

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE CELEBRATES CENTENARY OF WORKING TO 'IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CANADIANS'

By Michael Polvere
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INGERSOLL — They're many of the things we take for granted today — milk pasteurization, dividing lines on roads, fluorescent safety jackets for road workers and plastic wrap on bread.

They've helped create many commonplace things that make society a safer place to live.

Women's institutes far and wide have helped bring them all to fruition, and on Monday night, close to 200 local women celebrated the Oxford District Women's Institute 100th anniversary at the Elm Hurst Inn in Ingersoll. It was 100 years ago that Oxford women got together in Springford for their first meeting.

"It's pretty exciting," said current president Janet Uren. "We're the largest women's organization and we've done a lot of good.

"It's important to everybody. It's important worldwide."

Lillian White has been a member for half a century but was first introduced to the organization as a guest 10 years before that, in 1943, when she knitted socks for soldiers in the Second World War.

When she joined the local women's institute, it was to become a better mother and homemaker, she said, but later White became interested in the resolutions that could create laws and change society.

The 83 year old remembers when the group pushed to have school buses equipped with flashing lights that would

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stop drivers in both directions so kids could cross the road safely.

"We helped with that," White said proudly. "We got the buses to stop (vehicles) both ways... We've been on everything."

Sherrill Babbey, public relations co-ordinator for the group, said when a young Ontario boy died from contaminated milk in 1897, his mother, Adelaide Hoodless, was adamant that it never happen again and worked to spread the message to other women to boil milk.

It was from there that the

Women's Institute was born and spread across Canada.

"Family is the primary interest," Babbey said. "A safe lifestyle for home and country."

And the group's work continues today, said Ilene Chesterman, with an involvement in programs that promote women's health in rural areas.

"We hope to improve the lives of Canadians and educate women on food safety," she said.

The party at the Elm Hurst included a dinner, ceremonial cake cutting, special guest speakers and entertainment.