

**Below: Welcome Wagon recently honoured several local Gananoque businesses that have been sponsoring the program for 10 years this past January 9th at the Firehall Theatre in Gananoque.**



**Left: Pat Neuman and Donna Dempsey of Welcome Wagon  
Below: Welcome Wagon baskets have been helping newcomers feel at home for nearly 90 years**



# WELCOME WAGON

## Still Welcoming New Neighbours After Nearly 90 Years

By Lorraine Payette

In 1928, Thomas Winston Briggs of Memphis, Tennessee, created Welcome Wagon. This was a time when the majority of women were stay-at-home moms and housekeepers. They had committees, the PTA, other appropriately feminine activities, all made up of close-knit groups of women, but when a family moved to another community, they had to start over and fit in where they knew no one.

"Back in the 1800s, the Conestoga wagons would travel across the prairie," said Pat Neuman, Chair and CEO of Welcome Wagon Canada. "They'd get to a homestead and the women in that area would go out with their baskets of provisions – fresh bread, butter, milk, eggs, things that these people had not had for many months – and they'd go up to these people and say, 'Welcome, wagon.' That's how we got the name."

In 1930, Briggs brought the concept to Vancouver and it was a major success.

"By 1953 the company had done a fair amount of work across the country," she said. "Pauline

Hill was hired in Regina. She started a nursery and spent some time at the Y, then started our 'Baby Welcome' program. When a mum had a new baby, we'd visit her and present a basket with all sorts of little baby items."

Pauline worked in Regina. Later, based in Winnipeg, she excelled at selling advertising to some of Canada's most prominent businesses. The western provinces were very well developed before the organization moved into Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic Provinces. Pauline eventually became President of Welcome Wagon Canada in 1967 and also among her accomplishments were The first woman admitted into the Advertising Sales Club of Toronto, the first woman president of the Better Business Bureau, the first woman member of the Rotary Club of Canada, and later its first president.

Then in 1979 The company was purchased from the US making it completely owned and operated by Canadians.

"The company prospered in Canada," said Neuman. "The offices moved back to North York (where they had been in the late 1960s). It's getting quite difficult to visit people at home with most people working outside the home, but in some areas we still have good visits, good visibility and good awareness. In this area we still do lots of visits and have lots of businesses involved.

"More than 300 representatives working for us across the country, Welcome Wagon is privately owned, but it's still the same model

that we have had over all these years. In 2020 we're going to be 90 years old. It's really a pleasure to work for a company that's so longstanding." (Neuman recently celebrated her 40th anniversary with the company and was honoured).

Agents present baskets containing sample items and coupons donated by local businesses, civic information and other materials to the newcomers they visit.

"Businesses give little token gifts, sort of a welcome to the community, and then the agent gives the newcomer a card that that business has presented," said Neuman. "This gives them an incentive to go into the store – and that's how the whole operation works."

Welcome Wagon Representatives are commissioned agents of the company.

"The people we have working for us are dedicated – there's community service involved, lots of shaking hands, lots of talking to businesses, but there's lots of fun when you do the visit," said Neuman. "Especially when somebody sends a note back to you afterwards that says, 'That was the most wonderful thing that ever happened.'"

They are always looking for new agents, getting a lot of referrals and testimonials from people who have had visits, saying "this wonderful woman came to visit me and I just felt so welcome. I felt like this was the place I wanted to be." **LH**

To learn more or become an agent, go to [www.welcomewagon.ca](http://www.welcomewagon.ca) or call 1-844-299-2466; Pauline 613-283-7655 (Lanark County) for information and details.

Welcome Wagon operates throughout Canada, and they are more than ready to welcome you.