a district president, in 1958-59.

CHANGING PRESSURES

It is difficult to attract new members, though and Thompson said she understands the changing pressures on women.

"Young women who work and have families - the last thing they want to do is go to a meeting," said Thompson.

The contemporary goals of the Women's Institutes include working toward a sustainable, clean environment, involving women with technology and, on a global level, acting as a forum on international affairs for rural women - including having a voice at the United Nations.