



Purple Valley WI members, l-r, back: Sharon Gilbert, Rachel Hepburn, Margaret Urbshott, Doreen Gilbert, Charlene Hepburn, Yvonne Warner. Front: Edna Cook, Ethel McLean, Olive Burt, Margaret Urbshott, and Audrey Hepburn

Purple Valley WI celebrates 60 years

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Still faithful to its rural roots

**By Lindsay Eaglesham
Staff reporter**

"It was like a trip to Toronto. You were just so thrilled to go to the meetings."

That's how 86-year-old Ethel McLean summed up her early memories of the Purple Valley Women's Institute.

"It's still fun. We're all such friends," the senior member said at a special meeting celebrating the group's 60th anniversary.

This was a festive occasion, held at the home of Audrey Hepburn on County Road 18 last week. After 11 member ladies (six were absent) conducted the group's regular business, they reminisced about the history of the Purple Valley WI before winding up the get-together with a late 'lunch' and diamond anniversary cake.

Monthly meetings in the 1930s and 40s were all festive occasions, Edna Cook said. She recalls her mother Eva Gilbert, a founding member, telling her that in those days the tradition was for five women to take turns with the food supply for every meeting. "Some

**During the war years,
'We knit and knit until we
couldn't knit any more'
—Ethel McLean**

would bring six-quart baskets of sandwiches, and some made cakes," Edna said.

In the early years children often attended with their mothers, and meetings were held in the afternoon, alternating at members homes, usually farms. When times changed and many women began working outside the home "they started to have the meetings at night," Margaret Urbshott said.

The women laughed when president Charlene Gilbert read minutes from some of the old meetings—in 1942 the federal government awarded the branch a \$3 grant; "cash on hand" in one 1943 entry showed \$1.18.

At the start-up in 1934, the membership fee was 10 cents. "And some of the women couldn't afford that!" Edna said. In 1942 it

went up to 25 cents, today the membership is \$15.

Good works and volunteerism have been the hallmark of Women's Institutes since the organization was founded in Stoney Creek Ontario by Adelaide Hoodless in 1897. Hoodless first

launched the women's group as a lobby to have pasteurization of milk legislated. The WI is now a world-wide movement, but its motto, 'For Home and Country,' has kept it faithful to its rural roots with the emphasis on helping needy neighbors.

The women provide gifts for newborn babies in the community, throw showers for young mothers, visit and comfort the sick and the elderly. The Purple Valley group has been especially active in support of 4-H over the years, sponsoring 'homemaking clubs' and events. Besides that, fundraising through quilt auctions has been a traditional means of generating money for needy causes, including

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