

Women's Institute update mandate

By ROB SAVAGE
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Thomson News Service

TORONTO - If the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) have a reputation as a homebody's club, organizers say that won't last long.

The Women's Institutes are conducting strategic planning sessions to update their mandate. The Institutes hope to make the FWIO attractive to young women and other potential new members.

Ruth Halbert, a retired FWIO director from Shelburne, said in an interview that membership in Ontario has been declining. The FWIO is changing its mandate to attract new members, she said.

While she didn't know how the group's mandate would change, she said it would be different.

"I don't know what yet, but it's coming," she said in an interview at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto.

The FWIO was promoting its activities during the fair.

The Women's Institutes were formed in 1897 at a time when rural women didn't get out much. Currently, though, the FWIO provides money to third world countries and passes resolutions that go to government bodies, Halbert said.

The FWIO has voiced its opposition to pornography and was also opposed to the closing of rural post offices.

At its display at the Royal Winter Fair, the group was promoting the theme, Women and the Environment. Workshops have been held teaching women ways to fight pollution and other environmental problems, Halbert said.

There are about 20,000 women in the Women's Institutes in Ontario.

Halbert said there are a number of professional women in the group, including nurses and teachers. It isn't just a group of housewives, she said.

"Most women can't afford to sit at home anymore."

The FWIO also isn't solely for farmers' housewives, Halbert said.

"All women are welcome. It doesn't matter if they're in the city or the town."

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