

CONVENTION 2021 ~ KEYNOTE ADDRESS

What must we do to keep our organization sustainable, alive, and vibrant in terms of membership and goals? Let's build a legacy for the future!

There is a proverb regarding legacy building: "You can't really know where you are going until you know where you have been." We need to think about how the actions of our predecessors affected us. What resources did they leave behind? How did they shape our organization's culture?

Research shows that when we know we have benefited from the legacy of prior generations, that gets us thinking about the positive legacy we want to leave for future generations, and we tend to make better long-term oriented decisions.

I am going to briefly highlight some of the history of our organization. I would like you to reflect on the legacies that have been handed down to us.



Nancy Papież

Our Roots

In May 1937, a retired teachers' Bridge group in Toronto formed The Rendezvous Club. They were the first group of retired women teachers ever formed in Canada! Their motto was: To Care and Share. Between 1944 and 1956, the Rendezvous Club was at the forefront of attempts to address women's pension issues. They approached the Teachers' Superannuation Commission to make pension changes, without success. At this point, it became clear that they needed a larger provincial campaign. In 1954, a call went out to the province to form local groups of retired women teachers and report back to Toronto. This was a huge undertaking back in those days without email! The response was quick.

Our Organization is Born

In 1956, we became an organization. The women of the Toronto group were chosen as its first Provincial leaders. They had a strong tie to the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO, 1918-1998) who supported them on their

journey for pension improvement. The very first Convention was held in Toronto in 1957. One year later, in 1958, our Constitution was established, and we became the Ontario Association of Superannuated Women Teachers (OASWT), a title which we held for forty-one years.

The pension campaign was in full swing for a ten-year period, from 1956-1966, and it was immense with letters sent to members, meetings, and many briefings to the Ontario Legislature in Toronto. In Early 1967, legislation was passed that set the same minimum pension for both male and female teachers in Ontario. It was a long fight! It was also quite complicated. There were still injustices in pensions, but overall success was achieved with pension reform.

The Next 20 Years

During the '70s and '80s the emphasis included growing membership and expanding geographically throughout Ontario. There was also a focus on fine-tuning how the organization functioned at both the Provincial and Branch levels. There were many resolutions at Conventions!

Turning Points

Important "turning points" occurred during the 1990's and 2000's. At the Convention in 1998, a recommendation in a Resolution from a Special Strategic Planning Committee was Carried: *"That Membership be open to any retired woman teacher, whether or not she is receiving a teacher's pension."* This was big and it opened a door; presently, anyone who has taught in a classroom at any level of education can join our organization.

In 1999, our name changed to *Retired Women Teachers of Ontario (RWTO)*. In 2009, our name became bilingual: *Retired Women Teachers of Ontario/Organisation des enseignantes retraitées de l'Ontario (RWTO/OERO)*.

In 2009, the Preamble in the Constitution was amended to include our Motto (Caring and Sharing), Mission Statement, Vision Statement and Goals. This was significant as it gave direction to the organization and to the Branches, and it defined the culture of our organization.

Where Do We Go from Here?

It is now 2021. What legacies can we develop at the beginning of the 21st Century that will ensure that future generations in our organization will thrive?

First, let's think about our [Membership](#).

1. Should we open our organization to other Women Educational Professionals? We need to consider the following:
 - 25% of our membership is age 80+
 - 55% is between ages 70-79
 - 17% is between ages 60-69
 - 3% is between ages 50-59
- a) Is the percentage of new members compared to the number of members who will pass or become Life Members enough to sustain us?
- b) Education has changed over the last 30 years or so with the addition other educational professionals in our schools. They work with children in classrooms, have a vital role as partners with teachers in education and have become our friends in education.
- c) Will opening our organization to other women educational professionals really change our overall vision and goals?

[A decision on this topic will never come from the top down.](#)

[This needs to be a Branch resolution at an AGM.](#)

[The membership has the vote and decides.](#)

2. Should we encourage women of other cultures to join RWTO/OERO? As mentioned in "Uncommon Women", we have increasing population diversity in Canada. Many cultures have their own clubs and organizations. Surely there are female teachers within these groups who would like to join our organization. This is certainly something for Branches to think about locally.

3. Should we strengthen our ties with RTOERO, ETFO, OECTA, and OSSTF at both the Provincial and Branch levels? Perhaps we could find avenues for recruitment within these groups.
4. It should be noted that there is a Provincial Ad Hoc Marketing Committee that is presently looking into professional advertising for recruitment. Committee members have drawn up a list of initiatives. One initiative is 'coming to life' as Provincial will be advertising RWTO/OERO in both the English and French versions of "Professionally Speaking" magazine this year. We need to get our name out there!

We also need to look at our [Goals](#) as an organization.

1. Should we consider a common goal or a social action initiative? Members have been mentioning that they want to support a cause as an organization (e.g., the improvement of Long-Term Care Facilities in Ontario). We may need a Provincial Ad Hoc Committee to look at the legalities and feasibility of this and a resolution would also need to be put forward at an AGM. It is something we can all think about for the near future.
2. Are we going to continue to 'Embrace Technology' after the Pandemic? Over this past year, we have all learned the wonderful benefits of technology. Being together in person cannot be undermined, however technology has a place in the world of RWTO/OERO. Going forward, how can we utilize technology wisely at the Branch and Provincial levels?

[To be sustainable, organizations must always be moving ahead in terms of who they are, what they stand for and what they do.](#)

[I believe now is the time to build a Legacy for the Future!](#)

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Papiez

Provincial Past President 2021-22

Note: The history for this article was gathered from: Lenora M. Beech, and Mary Jane Finn (editor). *Uncommon Women*. Willow Publishing Company, Brighton, Ontario, Canada, 2011