

"Building for Tomorrow"

Theme for the 90th anniversary of the Women's Institute

"Building for Tomorrow" is the theme for the 90th anniversary of the Women's Institutes of Ontario. To help mark this occasion, over 1000 members of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) attended a provincial convention in North Bay. The 90 years of achievements were reviewed and the theme of the convention was enlarged upon with speakers, workshops and a panel discussion.

Time is divided into three main parts - past, present and future. Each is a link in the chain of time which cannot be broken. These links are interdependent and equally important. "The future depends on the foundations laid in the past."

Ninety years ago, Adelaide Hoodless had a vision for an organization which would assist women in the efficient operation of their homes. Encouraged and aided by Erland Lee and wife, Janet, she gave impetus to form the first Women's Institute at Stoney Creek Feb. 19, 1897. This organization, now known throughout many countries, is Ontario's contribution to the world.

From that one branch, with 75 members, there was a rapid growth. Branches increased in numbers across Ontario. By 1900, three years later, there were 33 branches and 1602 members. Rural women were seeking information about conditions that affected their homes and families. By 1904, there were 149 branches and 5433 members. This growth continued, then spread to the remainder of Canada. In 1919, both the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) and the Federated Women's Institute of Canada (FWIC)

were formed. By the zeal of Mrs. Alfred Watt, a Canadian, who organized the first women's Institute in England and Wales, the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) was founded in 1933.

The motto of the Women's Institute, *For Home and Country*, evolved into programs that met the needs of the women of rural communities and villages. They learned about sanitation and health; nursing and home care; beautifying and decorating homes.

Women Institute members developed leadership and self-confidence, the ability to conduct meetings properly and to organize events. They also learned to speak fluently and express their ideas clearly. They began to speak about the conditions that affected their homes and families. They formulated resolutions to influence action regarding community concerns and social issues.

Communities thrived! Homes were beautified. The emphasis on nutrition created new foods, new recipes and new food-handling techniques related to sanitation and storage. Women were exchanging information, sharing ideas and meeting women outside the home. They were learning and working together. As they travelled, they became more concerned about fashion, new materials and sewing methods and also interested in labour-saving devices for their homes. "What has been called the "Institute Spirit" evidenced itself throughout the countryside of old Ontario.

The keynote speaker at the convention was R. Alex Sim who recently completed research for his book, "The New Rural Community." He

urged the WI members to ask themselves, "Where are we going"? He also stressed the need to again identify a vision.

"The rural community is a raft swept down a river of change", Sim said. "There is a lack of rapport, communication and neighbour interaction. Do you know who lives in those new homes on the concession? What are their concerns? What are their interests? Today's community occupies the same space but has no power."

Sim challenged the WI members to put community back into Ontario; intensify their efforts to give leadership to the rural community. Unite those people and get them to look around and make decisions for themselves. Reread the objectives of the Women's Institute which are:

- to assist and encourage women to become more knowledgeable and responsible citizens;
- to promote and develop good family life skills;
- to help discover, stimulate and develop leadership; and
- to help identify and resolve needs in the community.

Then discover how to bring it together. Rejuvenate the rural community!

"This is a chance to renew old friendships, to make new ones, to communicate, to compare experiences and to reinforce and revitalize our beliefs in our aims and objectives", said Mrs. Margaret Munro, FWIO provincial president, as she addressed the convention.

"Our members may come in different sizes, shapes, colours and creeds, with different opinions and from different localities, but we have at least two things in common. We are all active, enthusiastic, dedicated, interested members of the largest rural women's organization in Canada, with an impressive history and a challenging future. We are all VIP - Vitaly Important People - vital to our families, vital to our various communities, vital to our country and, of course, vital to the Women's Institute.

"The need for our organization is as strong now, maybe stronger, than it was 90 years ago. You are the roots of this organization. How we grow depends on you and your cooperation."

Mrs. Munro challenged each member to volunteer for an office at some level of the organization; to knock on a few doors in the community and meet a new neighbour; to gain one new member in each branch by the end of 1987.

"The mind is like a parachute, it only functions when it's open", explained

Rosalie Wysocki, a leader in the field of personal development and one of Canada's foremost speakers on the subject. Relating to the topic *Managing Change Positively* she stressed that a positive mental attitude is a priority for continued success and growth. Success is 15% technical training and 85% personal development. "It's your attitude not your aptitude that determines the altitude you reach in life." Each member was challenged to develop personally by setting two significant goals in her life each year, then take inventory on her birthday. Always remember that a person has failures to achieve success.

FWIC President, Mrs. Beatrice Reeves from P.E.I. explained how she survived the cultural shock of moving from a large city to a rural setting. "The WI reached out and made me a part of the community."

Throughout the past year, "free trade seminars" have been organized by the WI in every province and the results compiled into a brief.

In June, 1988, the FWIC triennial convention will be held in St. John's Newfoundland. At that time, agriculture and public relations will have priority under the theme, "Shaping Out Tomorrow's Today."

The FWIO International Scholarship, established in 1962, is used to train young women from under-developed countries so that they may return and teach their own people. Members had the opportunity to meet the recent recipient, Libbylu Allen from Jamaica, when she told of her work in that country. Under the Jamaican Federation of Women, Libbylu co-ordinated early childhood education in 76 basic community schools with emphasis on sanitation, nutrition, teaching tips and motivation by example. FWIO supports Libbylu with a year's salary of \$2,000 and provides \$1,500 for an assistant's salary.

A panel moderated by Mrs. Peggy Knapp, addressed the topic *Rural Women - An Emerging Force*. The panel members stated their positions: Joyce Canning, co-ordinator Rural Women's Programs, OMAF, "mandate is to develop and enhance the human resource skills of rural people so that they can provide effective leadership to agricultural community in Ontario"; Diane Harkin, Women for the Survival of Agriculture, "represent a new breed of farm women, a self-help group zeroing in on agriculture, who study, research then lobby. There is strength in a small,

unstructured group that can act quickly";

Carol Hyde, Junior Women's Institutes of Ontario, "rural women have always been a force. Today, these women are changing and are open to new ideas to help recreate a sense of community"; Rebecca Johnson, FWIO, "feels that WI can cut across boundaries and barriers because the organization is open to all women - can unite a community by providing a common meeting ground. Evolution is occurring in our WI, we must adapt to continue to attract women. We must develop a greater degree of efficiency, a positive mental attitude and continue to develop the women personally"; and

Brigid Pyke, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, "women have been a force in developing our country and are still a force to be reckoned with. There is room for more women on the OFA board, whose role is to safeguard farmers' concerns".

Because the Women's Institute is an educational organization, promoting personal growth and community action, one day of the convention was a focus on education. The members had the opportunity to become better informed as they attended workshops.

Reflections and Visions, comprised of skits, songs, poems and fashions, provided an evening of entertainment and celebration and allowed the members to recall achievements and events of the organization through the decade.

The speaker, at the closing banquet, was Dr. Ellen McLean, president of Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) from Eureka, N.S.

Dr. McLean urged the members to "look at the past, consider the present and prepare for the future. Everybody needs a bit of history to be conscious of the debt you owe to those who came before. This is a time of reflection, rejoicing and renewal."

The women's groups that form ACWW have different names and different countries, but the nine million members in 66 countries are working and striving for the same thing - to improve the life of women and their families. Clean water sources; baby clinics; nutrition; sanitation and new latrines and many self-help projects all lead towards this goal.

The Women's Institute at all times stresses high standards in studies, projects, courses aimed at improving home and family life; in developing leadership and in serving the community.

Mother's At The Institute

That time of month has rolled around,
The kitchen's empty, there's no sound,
And hubby knows, without dispute,
She's off to the Women's Institute.
A casserole will be the winner
When Mom gets home to cook the dinner,
Something fast must be the way,
When W.I. meets for the day.
When this day comes, there is no doubt,
There's no one home, the cook is out,
And hubby doesn't really mind,
Somewhere a sandwich, he will find,
On her return, she's full of news,
And recipes for different stews,
Or maybe she has learned to bake
A different kind of homemade cake.
Or maybe her community
Is having something locally,
A fair, a euchre or a tea
And she's excited as can be.
Dad smiles, he thinks she's pretty cute
To belong to the Women's Institute.

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