

CONTACT...

INNER WHEEL CLUB OF COBOURG, CANADA!



By Gillian Lee

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How Contact was Made

What I thought was going to be a week filled with inspiring speakers and interesting plenary sessions at the Rotary International Convention held in Toronto recently, turned out to be more than I had bargained for. Never in my wildest dreams did I envisage the possibility of a bonus visit to an Inner Wheel Club during that trip!

It all started in early May 2018. While surfing the IWC website, I chanced upon a message from IWC Cobourg inviting Inner Wheel members attending the RI Convention to join them for a luncheon. What a great idea, I thought! The only problem was that the closing date was some time in February 2018. Undaunted, I wrote to the organiser, Edna Blything, to ask if she could consider my late application. I was excited to receive a response almost immediately, but deeply disappointed to learn that due to the poor response, the luncheon had been cancelled.

A month went by, and just before our departure for Canada I was pleasantly surprised to receive an email from Edna inviting me to their Club meeting. Apparently, the Club had received further enquiries about the luncheon and as a result of the encouraging response, the members decided to organise a luncheon meeting. A flurry of emails were exchanged between Edna and myself during those last few days prior to my flight departure, and before I knew it, the day of the meeting was upon us.

The Meeting

Monday 26 June 2018 was a beautiful summer's day. Other than myself, the other visiting IW ladies were:

- PDG Marie Jocelyne Camalon, IW District 920 from Reunion Island
- PP Nathalie Pota, IWC of St Paul-Etang Sale, Le Port Reunion
- Annie Riviere, Reunion Island
- CP Ginette Lan, IWC of Curepipe, Mauritius
- Liliane Nouh-Chaia, Cayenne, Guyane Francaise, and last but not least,
- Sandra Issa, IWC Paramaribo, Suriname

Clear blue skies greeted us as we made our way to the Toronto Metro Convention Centre that morning. There, we were met by Beth, one of the incoming Rotary District Governors who waited with us for our transport to arrive. Imagine our surprise when a sleek white limousine pulled up alongside the kerb where we were waiting. Oh wow! We were being ferried to Cobourg in grand style!

We enjoyed our ride and soon arrived in the picturesque town of Cobourg, which is situated on the shores of Lake Ontario, about 95 kms east of Toronto. There, we were warmly welcomed by our very gracious hosts... the lovely ladies of IWC Cobourg.

The Club has 42 members and for the Inner Wheel year 2016-2018, was led by its very capable Club President Alma Beston, who I was told was also the District Secretary! The luncheon began with the lighting of the Candle of Friendship by their very lovely District Chairman Joan Rolph. Among the ladies present that day were the affable Club Secretary Mary Pack, Club Treasurer Laura Scrivener and District Treasurer Thelma Tondeur.

According to President Alma, the ladies of IWC Cobourg came together because they *“enjoy having company on the road of life... giving everyone a reason and a place to gather for food and friendly conversation, organising themselves around service and fundraising projects that are meaningful to their community, and fostering their ties to Rotary”*. In fact, they have been so supportive of their local Rotary Club, that each member was recently awarded a medallion by the Rotary Club of Cobourg. On it were the words *“Honouring all you do for the Rotary Club of Cobourg”*. What an honour it was for the club members to be recognised and appreciated by Rotary!

Some of the projects undertaken by IWC Cobourg included:

- helping out at the annual Rotary Waterfront Festival Arts and Crafts Tents which have about 120 vendors. The IW ladies not only provide the vendors with a place to rest and to purchase beverages and snack food, but also provide a parcel check area for visitors.
- organising the Antiques Appraisal Clinic, where people could bring their antiques, silver jewellery, art and memorabilia for qualified volunteer appraisers to appraise at a fee.
- decorating the venue for the Rotary Sportsman’s Night Auction according to the theme set by the Rotarians. The ladies have been doing so for the last 4 years...creating the centrepieces and setting up the entire room for around 135 dinner guests.
- organising a Christmas House Tour and
- supporting their local hospital and other organisations that support women and children in their neighbourhood and responding to IWW requests for assistance during disasters.

After the First “Hello”

Although a couple of the visiting ladies had to take their leave earlier than originally planned, we managed to introduce ourselves and our clubs. In fact, I thought it was clever of Sandra Issa to hand us pamphlets about the Inner Wheel Club of Paramaribo in view of the time constraint. As you may know, Suriname is located in South America. However, I was surprised to learn that IWC Paramaribo, which was chartered on 2 February 1956 and has 43 members, is a member of Inner Wheel Nederland (the Netherlands) and belongs to District 60. Now, how interesting is that?

I decided to be the last speaker and armed with a map of the world and an enlarged map of District 331, spoke about the clubs in our District and the projects that the clubs in Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak undertook. Not having been to our part of the world, especially to the Island of Borneo, most of the ladies were amazed at the work undertaken by our Inner Wheel clubs.

We later exchanged gifts and our club/district bannerettes with each other and with the host Club, which unfortunately did not have their Club bannerettes with them. Nevertheless, we took lots of photographs as beautiful keepsakes of our lovely time together at the luncheon meeting and also in the beautiful garden at one of the member’s homes.

As we said our good-byes that afternoon, it was gratifying to be told by one of the IWC Cobourg ladies that the day's meeting was one of the best she had ever attended. This sentiment was also shared by CP Ginette whom I had the pleasure of meeting several times thereafter, and Edna who emailed me on behalf of her Club, to say how much the members enjoyed the very informative presentation about Inner Wheel in Borneo.

Conclusion

There were so many wonderful memories that I took away with me that day.... the warm and welcoming hospitality of the Cobourg ladies, the wonderful meal that we shared, the many friendships forged and the sharing of our Inner Wheel life in our part of the world. However, the most valuable experience for me must be how, despite several of the ladies coming from French and Dutch speaking nations, we all parted as friends. It just goes to prove that friendship is truly a bond that transcends all barriers.... or perhaps this is the magic of our Inner Wheel sisterhood!