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# Gifts from Mother Earth

One by one the neat vials of colorful beans are lifted from beneath the checkered dish towel that had hidden them in the three-quart fruit basket. Iowne Anderson is very careful how she protects her precious collection which represents a life-long interest in "the food that is there for all of us ... in the ground."

All we have to do is cultivate and harvest, she says.

The Six Nations resident says she has been fascinated by the "gifts from Mother Earth" as long as she can remember. She'd even hang plants from the rafters of her childhood home, plant seeds in all sorts of containers, nurturing them with the love of a born gardener.

And as a senior who describes herself as "sixty-going-on-seventy," she's still at it but with a greater purpose than ever before. In fact, Iowne is convinced that it is high time for people, wherever and whenever possible, to get back to growing their own healthy food.

She is prepared to back up her conviction by promoting, teaching and always keeping up her own extensive agricultural involvement. To this end she has instituted the Horticultural Learning and Resource Centre where she hopes to offer hands-on classes in both flower and vegetable gardening.

Located in the former No. 10 School, by permission of the Band Council, the Resource Centre will focus on the many benefits to a community that re-learns how to feed itself.

Independence, self-esteem, better health, a longer life span and the satisfaction of seeing those seeds sprout and grow are among the rewards Iowne promises all who will listen.

"At the moment, I am the Resource Centre," Iowne laughed because there is so much to be done to develop the premises. She has started on a fund-raising campaign by holding a flea market on the site and will build on this small scale initial effort, adding her own fresh fruit and vegetables as the season progresses. With further community involvement, it's hoped that there will soon be enough revenue raised to hook up the water and electricity — the most important steps in establishing classes which will be available to everyone.

My meeting with Iowne took place at the Bear's Inn, the handsome country inn constructed of White Pine logs and located on the 4th Line Road, half a mile east of Chiefswood Road.

I was introduced to Andrea Sandy, administrative assistant with Plenty Canada, the international development and non-governmental organization that has its Six Nations research offices on the lower level of Bear's Inn.

There is great concern, Andrea explained, about challenges faced in native communities in building their own sound agricultural programs, with special interest shown by the rural and community minded citizens of southern Africa.

Later, I met Tim Johnson, communications director for Plenty Canada which has its headquarters in Lanark, Ont. He was presiding over one in a series of workshops designed to address the needs in developing countries. There were a number of representatives from Lesotho in attendance for the weekend event.

This particular workshop dealt with the problem of obtaining, retaining and implementing a water system in remote areas. Tim is promoting workshops on an ongoing basis as part of a widespread rural outreach program and is directing an agricultural project, researching market development for indigenous foods of the Americas.

Iowne's participation in Plenty Canada programs has initiated travels to foreign countries such as Sri Lanka where she attended a soya bean project, involving all aspects of its importance in agriculture.

"After staying at home raising 10 children, I was ready to take off," the soft spoken grandmother of 18 remarked.

Iowne seems prepared to go almost anywhere to promote the values her people have adhered to for centuries, the work ethic and conviction that the earth will provide.

Her main concern is for today's children, many of whom may be growing up with a dependency on government handouts. She is also on a joint steering committee for Nutrition, sponsored by Health Canada, with emphasis on the dietary benefit of beans.

There is much concern about the increase of certain conditions such as diabetes, particularly among the Six Nations population; and the long-term effects of certain food products are being studied with a view to prevention and treatment.

"If only people would realize the good of growing your own food, including the healthy exercise in tending the garden and even developing your own recipes," Iowne says she loves to try out new bean salads, for instance and Andrea testified to one she sampled recently that included potato beans with pineapple tossed in for an exotic touch.

Many of the beans in Iowne's special collection have unusual names such as Pencil Pod, Jacob's Cattle, Wild Goose. The latter is attributed to an Allegheny legend about a brave who discovered beans in a dead wild goose. He planted the beans which became the source of many successful future harvests.

Iowne also displayed her rare Corn Bread Bean which she plans on registering (possibly under another name), and she reminded us that a well-balanced diet should include "the three sisters: corn, squash, beans."

Another bean is called Cherokee Trail of Tears, named for the seeds which members of the tribe carried with them when they were forced from their territory and had to seek a new life elsewhere.

There's a Grandma Walters bean "that must have been named for somebody's grandma" and so many more in the 15 jars I was privileged to inspect.



Iowne Anderson takes a look at some potato beans. In the foreground are (left to right) strawberries, wild goose beans, cranberry beans and Jacob's cattle beans.