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Unless more women are willing to do just what Popov has accomplished, however, it is feared further WI branches will fall to the wayside. Popov reports that in her own county she knows of branches which are fading away, with no younger members joining to keep them thriving.

Rebecca agrees, and visualizes the organization as losing most of its members in the number of years if it cannot attract newer people to join.

The method to do this, she suggests, is by altering programs to suit women of the area — holding the meetings at convenient times and including topics which would most interest them.

However, Women's Institute is already dealing with a number of issues which are likely to be of interest to younger women, although they are not "farm" topics. In resolutions the organization has sent through its provincial body, it has addressed such issues as acid rain, pornography and pensions for homemakers.

Not only has the WI sent resolutions to government officials expressing their views on these topics, but they have also been sent with the backing of a majority of all of the nearly 26,000 members. Each resolution generated from a member or branch level must pass through every level of the organization before it can reach the provincial body for a vote. This allows all of the membership an opportunity to express opinions on any given resolution.

The result is a potentially powerful lobbying group.

"When 26,000 people are speaking, the government may just sit up and listen," Ontario president of FWIO, Charlotte Johnson remarks.

It is this kind of backing younger women could find for their causes if they chose to join WI, its members suggest, but it is also this procedure which has come under criticism by members of other women's organizations.

Resolutions passing through the WI structure take about one year to do so, since they must travel through each section of the organization, from branch to district to area, and finally onto the provincial body.

"It takes forever," Rebecca admits, pointing out that even if a resolution makes it to the provincial level, it may be turned back to the branch originating it if it is written incorrectly. Rebecca, as a member of a committee studying the structure and future of WI, recommends a more expedient manner be found to take a resolution to the provincial organization. FWIO president, Charlotte Johnson, agrees with her. The Cochrane resident recommends members be taught how to write briefs so they might bypass the resolution system.

Despite its structural problems, WI's system of parliamentary procedures is still praised by members of other farm women's organizations. Suzanne Leach admits WSA may have to eventually turn to WI for guidance in developing a more rigid structure once the organization matures.

Leach and other members of WSA also showed support for the Women's Institute in the community work it has done. And this is surely one of its strongest points.

WI members can be seen holding fund-raising events to devote money to community projects. They are often found in nursing homes, spending time with lonely residents. WI members have also undertaken some of their own community projects, such as the one created by Marcie Johnston, in Bruce County.

## WI's beginnings

In 1857, a "woman with a vision" was born. She was a moving force in creating home economics courses in Ontario schools; took part in expanding the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) on a national level; served on the International Council of Women; and was chosen as most distinguished woman of the year by a British publication.

However, in rural Ontario and the small communities and backroads across the world, she is remembered as the founder of Women's Institute.

The woman is Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, raised a farm girl in Brant County. She was married and had four children, but the last child, John Harold, died at 18 months from drinking contaminated milk. This prompted Hoodless to launch a campaign to educate farm and urban women alike on the hygienic value of food and to raise the standard of life for farm people.

Hoodless initially met with the farm women who would help create the first Women's Institute group through Erland Lee, a young farmer and secretary of the Farmer's Institute of Saltfleet Township. He had heard Hoodless speak at the Agricultural College at Guelph and requested her to give a talk at a farm meeting in his own township.

She did so, and in a subsequent meeting inspired the farm women of that area to form the first Women's Institute in the world. The date was February 19, 1897. According to a biography on Hoodless written by Ruth Howes, the women hoped to improve the home from the physical, intellectual and cultural standpoints, making Hoodless their honorary president. They even adopted her suggestion for a motto, "for home and country" - one

that is still used today.

The idea of a rural women's group spread, and it became a national organization in Canada in 1919.

Today, the Federated Women's Institute of Ontario (FWIO) boasts of over 25,600 members, entailing 1,152 branches across the province. There is also the Federated Women's Institute of Canada (FWIC), which encompasses membership from all 10 provinces. Formed in 1919, its intentions are similar to those of the provincial organizations, except it works on a national basis, co-ordinating programs of provincial units and initiating nation-wide programs.

But Women's Institute has spread far beyond this. In 1933 it became international with the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW). Having a membership of over nine million in 66 countries of the world, the ACWW works closely with the United Nations, and holds a world conference every three years to decide policies, discuss matters of mutual concern, elect officers and vote on resolutions "of importance to all."

In Ontario, FWIO is divided into different levels, beginning with the individual member, to branch, district, area, and finally the provincial body.

Members hold conventions under which speakers are brought in for meetings to discuss issues. They convenorships are: agriculture and Canadian Industries; citizenship and world affairs; education and cultural activities; family and consumer affairs; and resolutions.

While WI was originated by mostly farm women, its members now share a variety of backgrounds, including farm and town women,