

Women's Institutes in Ontario 'keen to make a difference'

One hundred and three years ago horse and buggy was the transportation of choice and a community meeting was the best, and maybe the only place to acquire new information in rural Ontario, today WI members travel the breadth of our country and even our globe by plane to meet for conferences and fellowship, and they are becoming as comfortable with e-mail and the Internet as their techie sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters.

The WI website www.fwio.on.ca is visited by readers worldwide. Now many WI members no longer rely on a phone call for news, a host of e-mails each morning connects them with others across the province, the country and even the globe.

The nearly 12,000 members who make up the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario are as keen today as their predecessors were 103 years ago when Erland and Janet Lee and Adelaide Hunter Hoodless laid down the constitution of Women's Institutes at a first-ever meeting attended by 101 women in Stoney Creek, Ontario in 1897.

The educational programs initiated to promote safe pasteurized milk for babies and children back in the turn-of-the-century are being mirrored today with Federated Women's

Institutes of Ontario's (FWIO) new Health Program, being implemented province-wide during 2000 & 2001. The program, funded by Ministry of Health / Women's Health Council, will be providing FWIO members and rural Ontario women with access to vital health information.

Featuring the resources of FWIO's Health Partners (listed below), community workshops will be delivered in rural communities throughout Ontario, and organized and hosted by participating WI Branches. Branches will receive substantial support through Leadership Training, an event planning kit and promotional material, which will assist their planning activities.

This program provides numerous benefits. Not only will it increase awareness of important health issues, it will provide access to resources for prevention and treatment of disease and health problems, which will assist in improving the health of women and their families living in rural communities.

On another front FWIO will continue the 1999 initiative to join forces with the OPP's Phonebuster department to educate communities about the dangers of financial loss and emotional distress from falling victim to telemarketing fraud.

WI members have been

ever mindful of their ability to lobby government to create change in both community and country starting back at the turn-of-the-century with such basic fundamental issues as having milk pasteurized and having bread wrapped; then white lines down the centre of provincial highways FOR IMPROVED SAFETY ON ROADS; music in school curriculum (1937); legal age for marriage at 16 years with parental consent (1937); traffic to halt when school buses stop to pick up and drop off children (1962).

In more recent times WI's efforts to enforce such issues as handicapped parking regulation (1985) AND TO PROMOTE MORE funding for health care, have been recognized by our politicians. Before becoming an FWIO resolution each issue of concern is discussed and processed from WI Branch, to WI District, WI Area to WI Lobbying Coordinator and then presented to FWIO Board for approval and action. Grassroots-based, WI lobbying continues to work to protect the families and communities of Ontario.

FWIO members are as busy at a local level as FWIO is at a provincial level and wherever there is a Branch, that community will benefit from WI members' energy. Children in play schools, seniors in

nursing homes, hospital patients, adults with reading problems, are likely to experience the friendly smile, the helping hand or the skills of a WI member. Craft shows, health fairs, fundraising, entertainment, WI members are busy in their communities.

Women's Institutes, born 103 years ago in Ontario, is now a national organization and Federated Women's Institutes of Canada (FWIC) reflects a national viewpoint for WI members, and members Canada-wide will gather in Brandon, Manitoba this June for their Triennial Convention.

On a global scale WI members are also members of Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and many will take advantage of the opportunity to meet like-minded women from around the world at the ACWW 23 Triennial Conference to be held in Hamilton in June of 2001.

To continue the work started 103 years ago WI branches are always in need of new members who will bring new energy, new insights and skills to assist present members. To learn more about FWIO contact FWIO office in Guelph at 519-836-3078; FAX 519-836-9456 or e-mail fwio@sentex.net; or Internet www.fwio.on.ca.

Submitted by the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.