

COMMUNITY: Three of 111 branches still operating

# Women's Institutes left large legacy across region

BY STEPHANIE WEST

Women's Institutes were once neighbourhood institutions across York Region. Not so much in 2011.

But leaders of the organization say they're still vital.

And with the help of regional politicians, they won't be forgotten.

The York Centre District Women's Institute, the umbrella organization for the groups, had 25 women at its 62nd annual meeting at the Lemonville Community Centre, near Stouffville, this month.

*Blame the death of family farms, urbanization and the working mom for the loss in popularity, organizers say.*

Founded in 1897, the organization once had 111 branches locally. There are now three, in Vandorf, Bogartown and Nobleton.

Blame the death of family farms, urbanization and the working mom for the loss in popularity, organizers say.

They hope York Region council will erect

a plaque honouring the organization in its Newmarket headquarters. The plaque is ready to be turned over to the politicians.

"We deserve to be recognized in a regional building," said district secretary Sheila Richardson.

Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson, who attended the annual meeting, is championing their cause at the region. The plaque will be presented to regional Chairperson Bill Fisch June 9.

"It's to leave a legacy to our future generation," said district president Florence White.

The organization is also busy tracking down and digitalizing each of the branch's Tweedsmuir, books holding the valuable history of each community.

Many hard copies of the books can be found at the City of Vaughan Archives, Etobicoke Public Libraries, Aurora Library, and Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum.

In recent years, branch members have raised money through fundraisers, donations and their very successful Black Creek Pioneer Village Heritage Days event where the women sold baked goods, including 50 homemade pies by the piece.

Members of the three branches have completed the equivalent of more than 6,000 vol-

unteer hours so far this year.

"We're still here and we're still active," Mrs. White said.

There are provincial and national federations of institutes.

Their legacy includes ensuring mandatory stopping for school buses, signs at railway crossings, enforcement of the use of slow-moving vehicle signs, blue box recycling and proper markings on highways.

Last July, members of the Nobleton institute took a visit to the Boynton Sod Farm where they met Nick Boynton, who won the Stanley Cup last year with the Chicago Blackhawks. A group picture was taken with Mr. Boynton and the Cup in honour of his late grandmother, Jean Boynton, who was a 60-year member of the institute.

"We are a very vital and supportive group," said vice-president Anja Karppa.



PHOTO/STEPHANIE WEST

Sheila Richardson (left) and Florence White at meeting of area Women's Institutes in Lemonville this month with plaque being presented to York Regional council next month.



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