

Irene (Key) Ahner –College 1965

Honorary Life Member 2011

Irene was born to a farm family in Unity. She first attended a one-room school at Wasteena until it closed in 1954, when she and her sister, Sheila, began to take the bus to Unity. Irene enrolled in the College of Arts & Science at the University of Saskatchewan in the fall of 1961, but after one year switched to the College of Agriculture to pursue her interest in animal science. This move pleased her father, Alexander Key, who could only afford to finish his first year in the Vocational Agriculture program at the College. He felt that she could now finish what he had started. In the College, Irene sang with the Agro Orchestra, curled recreationally, and participated in College events.

In the spring of 1965, Irene received her Bachelor of Agriculture and married Derald Ahner (B.S.A. '65, M.Sc. '67), a farm boy from Maple Creek who she had met in classes. Irene then worked for Dr. Milt Bell as a research technician for 2 years until they moved to Brandon, Manitoba in 1967 where Derald had gained a position as a Livestock Specialist. Irene became a lot busier at home with the arrival of their first daughter Verna (B.Mus/Mus.Ed.) in 1969 and a second daughter Alexis (B.Ed/ B.Sc.) in 1972. In 1974 the family moved to Maple Creek to take over Derald's family cattle farm.

Over the years Irene served on the local Wheat Pool Committee (secretary/ treasurer), the Band Parents Association, and on the District 10 Agricultural Board (Vice-chair, Chair, Past Chair, 82-87). She is still an active member of the United Church, where she is a trustee and sings in the choir, the Hospital Auxiliary, the New Democratic Party (council member), and the Music Festival Committee (member for more than 25 years and serves as the archivist). She has regularly helped out nearby 4-H clubs as a judge for record books and public speaking competitions. Irene also works as the relief librarian for the Chinook Regional Library, Maple Creek Branch. She contributed to the Golden Prairie history book, and then served on the organizing committees for the Piapot and Maple Creek history books. Irene has also been a faithful contributor to the SAGA newsletter, where she is more commonly known as the "Prairie Chicken".

Further from home, Irene served as the SAGA Representative to the Advisory Council to the Faculty of Agriculture (76-81), and as a member of a national CBC Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Food (87-90). She served two terms as a member of University Senate, representing the Maple Creek-Shaunavon district (87-93), and was a MAL on the SAGA executive.

No record of Irene's passions would be complete without mentioning her love of the Saskatchewan Roughriders. If the game is on when she needs to weed her giant vegetable garden, the radio is there. If the game is on when she is at one of the many meetings she attends, it is recorded, and no one tell her the score! Grandson Alexander (class of 2028) is learning at an early age that the University of Saskatchewan is the only university to consider attending, and that the team to cheer for is the Roughriders.