

Entertainment & Leisure

Sitter raising money for Farmerettes documentary



Documenting history

Author and photographer Bonnie Sitter is making a documentary about the Farmerettes, women who contributed during WWII. She needs funding and has a tight deadline as many of the women who were involved in the program are now in their 90s. A surviving Farmerette (above), Beryl Beckett of Tampa, Florida, fields questions during an interview for the documentary from Colin Field. Beckett was a Farmerette in 1945 in the Vineland area when she was living in Petrolia. She was known as "Dusty". Two Farmerettes (upper righthand corner) pose for photograph on a tractor, an image that has been immortalized in art by Joan Tovey. (Courtesy photos)

By Shawn Loughlin
The Citizen

Celebrated local author and photographer Bonnie Sitter is working to create a documentary on the Farmerettes, a passion project of hers that manifested with her book, *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz*, but she just needs help to fund it.

Sitter is working with Colin Field, a London, Ontario-based film producer to make the movie, which they've already begun shooting. To keep going, however, they need to find funding. Field has set up a Go Fund Me page for the movie and Sitter is working on localized fundraisers, but really the pair is just keeping its eyes and ears open for any opportunity to make their passion project.

Furthermore, Sitter says, the clock is ticking. Many of the women who participated in the Farmerette program have passed away, and those who are still living are often in their 90s, so the window in which they can interview them is closing.

"Time is running out to do this project," Sitter said in an interview with *The Citizen*. However, since writing an article about the Farmerettes for *The Rural Voice*, *The Citizen's* sister publication, as well as *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz*, Sitter has become a passionate advocate for all of the young women who stepped up across Ontario during World War II.

Sitter, in an interview with *The Citizen*, said that the Farmerettes Forever Committee is a small, but passionate group of advocates working to tell the story of the Farmerettes, their impact on the world and the role they played in supporting the Allied Forces during

the Second World War. As the country faced a farm labour shortage due to men being shipped overseas to fight in the war, young women from all over the country stepped up to fill that void. And Sitter says that, when the story of World War II and the Herculean effort made by just about everyone to do their part is told, the Farmerettes are almost never mentioned.

Sitter's involvement with the group dates back several years when she found a picture in her late husband's possessions. She had never heard of the Farmerettes and decided to investigate further, and once she began looking into it, she was immediately interested in learning all she could.

Connecting with numerous Farmerettes from all over the province, Sitter wrote an article for *The Rural Voice*, *The Citizen's* sister publication, that would serve to connect her not only with many Farmerettes, but with English, who would eventually become the co-author of her book.

This curiosity would eventually lead to Sitter writing a book with Shirley English, telling the stories of numerous Farmerettes called *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz: Memories of Ontario Farmerettes*.

English, who was a farmerette herself, saw the article and then wrote a letter to the editor. She said she was moved by the story and then told her own story about working on the Sitter farm in Thedford in the early 1950s. That was the connection Sitter was looking for and the two women soon began speaking and working together.

English told Sitter that the summer of 1952 was the best summer of her

life and that she looks back on that time very fondly.

Once Sitter and English began working together, collecting stories, letters and photographs from living Farmerettes, the pair committed themselves to a tight deadline. Sitter gave English no choice in the matter, telling her they had to write a book and they should aim to finish it within a year. Due to the advanced age of so many Farmerettes, they wanted to pen the story as soon as they could, so as many women who lived the Farmerette life as possible could read it.

The book has proven to be a success and has served to connect the authors with even more Farmerettes after its publication.

She connected with Field when she was exhibiting at Goderich's annual Celtic Festival. He bought a copy of the book and spoke with Sitter about the project itself. She said it would be great to commit conversations, interviews and memories of the Farmerettes to film one day and Field told her that he just so happened to be a film producer and a relationship between the two was born.

They immediately began plotting a path for a documentary and discussing how it could be funded.

Field estimates that the budget is about \$30,000, \$5,000 of which will be paid for by a successful grant. The rest, however, remains yet to be determined. They have approached a number of organizations and groups, including the provincial government and its Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, thinking it was a slam dunk, only to get sent to another ministry that drove them to a dead end.

Sitter and Field, however, due to the time-sensitive nature of the

project, decided to start whether they had the money or not in the hopes of having the film complete by next year to be entered into 2024 film festivals.

Sitter has created art cards featuring work from Joan Tovey, who was a Farmerette and has since put some of her memories of those times to canvas as paintings. They can be purchased from Sitter by calling 519-235-1909 or by e-mail at bonnie.sitter@gmail.com.

In other Farmerette-related news, Sitter says she is optimistic about the production of a play based on the Farmerettes hitting the stage next year, which could give the entirety of the project a boost. A play based on Sitter's book has been co-commissioned by the Blyth Festival and 4th Line Theatre. Alison Lawrence has been brought on to write the play and the hope is that the play will be produced at

both theatres next year, though neither artistic director - Gil Garratt in Blyth and Kim Blackwell at the 4th Line Theatre near Peterborough - could confirm that the show would be part of their 2024 seasons at this point in the schedule.

Sudoku Solution

7	4	5	3	8	2	1	9	6
2	8	9	1	6	5	7	3	4
3	1	6	4	9	7	8	2	5
5	2	3	6	7	1	4	8	9
4	6	7	8	2	9	5	1	3
8	9	1	5	3	4	6	7	2
1	3	8	9	4	6	2	5	7
9	7	4	2	5	8	3	6	1
6	5	2	7	1	3	9	4	8

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