

'Sisterly Caring' Shown By Cumberland Farm Women

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Lancaster Farming Staff
BOILING SPRINGS (Cumberland Co.) — Cumberland County Farm Women president Fran Westbrook has nothing but praise for members of her society. "We are like sisters. When one has a problem we all share in it," she said.

Recently, Fran recalled two times when she desperately needed the support of the members. The first time was when she was a young mother with four children. When the oldest was only 15 months old, she had twins. Then her youngest daughter was born with a dislocated hip. The daughter was hospitalized for several years at the Elizabethtown Children's Hospital. It required many trips between the Westbrook's Cumberland County farm to the Lancaster County Hospital.

After that daughter and the other children became adults, Fran again needed the support of Farm Women members when one of her grandsons was born prematurely and permanently blind eight years ago.

Now that the initial shock of facing this disappointing news has faded, Fran credits this grandson for helping her find her place in life — that as a member of a parent support group for the blind and hearing impaired.

The joy that this happy, well-adjusted child brings into life infuses Fran. Remembering the support she received from Farm Women members while she grappled with the adjustment brings nothing but praise from Fran's lips.

She said, "Farm Women members are just like having extra sisters to help you cope."

Fran's involvement with the organization began early. Her mother, Pauline Kreitzer, was Cumberland County president at one time and organized a new group. Because her mother was deeply involved and happy with Farm Women, Fran said, "My mother was thrilled to death when I was installed as county president on November 9. She was too ill to attend the installation, but I think that was the one thing that caused her to hang onto life as long as she did."

Fran's mother died on November 21.

Fran heads 22 societies with its 356 members in Cumberland County. She has helped organize a younger group composed of daughters of Farm Women. Her daughter-in-law, Kathy Westbrook, is president of Group 22.

"It's a problem getting younger ones to join," Fran said, "but unlike many other organizations that have each family member pursuing their own interests, Farm Women encourage family activities by sponsoring family picnics and Christmas gatherings. And, they are always helping families in need. Recently, the Cumberland County societies donated funds to a young man from Shippensburg facing a heart transplant. The societies also help support foster parenting for delinquent teens."

Fran said that she is one of three sisters who grew up on a farm. "We did all the farm work just like the boys would have done if there had been any," she said. "We did the milking and the field work."

After her marriage, she and her husband Galen farmed 300 acres



**Fran Westbrook
 Cumberland Co.
 Farm Women President**

for 13 years until her husband began a water drilling business. They purchased a 70-acre farm that they continue to live on and cash rent the fields.

The Westbrooks' children are now married and they have seven grandchildren. Two sons own and operate an excavating business on the family farm. A son-in-law works in her husband's well drilling business.

During her children's childhood, Fran said that she was active in everything that her children were involved in.

"I spent more time at school than home," she said. "I'm happy to have raised the children on the farm. There are so many benefits: such as responsibility and opportunities that come with farm life."

Fran believes it is important for mothers to be home with their children. "After they had grown and were away from home, they often remarked how nice it had been to come and have baking smells in the house and have me home," Fran said.

Her children have also made being an at-home mom a priority. When one of her daughters who was about to have a baby asked Fran, "Mom, what do you think I should do? We really need the money from my job."

Fran answered, "It depends on your priorities. If you feel you need new clothes and furniture, then keep your job. But if you believe it is more important to be with your children because you can never regain that time, stay home."

Fran said that her daughter chose to quit her job. "It was tough financially for them at first, but in the long run it's been a big benefit," Fran said.

She is grateful that her children and spouses are "wonderful mothers and fathers. We don't have any family problems that so many other families have today. I have a fantastic husband and we have been married 37 years," Fran said.

Those physical handicaps that her daughter and grandchild face have brought rewards. Fran said, "Our children benefitted because they knew what it was like to be handicapped. They always stuck up for the underdog. They learned to do that because of their sister when so many other children were cruel. Even though her leg was a problem, the experience taught and instilled values in our family."

Shortly after the birth of her blind grandson, Fran, as dairy princess chaperone, accompanied the Cumberland County dairy princess to a local school. Unknown to Fran beforehand, the presentation was to a class that was visually and hearing impaired. "It was very emotionally healing and fulfilling to see how the children were coping," she said. "It gave me hope."

Her grandson, who is now 8, attends the school where Fran had accompanied the dairy princess.

"We are so devoted to him. He takes piano lessons and we've attended several recitals. We are so proud of him," she said.

During Fran's tenure as county president, she hopes to incorporate fundraising for blind. That's my special interest," Fran said.

Fran does the bookwork for her husband. She is extremely proud of her youngest daughter who was out of school for five years before she decided to go to college. She is now a certified public accountant. I think the determination she developed because she was handicapped helped her earn her CPA within a short period of time," Fran said.

In her spare time, Fran bowls and golfs. She participates in a water exercise club three times weekly. And, she finds her Farm Women activities fulfilling.

"I just can't imagine what it would be like without Farm Women. We have so much joy helping others," she said.

Those who would like to know more about the Cumberland Farm Women societies, may call (717) 258-6403.

Here is Fran's husband's favorite chocolate cake recipe that has been handed down through the family. It is a moist cake that tastes best with peanut butter icing.

FISHERVILLE CHOCOLATE CAKE

4 squares unsweetened baking chocolate
 1 stick margarine
 1 cup boiling water
 Melt chocolate and butter in boiling water.
 2 teaspoons baking soda
 2 cups flour
 2 cups sugar
 Mix together in liquid. Add 1/2 cup sour milk, 2 eggs, 1 teaspoon vanilla. Blend and bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes.
 Cool. Frost with a basic peanut butter icing that may be made by adding peanut butter to taste to vanilla icing.

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