

South Bruce Retired Women Teachers Are Thankful

Christine Roberts

It's appropriate at this time of year to reflect on and express gratitude for the blessings in our lives. With the theme, "We Are Thankful", members of the South Bruce Retired Women Teachers of Ontario / Organization des Enseignantes Retraitées de l'Ontario

(RWTO/OERO) gathered at the Pine River United Church October 17th to conduct business, share a meal and experience the incredible story of persistence and compassion of a Kincardine family who welcomed Ukrainian refugees into their home and hearts.



Eleanor Thompson presided over an emotional In Memoriam service for Eva Wilken who died January 12th, 2023. Remembering Eva as a good friend and outstanding member of the branch, Thompson recited poetry and outlined her teaching career.

Many members shared personal memories of Wilken as a colleague, mentor, friend, poet and first president of the South Bruce RWTO branch.

A report on the provincial RWTO/OERO convention in Kingston in early June was made by Carole Machan and Lynda Cerson. Machan spoke of the interesting activities, great food and entertainment and the important meetings and recognitions. The South Bruce branch was among the recipients of the Barbara Bain Award for increased membership.

Cerson reported on the much debated resolution to increase membership by inviting retired women educational assistants, early childhood educators and child and youth counsellors who worked in schools to join the organization.

The motto of the RWTO/OERO is Caring and Sharing and the South Bruce branch exemplifies this guiding principle in its charitable giving. In September members donated to the Kincardine Food Bank in support of school snack programs. For the October meeting feminine hygiene products were collected for donation to the local food bank. In November the branch will donate to the Christmas programs of the Kincardine and Saugeen Shores food banks and the Ripley Lions Christmas Hampers and to the United Way of Bruce Grey.



Following a delicious lunch prepared by the Pine River United Church ladies, the group moved upstairs into the church to welcome guest speaker, Bren de Leeuw.



De Leeuw's presentation, "Finding Peace in Rural Ontario", summarized the arduous journey of the Kovalenko family of five fleeing war torn Ukraine to settle in peaceful Kincardine.

Over the course of many months, countless and constant emails and social media posts this compassionate Kincardine family helped the Kovalenkos navigate the bureaucracy to finally arrive in Canada in April 2022 where they immediately became part of the de

Leeuw clan.

Both recently retired, the de Leeuws leveraged their career and community connections and forged new networks to support the newcomers as they acclimated to the culture, the language and began the process of building a new life.

Giving voice to what everyone was thinking, Bren expressed thankfulness for being Canadian and living in peace and prosperity.

Vice President JoAnn Ruetz thanked de Leeuw for her passionate presentation and for sharing her journey of caring with the group.

The next gathering of the South Bruce Retired Women Teachers will be the Christmas Tea November 23rd at the Kincardine United Church. Contact information and details will be posted at: <https://rwto.org/branch-new/south-bruce/>.

