

Town Hall Forum – Friday October 25, 2013
Keeping Families Strong: Message from Lynda Lowry, PHEc, RD
Chief Operating Officer of Food Development Centre

I am very pleased to be invited to speak to this town hall tonight. I am proud of the education I received from the faculty of home economics as it has provided me with a rewarding and challenging career and contributed to the successes I have enjoyed.

It was 40 years ago last May when I participated in the ringing ceremony and I remember the words of the Dean (Lloyd) at that time who said that the ring contains many facets, representing the many facets of home economics – all the same size as none is more important than the other. If you saw my ring today, you would notice that it is almost smooth and to me that shows that all facets work together to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. All pieces of the home economics' curriculum contribute to producing professionals with a unique set of skills.

Home economics is a “strength based practice” that helps individuals and families achieve their goals. It is not the medical model of diagnosing a problem and prescribing the solution but instead builds on strengths to achieve behaviour change. This foundational skill comes from an education with a focus on family and communication - to bring out the best in others to achieve positive outcomes.

At the Food Development Centre, I have hired many staff over the last six years - product development consultants, lab technologists, program officers and a business development officer. I am always excited when home economics/human ecology graduates apply for these positions because they bring so many skills to the job – in addition to the science that they hold. Yes, they are technically qualified but they also provide leadership in many other ways – with their clients and with their colleagues. Home Economists that I work with, are open minded to change, willing to do more than their job description says, and are very important to their work units.

During my career, I have seen how home economists have assisted farm families and small food businesses to achieve economic growth. They advise on record keeping, budgeting, and decision-making – all key pieces of sound financial management. They are creative in their advice on how to grow these businesses and enterprises to achieve more economic security while keeping balance with the needs of the family.

These skills have also been used in rural Manitoba with organizations who strive for a governance model that works within the parameters of volunteer involvement and provides empowerment for these groups to succeed and help build strong communities.

When I look around at the home economists who work for Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, I see staff who are skilled in resource development, public speaking, creative thinking, and innovation. They have networks that are very beneficial to their clients. And, these linkages help their clients to think outside the box when solving problems to achieve their goals.

Some have suggested that in the future, students can obtain these skills if courses were offered in several different faculties all across campus. But, I would suggest that it would be very challenging to

schedule all the classes that would be needed to provide a foundation in family resource management, communication, child development, clothing and textiles, as well as foods and nutrition if they were not together in one faculty or school or college.

There are difficult decisions to be made in the months ahead. Let's be sure that our voices help frame the education of those who will support future generations of families.