

Lambton Agricultural Hall of Fame Inductee
Dona Stewardson
June 2021

1. Contributions to the Agricultural Community within Lambton County

Dona's love for agriculture started at a young age. She was raised on a farm, married a farmer and was a key element to the growth of her family and the success of their farm business within Lambton. Carrying an enthusiasm to forward the causes of agriculture started early on, for several years she promoted dairy farming to the public as a Lambton County Dairy princess. With a keen interest in farm politics and the environment she began her agricultural political leadership. In 1981 she was elected to Lambton County Federation of Agriculture board of Directors, and later as Regional Director of OFA. In 1987 Dona became the first women president of LFA. Dona's energetic approach led her to help solve many of the rural community challenges such as the formation of the Lambton Rural Childcare Program which began as a pilot project in Lambton. Dona worked with OMAF staff and members of the Women's Institute to put on a new program called Agriculture in the Classroom, for students and teachers of Lambton. With an enthusiasm for protecting the environment she represented farmers on the Sarnia Chamber of Commerce Environment Committee. As a field inspector she assisted landowners with habitat and pollution issues with a newly formed Rural Lambton Stewardship Program. Concerning Lake Huron and St Clair river, Dona was on the Remedial Action Committee advisory board for Sarnia. Dona's work proved to help the primary concerns and wellbeing of farmers.

2. Contributions to Agriculture Outside of Lambton County

Never forgetting the importance of individual farmers, Dona represented agriculture in not only local but provincial, national, and international appointments many with breakthroughs in gender barriers. She was elected to the board of Director's for Ontario Federation of Agriculture and later elected to the Executive, and Vice President. She was the only women in the seven-member executive committee. She was chair of the OFA Environmental Committee and on the Public Advisory Committee for the International Joint Commission between the USA and Canada. She was appointed to the Provincial Advisory Committee for rural development, the Agriculture Research Institute of Ontario, Fair Tax Commission, and appointed to the committee to revise the Environmental Bill of Rights for Agriculture.

Dona was both a participant and observer with the Stable Funding resolution, that originated in Lambton County, which later in 1990 evolved into the provincial legislated Farm Business Registration Program.

As an advocate for farmers Dona was a proactive voice during a time with extremely high interest rates, changing trade rules and increasing environmental concerns.

Dona was elected and for 12 years represented agriculture on the Board of Directors for Co-operators Insurance of Canada. She was also on the executive plus several in house boards and committees. One committee which hired the first female CEO of Co-operators.

3. Business Development

Together with her husband Don, in 1957 they purchased their first 100-acre farm in Bosanquet township. The farm started with laying hens, hogs, and 10 Holstein cows they milked by hand. Dona was a full partner with Don in the growth and success of the farm, with a strong work ethic they raised three sons and continually strived to grow the farm. With energy and determination, they increased the land base to 600 acres and expanded the dairy herd size to 80 Holsteins, they renovated and had one of the first milking parlours in Lambton.

Continuing to the next generation was a goal that Dona and Don took very seriously and over time the original farm operation was sold to their youngest son and daughter in law. Dona and Don moved around the corner from the home farm and renovated a century old home, offering a bed and breakfast. The B & B offered a place to meet new people and show the travellers a working farm.

They continued to farm with a cropping and cow calf operation. While living close to the home dairy farm they also helped with the growth and success of the next generation in farming.

Today their grandchildren are actively farming with crops, milking cows, and broiler chickens.

4. Contributions to the Community Beyond Agriculture

Elected as Councillor for the Township of Bosanquet allowed Dona's love for politics and people to prosper. She served on the committee of adjustment, waste management committee when the recycling program began and the arena committee.

She was on the founding committee of the North Lambton Community Health Centre.

Dona's ability to listen and learn led her to be a part of the Mental Health Association in Sarnia. Dona also had the opportunity to mentor a child through Sarnia-Lambton Big Brothers.

Locally Dona spent many years actively involved with Libro Credit Union council and on the board of directors with Huron Country Playhouse.

Presently she is a member and deacon of Knox Presbyterian Church in Thedford.

5. Personal Development

Continuing education was a priority over the years and Dona participated in many opportunities to improve skills. Some of these included powerful communication skills, creativity and risk taking, also psychology courses. Effective speaking, human relations, and financial literacy.

Through experience and training Dona was able to define issues with clearness and conviction

6. Summary and Length of Service

In Dona's words "From childhood to retirement, to be able to stand up to introduce oneself and say I am a Farmer is so rewarding and the best life ever."

In retirement Dona is enjoying watching the next generations of family engaged in farming and knowing that the Stewardson family in agriculture will continue.

As well as the rewarding experience of being a grandparent to a growing family of 10 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

Dona and her husband Don reside in a century old home, on a peaceful road in Lambton Shores where they enjoy the tranquility of the rural space.

After such an exemplary contribution to the agricultural community this evening Dona Stewardson will be inducted to the Lambton Agricultural Hall of Fame