

Women's institutes are fighting

By ELIZABETH PATTON
The Spectator

BRANTFORD — The village baker used to deliver unwrapped bread by horse and buggy — until a member of the women's institute watched him slap his horse's rear and pick up her light rye with the same hand.

The Women's Institute led the fight for pasteurized milk after a member's son died from bacterial infection, and for rural day care, when farm parents were forced to take their children on dangerous field machinery.

Members of the Hamilton Area Women's Institute have spent almost a century fighting the issues of their day. Now they're fighting for the institute's survival.

The main problem is a lack of new members, said delegates attending the annual convention at Brant Park Inn this week. Their average age province-wide is close to 60. About 400 of 25,000 Ontario members are under 35, officials estimate.

"We're old enough to have history, young enough to make history. And if we don't move ahead, we may be

history," secretary-treasurer Billie Forrest told almost 300 from the institute's associations in Lincoln, Wentworth, Haldimand, Welland, Brant and Norfolk.

Members fear the institute will be lost in the fast-paced world of career women and working mothers. Most say they joined as homemakers, to make friends and take a break from routine. It was a chance to talk to adults for a change, said a mother of two.

"But these days women get those things from work relationships. They don't have time to come out for meetings," said Pam Bronn, a 25-year member from Fonthill.

The country's first Women's Institute grew in 1897 in Stoney Creek, from a groundswell of concern for issues about the home — hygiene, childcare and home safety. Its foothold was in the tight-knit society of rural areas, and it came from the grass roots.

Even those communities aren't participating much these days. "Farm wives are no slouches among working women," said Jean Dickhaut of Dunnville. "They work all the time. They keep computers in their homes." The institute has turned its focus from the home, to teach leadership and skills.

lack of interest as much as issues

Members say women's success in business is good to see, but some warn the price is high.

"I think men have been lonelier for confining their social life to business contacts," said Mrs. Bronn. "When they retire those friends drop them." Friends at the institute, usually neighbors, are friends for life, she said.

Institute activities gave her confidence she never knew before. "I had a stuttering problem as a child. I couldn't imagine talking in public but I was able to do it at these meetings because I knew they were just like me."

After that she had no problem addressing MPs or local councils. They've visited nursing homes, picked up street rubbish, and forced a junkyard to clean up its act.

No job is too small for the institute. A penny drive raising \$300 may seem like chicken feed next to a gala fundraiser at \$50 a pop. But Mrs. Bronn sees her share as one part of a huge picture, with nine million others contributing to the Women's Institute parent group, the Associated Country Women of the World. The ACWW has a delegation advising the United Nations, she said.

In addition the Ontario institute successfully fought for provincial legislation improving tax deductions, re-packaging bacon to be visible to the consumer, and requiring flashing lights on school buses. The Allenburg chapter was responsible for founding Brock University in St. Catharines, she said.

Today area delegates are voting on whether to champion a ban on all plastic containers and a push for mandatory headrests in pickup trucks.

To succeed will take some doing — they're still pushing for seatbelts in school buses. They're looking to their daughters for strength in numbers. Many recall being brought into the institute by their own mothers and grandmothers.

Gwen Piper followed her mother-in-law's lead in 1937.

"They were the most interesting group," she recalled of the Port Colborne branch she still attends. "I was barely in the door and they sent me to study furniture refinishing." Then she taught the other members. "I've used it all my life," she said.

OCT 89

October 4, 1989



During its meeting last month, members of the Beamsville Women's Institute agreed unanimously to withdraw their food booth from future Lincoln County Fairs. Shown here at this year's edition of the food booth are Mina Juhke (left) and Norma Burse.

Unanimous decision: fair food booth axed

(The following report was submitted by Angela Valli for the Beamsville Women's Institute.)

The Beamsville Women's Institute (BWI) had 19 members turn out for its first meeting of the fall season on Tuesday, Sept. 19.

However, instead of just noting their attendance, the women were asked by Dorothy Burch, convener, that roll call be answered by telling what had occupied the site that Lincoln's town hall now stands on. Scrap books were also on display.

It was unanimously agreed that the BWI would cease to participate at the Lincoln County Fair in the future. The food booth had been in existence since 1951. All members that had given their time over the years were thanked.

A special thanks was given to Barbara Stones, president, for her time in the management of and purchasing for the fair.

The BWI entertained residents at Albright Manor on September 13. A successful party was held for all those residents with September birthdays.

The Hamilton Area Convention will be held on October 24 and 25. A representative is still needed.

A trip to Westbrook Greenhouses in Grimsby has been planned for the meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 17. All members are to meet at St. Albans at 1:15 p.m. Members from the Vineyard WI will be our guests.

The BWI welcomes Nellie Mairs as a new member and thanks goes to all those who contributed tapes and labels for the Community Club Awards.



WE'LL DRINK TO THAT

World War One veterans Gord Brown (left) and Bill Kimmitt, both residents of Albright Manor in Beamsville, toasted the Grimsby Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion last Saturday night for hosting the WW1 Veterans and WW1/WW2 Widows Dinner. The annual affair has become a tradition at the Branch.

Nov 89