

Pontiac Women's Institute information day educates local ladies

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Julielee Stitt, THE EQUITY

Shirley O'Connell, the national coordinator of the Izzy Doll project, shows the different types of dolls that volunteers have knit.



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Attendees listen to Shirley O'Connell speak on the Izzy Doll project.

JULIELEE STITT
Equity Reporter

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Women from the Pontiac Women's Institute invited ladies from across the county to join them on Feb. 20 for their annual information day, held at the Shawville

United Church Hall.

The event attracted approximately 65 women and featured a roster of speakers that included, Joanne Labadie from Ferme Lavender Ridge, Anne Rondeau from the Pontiac Reception Centre Support

Services, Gillian MacDougall from the 4-H society and Shirley O'Connell.

O'Connell, a resident of Perth, ON, spoke to the group of ladies who congregated inside the church hall about the Izzy Doll Project, an initiative that was started

by the mother of a member of the Canadian Armed Forces who served abroad.

During a tour, Master Cpl. Mark Isfeld came across a doll, which had been lost by its owner, presumably a young girl.

He wrote to his mother to tell her about the incident and she quickly began to knit small dolls that would fit inside her son's uniform pocket.

Isfeld distributed the dolls to children when he had a chance.

However, in 1994 Isfeld died while clearing a minefield in Croatia. Several of the corporal's friends asked his mother if they could continue to distribute the dolls in their friend's honour, dubbing them 'Izzy' dolls.

The project quickly grew, and today the small, knit toys are created by people across Canada and distributed to children living in war torn and poverty stricken countries.

When Isfeld's mother passed away in 2007, O'Connell became the national coordinator of the program.

O'Connell explained to women who attended the information day in Shawville how simple it is to craft a doll and how much joy they bring to children around the world.

Women's Institute member Margaret Hodgins called the presentation by O'Connell "inspiring."

"It's such a worthwhile project," she added. According to O'Connell, new volunteers are always needed to craft the small dolls.

In addition to the presentations, members of the Pontiac Women's Institute prepared a lunch for attendees.

According to local chapter president Helen Routliffe, the day went "very well" and all of the speakers were "very good."