

A life well lived making community news

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A wedding announcement. The births of five children. Reports of Women's Institute meetings, Women's Missionary Society gatherings, and Liberal party events.

Jeanne Coulthard is marking many milestones. The Downie Township native turned 95 on Apr. 30, and was lauded at the recent Perth South Women's Institute district annual for 75 years of service to the organization. She's also been a member of the Liberal Party of Canada for 65 years.

It's a busy, fulfilling life that's been well documented in this very newspaper – and Coulthard should know, for she's been a subscriber for 71 years.

The Journal Argus has been familiar with Coulthard's community service for as long as any one currently on staff can remember – but that's only 25 years of local history that we're familiar with.

Jeanne Innes was born in 1915 in the former West Zorra Township, between Brooksdale and Harrington, in Oxford Township. The youngest of seven children, she jokes that "I was a novelty," as the next youngest in the family was eight years older than her.

Her father Donald served as Reeve of West Zorra Township, and he and wife Jane also farmed, and had dairy cattle. As a teen, she drove her father around on municipal business, as, she says, he was older and wasn't as familiar with the still-novel automobile as she



Jeanne Coulthard (front) is given a bouquet of flowers in honour of her 75 years with the Women's Institute at the Perth South WI's district annual May 3. With her are, from left, Norma Howe, Carol Innes and Marlene Archer. (Heuchert photo)

was. Jeanne also worked on the family farm until she married.

"I milked cows this way," Jeanne says, gesturing with her hands in the tugging motion, "and I milked cows after I got married, too. Now? I don't know anything about how it's done."

That sly sense of humour must have been attractive to Norman.

Jeanne's brother Wallace had purchased the Coulthard farm in the late 1920s from Norman's father, "four miles over the border into Downie." Jeanne says that she first met Norman as children in Sunday school, during visits to her brother.

"It was quite a few years after that when we got going together," she

says. The couple was married at home on June 4, 1938, and then moved out to the farm Norman purchased a year prior – the familiar homestead, Downiebrook Farm, which borders Hwy. 7 and the St. Pauls road.

Early married life on their 100-acre mixed farm was "busy — you were too busy to think of anything else... Times were different, you stayed at home and worked on the farm to keep things going."

Family life was also busy for the young couple. Twins Gordon and Norma arrived first, then Winston, Larry and Alex. Jeanne maintained her commitment to the Women's Institute after marriage – she was a member of the Brooksdale Branch prior to her wedding, and joined the St. Paul's branch after, serving in a variety of positions, including district president, throughout her 75 years of membership.

She was also a member of the Women's Missionary Society, also serving as president for the Stratford branch before it changed to encompass Huron and Perth Counties. "I have to stop and think," Jeanne says, "as everything's changed over the years."

She says that membership in these organizations allowed her "to learn a lot... I've had the opportunity to go places I never would have." This includes attending national conferences for the Federated Women's Institutes, and even attending international events for the Associated Country Women of the World.

Coulthard has also been a member of the local Liberal Party since 1945, and served as president of the local women's wing of the party in the mid-1960s.

She was honoured in 2009 by the

Stratford Ontario Women Liberals with the creation of a bursary in her name for high school girls who have demonstrated the same sense of community service Coulthard has.

Coulthard made the move from the family farm to a room at the Wildwood Care Centre in February, since she couldn't do the stairs up to her bedroom anymore. She still gets out for events and her many social commitments.

"I've been fortunate – my health hasn't been too bad," she muses. "I can really appreciate what I have – and I can still remember... maybe too much!" Her memories include former Journal Argus Downie correspondent Jack Matthison's extensive reports on her community, write-ups on WI meetings and she still has the photos that John Eedy gave her of the Downiebrook barn, demolished by a tornado in 1975, that made the paper's front page that week. She's a history buff, and has kept records and clippings for her various groups, as well as for her own family.

Jeanne says that she appreciates her local paper because it has all the local news she needs – and is often a part of. "If you forget what you hear at the meeting, you can check who's right or wrong in the story," she jokes.

Speaking a few days before her birthday, Jeanne was suspicious that a few events were planned to celebrate her milestone – birthday cards and flowers had started to arrive, and she jokingly refused to have her photo taken at first.

"I don't like this publicity... I don't need to be in the paper again," she sighed. But for such a life lived, she can't help it.