

Women's institutes seek to shed 'old ladies club' image

By **Mary MacArthur**
Western Producer staff

CAMROSE, Alta. — Shortly after joining the Alberta Women's Institutes in 1952, Doris Northey dreamed of becoming president.

She had just heard Martha Beilish, the first woman senator from Alberta, talk at the provincial convention.

"I thought 'I would like to be president of this organization,'" said Northey.

Forty-four years later Northey was elected president of the Alberta Women's Institutes.

"The time was just right," said Northey, a retired Red Deer farmer.

Not everyone may think the time is right to be head of the organization celebrating its centennial next year.

Many people see the women's institute as an organization of old

ladies only interested in handicrafts.

Government recognizes AWI

But Northey sees it differently. When the Alberta government wants an opinion from a rural group they turn to the women's institute.

"We're becoming recognized as the organization representing rural and urban people now," said Northey.

"The government is recognizing us," she said referring to governments coming to the institute to organize farm safety and child-care programs.

There are 1,600 members in 117

branches around the province. Almost 300 members were at the provincial convention at Augustana University College in Camrose.

As president, Northey sees her job as trying to let women know the organization is not just crafts.

"Our programs must fit the needs of the younger generation," she said.

Resolutions during the convention covered everything from Alberta's water act to discrimination of the elderly.

Sessions during the convention ranged from creative writing to help members write their family histories to resolution writing to help formulate resolutions at conventions.



Northey