



**Chatting with friends**

Ellen Willis, Hoke County Home Economics Agent, retired last week and a drop-in to honor her was given last Thursday by many of her friends. Mrs. Willis (left)

greets a young friend and her mother. Held at the Extension Service Department of Social Services Building, the drop-in drew people of all kinds who wanted to say

"farewell" to the lady who has served the county for 19 years.

# Looking for a rest

## Ellen Willis put in 19 years serving Hoke County, and now she's ready to put her feet up

By Ed Miller

When twin girls were born 63 years ago in Kenansville, no one knew how much help one of these little girls would turn out to be to a then 10-year-old county called Hoke.

Eight years later, the young girl, whom we now know as Ellen Willis, headed off for her first year at 4-H camp.

Recently she confided that, at eight, she was one year too young to go to camp, but having the county extension agent as a friend of the family helped her get to White Lake and into the spirit of 4-H a year ahead of most.

She obviously enjoyed her years at camp because she now takes great pride in seeing kids in the county she has served since 1965 head off for a similar experience.

Ellen says that while at camp, one can see the young "4-H'ers bloom" as they experience the woods, camp fires, new friends and pride in themselves.

It seems that Willis has almost always worked with or for an extension agency no matter what area she lived in at the time.

After she graduated from U.N.C.-Greensboro, then called Women's College, in 1942, she taught school for two years in

Clinton, and went to Johnston County to work for three years as a 4-H agent.

Naturally, she was into the Collegiate 4-H while still a student. She went to Goldsboro and worked for almost a year as Home Economics Agent before she married and moved to Raeford.

"I loved Raeford before I came here because it was my husband's home, and I haven't changed my mind a bit," Ellen said.

Even during part of the 17 years Ellen took off from her professional career to raise a family, she was in the Rockfish Extension Homemaker's Club.

Willis says that her children were not "latch key kids" or children who must fend for themselves after school while parents are at work.

"I did not go back to work until my youngest child was in school," she said adding that even when she did return to work, her children were involved in scouts, choirs and 4-H in the afternoons while she was at work.

And, of course, the four Willis children went to 4-H summer camp.

Even when away from home, Ellen had sharing and growth in mind. "I would not bring my children presents just to say I

brought them something. I would bring them something that would help them grow, like a new tree or flower, or a quote that really meant something."

Even now, with retirement not too far off, Ellen has a few projects going on that she probably will not be able to just up and leave.

One such project is a scrap book that the Extension Homemakers are putting together with pictures of all the Home Economic Agents as well as pictures of all the presidents of the Extension Homemakers County Council since 1937.

"We have all the presidents except three or four and we even have the minutes from the first meeting which was held in the courthouse," she said.

Ellen admitted that it was really not too difficult to get pictures of the Home Economics Agents in the county since 1936 because there have only been five.

Number six is going to have a time filling Ellen's vacated shoes.

A teacher of retirement planning, Mrs. Willis says, "Now that I'm retiring, I'm going to practice what I teach. I am going home when I retire. I just want to enjoy being at home."



**Flowers and gifts**

Old friends gathered at the Willis reception to watch her excitement as she opened the many presents that were given her. Besides this crocheted work, reclining chairs, other art pieces, and a gift from her children

to help her take the trip she has always wanted, helped make this day one that will remain in the memory of Mrs. Willis for a great while.



**Everything must be perfect**

Mrs. Willis is doing what she has done for years, making everything just right. Arranging flowers became like second nature on the day of her drop-in

as flowers were rolling in by the bunches. Before the party was over, an entire table was garnished with colors stemming from numerous flower pots.