

Women join together to share common goals

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SPRINGER TWP. — More than 60 women from rural and agricultural settings throughout Northern Ontario gathered at the New Sunbeam Motel here this week for a seminar aimed at sharing common goals and interest.

Janet Parsons, Cache Bay, president of the Veuve River Women's Institute, which sponsored the conference, said she was very pleased with the large turnout, qualifying the event as a success. Participants for the workshop came from as far away as Matheson.

The agenda included a 90-minute presentation by Terryl Ledoux, a wardrobe and makeup consultant from North Bay.

Kristina Maus of the Concerned Farm Women Movement, spoke at length about a survey conducted among farming operations in Bruce and Grey counties; the survey was the foundation for a book entitled "The Farmer Takes a Wife", written by Gisele Ireland, who was also on hand to chat with seminar participants and autograph copies of her book.

Ms. Maus said 67 per cent of farming operations in the survey area are owned jointly by the husband and wife, 19 per cent are owned solely by the man and two per cent are owned solely by the woman. The balance is made up of family-owned corporations or other co-operative or legal partnership arrangements.

On a sombre note, she said 86 per cent of the farming community surveyed is worse off than in 1976, with product prices, input prices, interest rates, foreign land ownership and provincial and federal government agricultural priorities and policies as the main culprits.

Ms. Maus said 17 per cent of farm owners surveyed expect to lose all or part of their farm because of economic difficulties over the next year.

She said the four major aspects of living on a farm that appeal to women are the country life, independence, rural values and the enjoyment derived from the production of food.

West Nipissing Planning and Industrial Board chairman John Beddows, a business teacher at Northern Secondary School in Sturgeon Falls, told seminar participants they are "key personnel" in their farming business.

He explained certain advantages of forming official partnerships, limited partnership or incorporating the farm business, when it comes to a questions of ownership with the husband.

"The best advice I can give is write down what you feel you would want from your business organization," said Mr. Beddows.

Ontario Farm Safety Association representative Marilyn Sewell told the women gathered for the workshop, "being aware is your best protection."

She said an average of 40 to 50 people are killed in farming accidents annually in Ontario, and of those fatalities, up to 25 per cent involved youngsters under the age of 16.

Ms. Sewell said farm operators should at least be familiar with emergency procedures in order to be prepared in the event of an accident.

In the afternoon, Dr. Jane Deschesne of Sturgeon Falls gave a lecture on women's health, followed by a presentation on assertiveness training by Canadore College West Nipissing Adult Training co-ordinator Gaetan Serre.

Mr. Serre said the college got involved five years ago in promoting women's training programs in Sturgeon Falls because it was obvious women in the district were "very underprivileged" in the areas of job preparation and career opportunities.

Mr. Serre said the college set up a women's advisory committee, and convinced the Canada Employment Centre (CEC) to introduce more training programs geared to women's needs.

As a result of the program's success, 10 to 12 women who took the initial eight-week course subsequently found permanent employment in non-traditional roles.

While 90 per cent of the trainees under the college programs at Sturgeon Falls were men five years ago, 72 per cent of enrollees are now women, Mr. Serre said.

"And a good percentage of them are going into more specialized training at the post-secondary level," he told seminar participants.

Mr. Serre said one of the most rewarding features of assertiveness training is getting men and women to become more aware of their potential.

"It's very important when taking a personal inventory to take a look at all aspects of your life.

"Our Creator made us the way we are. We all have the potential to be successful in life," said Mr. Serre.

The seminar concluded with a small tour of a local farming operation in Spring Twp.