

Champion Country

Covering Rural Halton
& Wellington County



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

✓ Loads of fun

Seven-year-old Sarah Bradley shows some of the items from the penny raffle sale that was part of the recent Country Bazaar at Boston Presbyterian Church. With Halloween now past, the bazaar season is in full swing leading up to Christmas.

Rural Watch looks to spread the word

By **ROBIN DOWNTON-POIRIER**
Special to The Champion

For Rural Watch to enjoy continued success, the entire community needs to be actively involved, says organizer and founding member Jean Woods.

"I would really like to see everyone in the area involved," she stressed. "When thieves come out to the country, they go from house to house until they find an empty one. It's important that everyone knows what is going on so we can prevent more crime."

Into its 20th year, Rural Watch began in 1985 because it was felt that a new communication tool was needed for residents to inform and protect each other due to the distance between rural homes compared to urban homes. Urban residents have the advantage of looking out their window at their neighbours' homes and can instantly report anything suspicious. This is usually not possible in rural areas.

Beginning with 11 members, some of them still involved, Rural Watch was established and all the information was communicated by phone with a pyramid plan. Some things have changed over the years but the initial purpose of keeping the rural community and police informed

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JEAN WOODS

about possible criminal activity and keeping neighbourhoods safe remains the same.

"When we were doing it all by phone, there were 1,200 people on the (phone) pyramids and it was hectic," says Ms Woods. "Today, there are 100 people on my e-mail list and others are forwarded the information through them. As well, we still call the people who do not have a computer."

Rural Watch organizers often receive information from Halton Regional Police regarding crime, such as break-ins in the community, and the information is passed along to residents so they can be aware, protect their homes and themselves, and be alert for the suspects.

Rural Watch has also been used to find lost pets, catch mail thieves, and spread the word about roadside clean-up initiatives.

"We had a couple of arrests in the past

• see **CITIZENS** on page 15

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