

Branch Profile

WINDERMERE WI

In 1911, Elizabeth Forge, with the assistance of Barbara Goltz, formed the Windermere WI (Muskoka District, Northern Area). Elizabeth would be proud to know that seven of her direct descendants are active Members today, carrying on the WI tradition. This Branch worked through both World Wars with the Red Cross, sharing their skills and knowledge by contributing knitting and medical supplies to soldiers. They supported the 4-H Club and, to this day, Members have fond memories of their own past involvement. Windermere WI will celebrate its 105th Anniversary on October 11, 2016.

At one time, Muskoka had over 30 Branches, but sadly, Windermere is the last Branch in the District. Its membership of 46 comes from Windermere and the surrounding communities of Bent River, Bracebridge, Hekkla, Orillia, Raymond, Rosseau, Ufford, and Ullswater. Members range in age from 53-89 and are either currently in the workforce, or retired. The background of this group is quite diverse and includes accountants, administrative assistants, artists, data analysts, domestic engineers, farmers, musicians, nurses, real estate agents, teachers, and technical writers. They work well together and newcomers merge quickly into becoming valued Members. No generation gap here! They welcome all with open arms and enthusiasm.



The Branch's monthly programs come together by asking Members to submit their ideas for guest speakers. A dedicated committee works during the summer to select nine of the most interesting ideas. Once all is confirmed, the program is printed and a copy is given to each Member in September for the upcoming year.

In 2007, through the work of dedicated individuals, the Windermere Area Archive was created. This Archive collects and preserves the history of the Township of Watt. Most of the information comes from the community at large and the donated material never ceases to amaze Branch Members, so much in fact that a specific archive room was needed to collect and store the pictures, books and letters. Volunteers work at least one day per week or will accommodate visitors upon request. They enter data into a computer database, scrapbook, sort, scan, photocopy and showcase information on their website: www.windermerearea.ca.

The Branch successfully completed the publication of two cookbooks, one in 2004 and a second in 2015. These two

books have been well received and created substantial funds enabling them to donate to two local hospitals, the community school, local health centre, community needs, Hospice Muskoka, local camps for children with cancer or diabetes, and youth from the area who otherwise could not go to camp.

Some of the activities keeping Members busy lately are sewing fidget blankets for residents of the Pines Long Term Care Home who are living with Alzheimer's, visiting shut-ins at Christmas, packing gift items into shoe boxes for women's shelters, participating in the spring road clean-up, holding in-Branch auctions, catering funeral teas, family parties, playing cards, visiting spas, theatres or joining the out-to-lunch bunch. Yes, they are active but as the Members proclaim, "Our diversity is our strength!"

Pictured: Members of Windermere WI display the many fidget blankets they created for residents of the Pines Long Term Care Home in Bracebridge. See the FWIO Facebook Page for media coverage on this special project.