

The Rangitoto Observer

DELIVERED FORTNIGHTLY

Issue 18 – November 8 2019

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

**Council crackdown
on dodgy plumbing... p2**

**Choir swan song after
45 years... p2**

**National schools
mountain-biking champ... p3**

Lake Pupuke at tipping point: council acts

Lake Pupuke is at the tipping point of an ecological disaster, says a leading water scientist.

Ebrahim Hussain, who has just left Auckland Council, says continued degradation of the most popular free-diving lake

in the Southern Hemisphere would be a disaster for divers in particular.

An unexplained hydrogen sulphide layer has recently developed at the lake, which seems to indicate further nutrient overload, a cause of algal blooms.

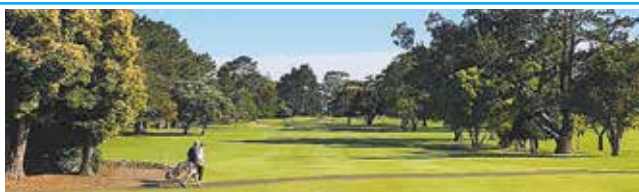
Auckland Council is working on solutions following a \$100,000 study. Various options are under consideration, including capping, sprays and aeration.

• **State of the Lake, background-
pages 16-18**

Waving the flag for diversity



Little mix... Milford Baptist Kindergarten children dressed in national costume and marched through Milford late last month. More pictures, pages 22 and 23



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Dodgy plumbing blamed for faecal pollution

Council compliance officers will visit more than 30 Castor Bay property owners whose plumbing is likely to be contributing to faecal contamination in the bay.

In recent testing, Auckland Council and Watercare identified faecal contamination in two of three stormwater outlets feeding into the bay, according to Healthy Waters general manager Craig McIlroy.

They have been tracing the source of the contamination using techniques such as flush-

ing water through pipes, CCTV recordings, visual checks and dye testing.

"To date, the work has found 11 issues with public stormwater and wastewater assets," McIlroy says.

Stormwater issues will be followed up by Auckland Council and wastewater issues by Watercare.

Watercare has also almost completed private property investigations of pipes and found 32 issues with private drainage systems.

"These have been referred to the council's compliance team for follow-up and resolution with the property owners," McIlroy says.

Sampling at selected stormwater manholes in the wider Castor Bay catchment is also near completion.

This sampling will determine whether any additional catchment areas will need to be targeted with further testing.

• **Recent beach clean-up finds little rubbish, see pages 8 and 9**

2 The Strand: empty for 605 days

The former Takapuna Library building at 2 The Strand has been vacant since an earthquake notice was issued in March 2018. The 1956 heritage-listed public building has now been unoccupied for 605 days. At some point, its future will be determined by Auckland Council.

Letters to the Editor

Topics should be local.

Noms-de-plume or submissions without a name will not be printed.

Email news@rangitoto-observer.co.nz or post to Rangitoto Observer, PO Box 32 275, Devonport.

Choir prepares swan song

After 44 years, Takapuna choir Shore Singers is preparing to wind up with a grand finale concert.

Since 1975, the mixed voice choir has had a core who have stayed for many years, but many of those have now moved or passed away, chair Kerry Johnstone says.

"It has been difficult to attract younger people – most are too busy trying to work and survive," Johnstone says.

Membership, which was stable at around 40 for four decades, has plummeted in the past few years to around 18.

Since 1977, the choir has benefited from the skills of musical director Beth Donnell, who had then just retired as head of music at Takapuna Grammar School.

"She brings great skill to the choir with her unique arrangements of many works to suit the choir's voices," Johnstone says.

"She is able to bring out the best, with the

soloists receiving valuable encouragement and assistance."

Johnston has been chair since 1995 and is proud of the choir's record of performing a wide repertoire from classical to modern, as well as fostering friendships between people who love music and bringing pleasure to audiences.

In addition, Shore Singers have sponsored the under-16 vocal aria in the annual North Shore Performing Arts competition, contributing to many a young person's musical career, he says.

Shore Singers' 44th and final annual concert features the choir with special guests the Isomura brothers on piano and violin.

Featuring classical to modern music, the concert is on Sunday 17 November at 2pm at St George's Presbyterian Church in Takapuna, with tickets \$20 and under-16 free. Phone John Ae 021 476 900.

Mayor bypasses Devonport-Takapuna

Locals hoping to meet Auckland Mayor Phil Goff at the inauguration of Devonport-Takapuna Local Board members last week were left holding their breath.

Goff was pencilled on the board's online agenda to attend, but a spokesman for his office said he was listed on all local board agendas as having the opportunity to speak, "should he be in attendance". Four board

inaugurations took place last Tuesday.

Asked why the Mayor opted to attend Albert-Eden instead of Devonport-Takapuna, the spokesman said: "It was selected because it best fit the constraints of his schedule."

"The mayor gets to Devonport-Takapuna regularly, as he does across the region and he will continue to do so," the spokesman said.



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Hard yards pay off for teen mountain-biking champ

At just 16 years of age, Westlake Boys' Sam Buckley punched above his weight in recent national mountain-biking national champs, winning the under-20 category.

Sam took the title at the National Schools Mountain Bike Championships, held in Dunedin from 4 to 6 October, in a race over 24 kilometres, including 700 metres of elevation.

Asked what was the key to his success, Sam has two words: "Training hard."

He averages 200km a week through the year, rising to 300-400km through the recent competitive season.

Most of that cycling is in three training sessions a week with Westlake's road-riding team, but he also goes mountain biking twice a week, including riding with the Jafa Kids Academy at Woodhill on Wednesday evenings. In addition, there are two sessions of gym training per week.

The under-20 category is assessed on a student's age on 31 December, by which time Sam will be 17.

A significant challenge was breaking his arm last year on a trail at Maraetai, but he maintained his cycling regimen using a wind trainer for about six weeks. He was a little nervous getting back into mountain biking after the injury.

"I held back a bit, but I got back into it pretty quickly."



Champion... Sam Buckley won the national title for under-20 mountain-bike cross-country, despite being only 16 on race day

Westlake's road cycling team recently came third in the Auckland schools' team time trials, held in Pukekohe.

Sam plans to try out for the New Zealand team going to the Mountainbike World Championships in Germany next year.

Heroic effort sees show go on



New set...(from left to right) Heroes director Janice Finn, set builder Nick Greer and Tadpole productions president Louise Wallace at the PumpHouse on Monday

The theft of a trailer containing a set destined for the PumpHouse Theatre almost derailed the production of *Heroes* which begins a 10-day run on 7 November.

Tadpole Productions was due to pack the *Heroes* set into the PumpHouse on Sunday.

But Nick Greer, its set designer and builder, had his trailer with a finished wall on it stolen overnight from Henderson. He sourced new materials and rebuilt five panels, just in time for a sound and lighting check late Monday afternoon.

Luckily panels from another set could form the basis of his rework, Greer said.

Heroes director Janice Finn said the theft meant a massive work-around by the team but the play would be on track by opening night. Luckily a loaned dog statue "fourth character" in the play was safe in Greer's garage at the time of the theft, she said.

• See interview on page 15.

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Fun in the sun... at the Takapuna Primary Vintage Day Fair last weekend. Above left: Eleanor Woollett (4) races down the slide. Above right: Stella Tait (8) above negotiates the trapeze.

Hearings soon for Taka bars' closing hours

A controversial application by three central Takapuna bars to extend their closing times to 3am is set to be heard in early December.

Sixty-four residents objected to the change of closing time at the bars from 1am to 3pm, citing concerns about safety, litter and noise.

Four submitters supported the later trading hours.

The District Licensing Committee hearing dates for the three Hurstmere Rd bars, Florrie McGreal's, Master and Apprentice and Elephant Wrestler, are on weekdays from 4 to 9 December, from 9am at the Mary Thomas Centre in Takapuna.

These are public hearings, unless the committee says otherwise, so anyone is welcome to attend.

An education revolution in Takapuna



Takapuna is home to a first of its kind boutique, sustainable urban school - ready to revolutionise education.

Age School is for families and students who are passionate about wellbeing for people and for the planet. Our small nurturing environment and high teacher to student ratio means we get to know each student deeply and personalise learning so that it is meaningful for them. We have been inspired by international education innovators and thought leaders who have paved the way and proven future ready education models that focus beyond the academic, to an individual's purpose, wellbeing and agility to thrive in the future. Combining the best of New Zealand's approach to education with the latest thinking from these international education innovators, our learning model is designed to let your child embrace who they truly are – not what traditional education thinks they should be.

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AGE School Principal Steve Mouldey says that the chance to lead this new school in Takapuna is an exciting opportunity.

'I have been involved in a range of different teaching experiences and this is the most exciting of all: leading a school based on developing students' curiosity and creativity,'

Mr Mouldey said.

'Large schools need to cater to the needs of the many and although they can tweak programs for some students they just don't have the flexibility to truly contextualise learning for each individual student like we are able to at AGE School.'

'Having the chance to lead a school that is reimagining education for the future is an exciting opportunity.'

There are limited spaces still available for enrolment in 2020, and the school is holding an Open Morning on Thursday November 21st from 9.30 - 10.30.

To register for the Open Morning, or to organise a separate personal visit, please email info@age.school.nz or phone (09) 218 7771.

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Takapuna Library marks 145 years

Figures from Takapuna Library's recent history have helped celebrate 145 years since the library's opening – and 30 years in its current building.

At a morning tea marking the occasion, historian David Verran recounted the earliest record of a library grant in 1874. The library was housed in a public school, then Takapuna Borough Council rooms until local donors Fanny and Catherine Trimble, and Grace Abbott, donated funds for a building and R & W Hellaby donated land behind their Hurstmere Rd butcher's shop. The library opened there in 1956, moving across the road to today's building in 1989.

A show on the library's history is on at Takapuna Library until 17 November.

Old stamping ground... (left to right) former Takapuna librarian (1984-90) and North Shore Librarian (1990-2010) Geoff Chamberlain, former Takapuna Library manager (1990-2019) Helen Woodhouse and Takapuna Council promotions coordinator for the library building opening in 1989 Angela Antony.

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Slim pickings

Plastic rubbish, a rope and some seaweed for the garden were all that was collected by around a dozen people who turned up for a Castor Bay clean-up over Labour Weekend, organised by the Shore's The Clean-Up Crew.



Bucket brigade... (above, from left) Tracy Peers, David Peers, Murray Bell and Debbie Bell; (above right) Emma Wingrove



On the hunt... (above) Terri Prest; (above, right) Zal, Zuri (5), and Zeek (9) Pagong

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On the rocks... Cole Barfoot, Connor Doherty and Jackson Parker (all 14)



Head down... Mary Pottinger, who collected seaweed for her garden along with the rubbish, adopts the emu position



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Time for Takapuna to work together

With the election campaigning over, now is the time for Takapuna to positively work together.

Congratulations and commiserations to all the local candidates who stood to be North Shore councillors or Devonport-Takapuna Local Board members. There is a lot of passion for our area. Well done to Chris Darby and Richard Hills on their re-election as the two North Shore councillors. Both have been heavily involved in Takapuna's progress and both have been supportive of the Takapuna Beach Business Association's ongoing efforts. The business association looks forward to working with Chris and Richard again over the next three years.

The North Shore voters were presented with the potential of stalling Takapuna's

agreed progress and redesigning it. Or just getting on with the town centre's transformation. The overall election result, I believe, shows that locals have voted to stay the course and get on with Takapuna's revitalisation. It will help provide businesses with confidence to plan and invest, based on more certainty about the developments ahead.

It was a pretty bruising local body election for Takapuna, the Takapuna Beach Business Association and for many in our business community. At times we felt we were caught in the middle, however we have continued to advocate strongly for our members' interests. We have always sought the best outcome for Takapuna with the planned upgrades, all while being supported by business and public surveys and consultations.

I would also like to congratulate Takapuna advocate George Wood on his re-election. Mr Wood has been the chair of the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board and sat on the business association board last term. Congratulations to the re-elected local board members and of course the new ones. We look forward to positively and constructively working with all elected members this coming term. It's set to be a really exciting time for Takapuna.

I would like to now encourage all people in the community to join together and work collaboratively to enable Takapuna to become Auckland's best town centre – for locals, visitors, and business.

Tony Dench

Chair of the Takapuna Beach Business Association

Former library building held dear by people of Takapuna

Thank you for taking up the cause of the former library building at 2 The Strand in Takapuna. It was fondly remembered during the recent celebrations of 30 years in the present library building. Your story mentions that its future is being considered by the Local Board. As I understand it, 2 The Strand is not on a council list of buildings where their future is decided by the Devonport-Takapuna

Local Board, as it does not have a current community use.

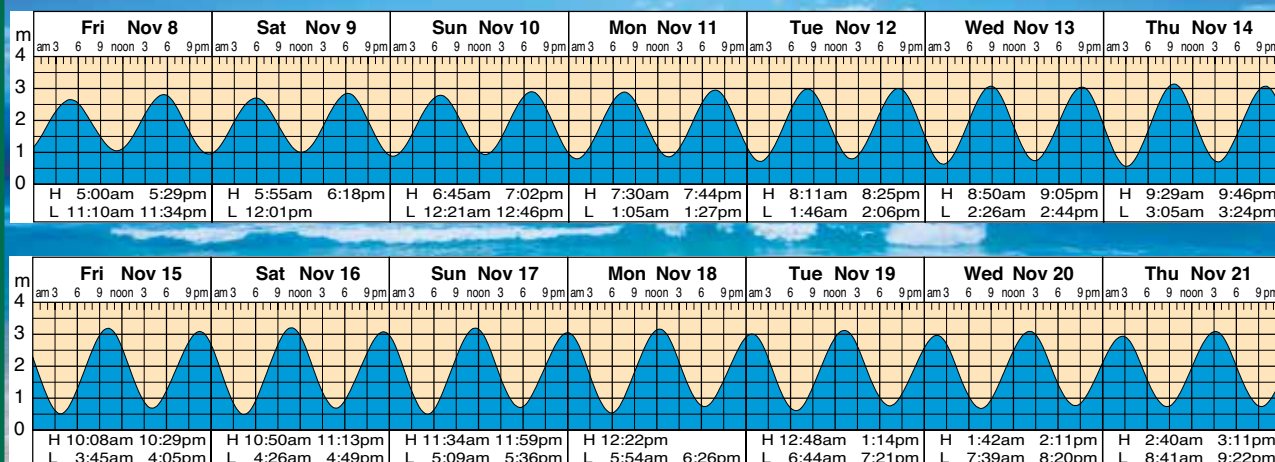
However, it is protected by being on the Schedule of Protected Buildings in the Unitary Plan. It also has the hearts and minds of the residents of Takapuna who were very supportive as the Shore Exhibition Trust tried for 10 years to get a lease to open an art gallery.

Ruth Ell

Letters to the Editor

Letters are welcome. They should be on topics relating to Milford, Takapuna and nearby suburbs. Noms-de-plume or submissions without a name will not be printed. Length should be under 500 words. Email news@rangitoto-observer.co.nz or post to Rangitoto Observer, PO Box, 32 275, Devonport.

Milford / Takapuna Tides



Takapuna resident weighs further costly action over zoning

After spending more than \$300,000 of his own money battling Auckland Council over zoning decisions in Takapuna, a resident is weighing whether to go another round in court.

Franco Belgiorno-Nettis believes "reasons" sent by the Independent Hearings Panel [IHP] may still be too general to fulfil an order by the Court of Appeal.

Further, the first set of reasons supplied by the panel referred to a different area than one of the two blocks he was challenging, and a new erratum still doesn't specifically discuss all of the area challenged in the court.

"They had nearly five months to think about the 'new reasons' and they got it all wrong," says Franco Belgiorno-Nettis.

He originally took the council to the High Court for a review of zoning decisions in the Unitary Plan in four Takapuna areas.

While the review failed in the High Court, his appeal, narrowed to the Promenade Block behind the beach campground and the Lake Rd Block, south and east of the shopping centre, succeeded.

The judges ordered the IHP reconvene and provide reasons showing how it had responded to public submissions in reaching zoning recommendations.

The IHP produced these reasons after Belgiorno-Nettis failed to get the Supreme Court to review the Appeal Court order. He wanted the actual decisions overturned, not just reasons provided.

When the reasons did arrive, they did not address submissions about zoning east of Lake Rd, which changed from Mixed Use Suburban

to Mixed Use Urban, but instead discussed the Terrace House and Apartment Building zoning west of Lake Rd. Now, erratum have been issued that still do not discuss zoning east of Lake Rd.

Belgiorno-Nettis believes the new reasons and erratum still do not respond sufficiently well to his own and other residents' submissions, as required by the Appeal Court.

For example, in the Promenade Block, submitters raised concerns about shading of the beach and campground, traffic and parking, but the IHP's new reasons say the amenity of the area is protected, without commenting on those points.

To get the newly issued reasons reviewed, Belgiorno-Nettis would have to fund another action in the High Court.

He has directed his lawyer to investigate the possibility, as he believes an important matter of principle is at stake, with ramifications for other parts of Auckland.

So far, the Appeal Court has ordered the council to pay \$30,000 in costs. The High Court is still taking submissions on costs.

Belgiorno-Nettis believes the most he could hope to recover is about 20 per cent of his expenses. "The cost is proof that justice isn't available to the common person," he says.

Auckland Council says the IHP chair has responded to submissions, albeit at a high level,



Carrying the cost... Franco Belgiorno-Nettis has spent more than \$300,000 on legal action

in the new reasons.

"The court was not saying every submission matter should be addressed in total. That goes back to the millions of submission points that had to be addressed," says council team leader of plans and places (north, west and islands) Dave Sanders. "The court agreed it had to be an efficient approach and that's where the grouping of issues occurred."

An editorial in the *Resource Management Bulletin* by associate professor of law Trevor Daya-Winterbottom is critical of the Appeal Court for not overturning the IHP's decisions.

Daya-Winterbottom points to sections of the Appeal Court judgement stating the panel was legally required to specifically address submissions.

Clarification

In the Rangitoto Observer of 25 October, we described top-polling Devonport-Takapuna Local Board member Aidan Bennett as a first-time candidate.

A reader correctly pointed out that Bennett stood in the 2013 election, failing to get on the board with 4650 votes.

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Greyhounds finally back on track



Field work... Devonport-Takapuna Local Board member George Wood gives a thumbs-up for the reopening of Sunnynook Park's sports field number 3.

The Glenfield Greyhounds are frustrated they have been turfed off their Sunnynook rugby league fields for two years, longer than originally predicted by the council, which has been carrying out flood-prevention work.

Founded in 1964, the Glenfield Rugby League Club has played mainly in Unsworth Heights in the interim, which has directly impacted on revenue and membership, according to chair Simon Watson.

"We have just got on and made it happen. All our focus now is on building to the 2020 season and we have started our planning around that," Watson says.

The club does not want to appear ungrateful, as the fields it returns to for next season will be some of the best in Auckland, Watson says. "There are 15 floodlights waiting to be used."

Originally the council said field would reopen between October 2018 and May 2019. The council confirms extremely wet weather conditions throughout the year have been the cause of delays.

Community facilities manager John Schermbrucker says the contractors are not to blame. "Decisions related to the project schedule, which is entirely weather dependent, are made by council not our contractors."

Now two of the four fields are open, but one of those, which has been used occasionally, is in a poor state. A third field is at the grass-growing stage and a fourth is still being worked on.

Watson says the grass on all fields will come away in the warmer summer weather.

Devonport-Takapuna Local Board chair George Wood says: "This project has dragged on for a lot longer than was first expected. It is great to see that progress is now happening."

The council work included excavating the grounds to add water storage capacity so, during heavy rainfall, downstream flooding would be reduced, council water quality projects team manager Priya Kumar says.

The spoil from the park was used to fill and level playing fields at Wairau Intermediate School.

Project works, including earthworks, new spectator seating, footpaths, a floodwall, local drainage improvements, landscaping and upgrading the gym area, were completed by February 2019, Kumar says. Since then, works have included drainage and irrigation of the sports fields, along with new turf.

Rediscovered Baroque music in Takapuna bill

A Takapuna concert of Baroque chamber music, played on original instruments, will present pieces by lesser-known composers of the period.

Hausmusik NZ will present a selection of such works, that were wildly popular at the time, but later forgotten.

Hausmusik NZ, Lost & Found – Rediscovered Baroque Masterworks, Takapuna Methodist Church, Sunday, 17 November, 5pm, hausmusiknz.com



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Award-winning Takapuna restoration features in heritage film

Peter Golder's emotional return to his family's long-time Takapuna home features in a heritage movie night this month.

Golder was brought home to his parent's Rewiti Ave house as a newborn in 1938 and it was his home base for the next 78 years.

The historic Arts and Crafts house was in almost original condition when Peter put it up for sale in 2016.

It still had the meat safe and coal range in the kitchen, and 1923 bathroom fittings. His family memorabilia, hand-made toy planes and old books, and even his mother's sewing machine, were all still where they had been for over 80 years.

The classic Chapman Taylor designed house is one of two restoration stories featured in a Devonport Heritage film night at the Victoria Theatre this month.

The film shows Peter, at 82, returning to check out the renovated house.

It was bought by Sue Fleischl and Michael Booth, who embarked on a restoration project that took over their lives for the next three years.

They had to negotiate with heritage specialists before any changes could be made, as the house has category A protection.

Their resulting restoration and modern extension won them the North Shore Heritage Award last year.

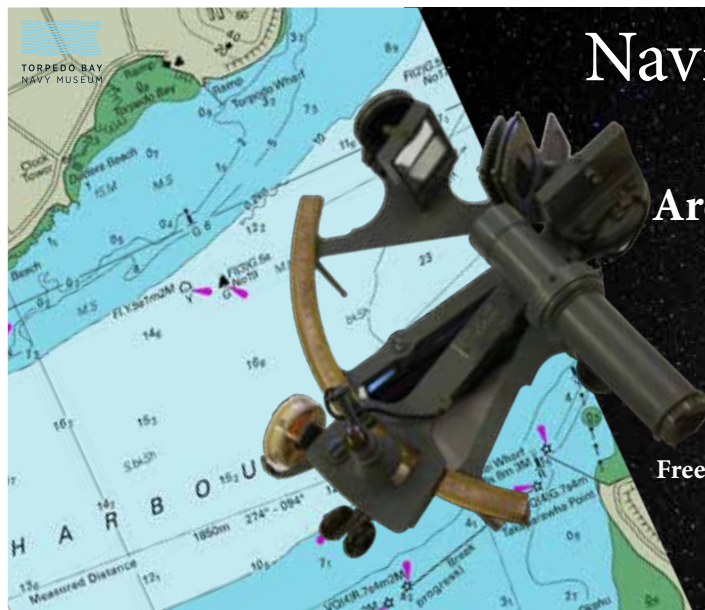
The other film features one woman's dream to buy an old church and convert it to a family home.

Lesley Harris bought St Augustine's in Devonport two years ago. The film follows her as she begins planning for her dream home.

• **Restoration and Transformation, 21 November 8pm. Tickets at thevic.co.nz**



Home again... A movie still showing Peter Golder back at his family house in Rewiti Ave



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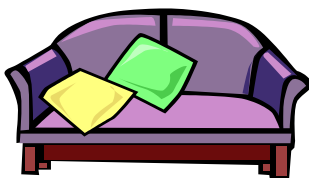
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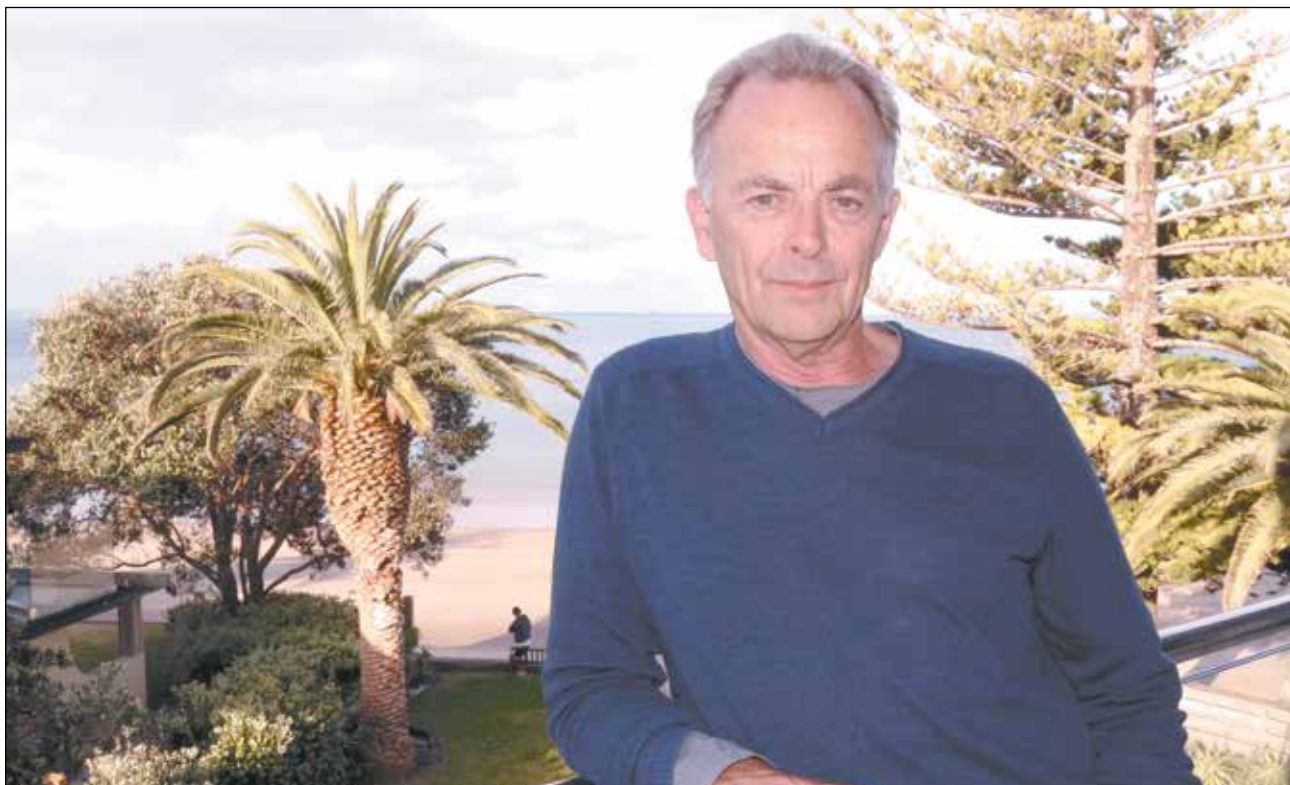
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David Aston: From *The Matrix* to the PumpHouse



Balcony scene... Actor David Aston at his apartment in Milford

Learning lines and finding the character are the biggest challenges faced by Milford actor David Aston, and both are put to the test in *Heroes*, currently showing at the PumpHouse.

The comedy centres on a trio of World War I veterans, each damaged in different ways, who sit on a terrace, outside a French home for returned soldiers, plotting how they will break out of the institution.

Will it ever happen? The men are not physically capable of it.

“That’s the play,” Aston says in the perfectly enunciated tones of a professional actor.

Heroes was originally called *Le Vent des Peupliers – The Wind in the Poplars* – but, when playwright Tom Stoppard translated the play, written by Gérard Silbreyas, it was decided it sounded too much like *The Wind in the Willows*, so the name was changed,

Aston says.

“That’s a shame, because it’s all about those poplars... ‘Somewhere over the poplars’.

“The suggestion is that once you get over the ‘rainbow’, you will be happy, but will you? There’s nothing there. There are more hills and more valleys – it’s a fantasy,” Aston explains.

Aston and his wife, Moira, moved to their stylish 1960s apartment about four years ago, downsizing after their four sons had left home.

Over the years, Aston, who started his career at Theatre Corporate under Raymond Hawthorne, has since subsidised stage acting with waiting on tables, teaching English as a foreign language, voice-overs, and advertising.

Aston is arguably best known in Australia as the face of Macquarie Bank. Over 10 years, he made around 15 advertisements for the bank,

which, in acting terms, was a well-paid gig.

His film-acting has included a speaking role in *The Matrix*, which was filmed in Australia. Actors there are unionised, so the odd cheque, albeit modest, still rolls in, he says.

Now, at 65, Aston hasn’t taught for eight years and, when not involved in *Heroes*, he is putting his energy into a company, set up in 2017 with acting friend Paul Gittens, called Plumb Theatre. Their goal is to provide intimate, emotionally charged theatre that makes the audience think. Ultimately, they would like to find a permanent venue.

“We are committed to carrying on and finding a venue. We are starting from nothing.”

With Aston’s combination of skill and passion, their dreams surely will come true.

• *Heroes*, produced by Tadpole Theatre, is at the PumpHouse until 17 November

Maggie Barry retires

North Shore MP Maggie Barry announced on Tuesday she will be retiring from Parliament in 2020 at the general election.

Ms Barry has held the North Shore seat for three terms. In 2014 she became a Cabinet Minister with the Conservation, Seniors and Arts Culture and Heritage portfolios.

Experienced reporter wanted

Reporter required for the Devonport Flagstaff and the recently launched Rangitoto Observer.

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State of the lake: one of Auckland's natural gems

The preservation of water quality and natural habitats is a major issue on the North Shore. Rob Drent looks back at the history of Lake Pupuke and what is being done now to safeguard the lake, which is in serious decline.

Water scientist Ebrahim Hussain is picking up cans and broken glass outside the PumpHouse Theatre near the edge of Lake Pupuke at 8.15 on a Sunday morning.

He's there for an interview with the Rangitoto Observer and some diving work later on. The irony of a conservationist picking up litter as he is about to explain the state of lake is not lost on him.

"What are you supposed to do? It looks like it was a big party. I just can't understand why people don't care for their environment," he says, pointing to an empty rubbish bin nearby.

He's been "weirdly passionate" about Lake Pupuke ever since he took his first dive in New Zealand's largest urban lake in 2013.

"Where in the world can you have such fantastic diving right on your doorstep in the middle of a city?"

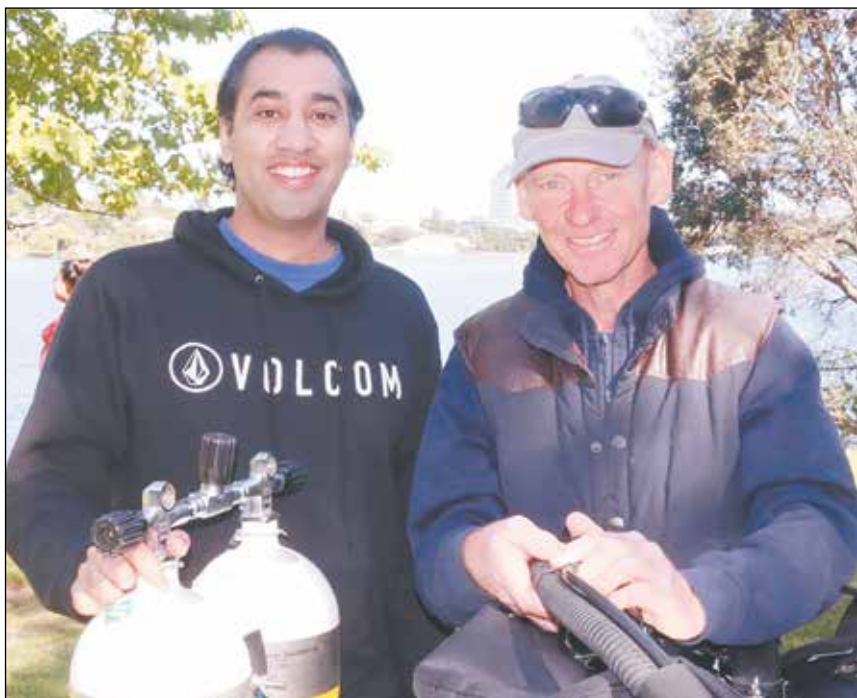
But all is not well under Lake Pupuke's waterline. Hussain is worried the lake is almost at tipping point, headed for a crash with no coming back.

Millions would then need to be spent to return any sort of biodiversity.

"Even in that short time since my first dive there has been a marked deterioration," he says.

"The deterioration of the lake is a disaster, as it is the biggest free-diving site in the Southern Hemisphere and a training ground for numerous diving clubs."

Hussain has been able to combine his love of diving and desire to conserve Lake Pupuke with his work as a research scientist at Auckland Council.



Guardians of the lake... Ebrahim Hussain (left) and Oliver Horschig prepare for a dive in which they will clean sensors

Alongside his job with Auckland Council, he was instrumental in setting up the Lake Pupuke Project Baseline volunteer group in 2017, which aligns itself with an international parent body using citizen-science monitoring to collect data which will act as a benchmark in measuring changes to water quality and biodiversity.

In Lake Pupuke's case, it is a collaborative project between council's healthy waters group, the Cawthron Institute and Project Baseline.

Hussain and other Project Baseline divers (a core group of five, which can swell to 10) collect samples, take photographs and monitor sensors. The Cawthron Institute does the analysis, while council logs the data and is scoping out options for the best way ahead.

Evidence of deterioration includes the more regular occurrence since 2014 of non-toxic algal blooms, some of which have gone from the surface down to 10-14 metres.

Water visibility has often been poor and a mysterious underwater hydrogen sulphide layer was discovered early in 2019, the first of its type

recorded in any New Zealand lake. The layer's depth varies across the lake, but is found at around a 4m depth in the middle, says Hussain.

He describes it as like a thick smog. "You can smell and taste it in your regulator – it's a strong sulphur taste."

The exact cause of the layer is not yet known, but is thought to be a bacteria byproduct caused by organic material breaking down.

The biodiversity of the lake has dropped over time. Aquatic plants have decreased, and native freshwater fish and mussels have disappeared.

Project Baseline divers have collected numerous old mussel shells and surveyed dead mussel beds of around 20m by 15m. The freshwater mussels are thought to have been killed off around 20 years ago, with introduced perch the likely culprit. Perch eat bullies, native fish that the mussel larvae attach to early in their life cycle.

When the divers float over the funeral pyre-like mussel beds they can sometimes encounter schools of 50 to 60 healthy perch.

The increasing level of decomposing plant

Lake Pupuke: facts at a glance

- Lake Pupuke is the only lake of its type in the Auckland region, occupying a volcanic crater formed in an eruption about 140,000 years ago.
- It covers 110 hectares, has 4.3km of shoreline and is 57m deep.
- Its water discharges through an underground outlet, running out at Thorne Bay into the Hauraki Gulf. Water sits in the lake for 30-40 years before draining to the sea. It takes less than a week for water to flow from the lake to Thorne Bay.
- From 1895 to 1943, the lake was used as a domestic water supply, firstly to supply Devonport and later much of the North Shore as well.

A brief history of occupation

For around three centuries before Pakeha arrived, Maori occupied the area due to the abundant food, including eels, freshwater mussels and birds. Flax grew on the shores, and beaches nearby provided shellfish and fishing grounds. Around the lake, Maori cultivated gardens and grew kumara.

The area was purchased by European settlers from numerous Maori owners from 1841 to 1844. The area was farmed until the 1920s, and was notable for horticulture

and agriculture.

In the mid to late 1800s, residential subdivisions began to appear and the area became popular for holiday homes. By the early 1900s, holiday homes began changing to become permanent residences.

In 1958, North Shore Hospital was built. Subdivisions followed in Sylvan Park Ave, Lake View Rd and other areas around the lake in the 1960s and 1970s.

**In the heart of suburbia... Lake Pupuke**

PHOTO: CANDIICANDII

matter in the lake has also thought to have affected the mussel beds over time, choking them with silt.

While many members of the public believe the lake issues are caused by runoff and big city pollutants, Hussain says most of problems emerge from within the lake itself.

The lake has its own “nutrient load”. Material in the sediment interacts with plant growth and breakdown of organic material. It’s possible the imbalance in the lake could have started as a result of run-off from dairy farms as much as a century ago.

Chemical run-off from homeowners fertilising their lawns has only a minimal effect on lake health.

Hussain says the lake was in quite a steady state from the 1930s until quite recently.

“The internal load is causing the problem,” he says.

“I fear what is happening is the lake has shown a resilience... until a tipping point.”

Water quality and biodiversity are closely linked. Take the lake’s black swan population for example: swan droppings add to the nutrients in the lake, but the birds also eat the tips of the common eel grass weed, killing a 5m-long plant, which then starts to decompose.

What’s happening now?

Hussain says Auckland Council has taken a proactive stance towards lake health in the region over the last five years.

For Lake Pupuke this has culminated in the \$100,000 study combining work from Project Baseline, Auckland Council and the Cawthron Institute.

Project Baseline has been doing sediment sampling at various depths. Around twice a month its divers are out on the lake taking photos, conducting plant surveys and checking numerous sensors to monitor oxygen levels, temperatures and PH readings.

“The aim is to get a good understanding of

how the lake changes over the seasons,” says Hussain.

Auckland Council is finalising a report on the various options for the lake, which will be costed before decisions are made.

Currently the key options are:

- “Capping”, with 5cm of river sand laid over the nutrient sediment at the bottom of the lake to stop the release of phosphorus. This could be difficult as the lake floor is bowl-shaped, meaning the sand may stay in place).

- Flocculant spray, often used in water treatment processes, though this is very expensive and needs to be reapplied at least five yearly.

- Aerators across the lake to break down thermal stratification (temperature differences in the water).

The council is increasing its own lake water sampling from quarterly to monthly from January.

“First and foremost, we want to stop further decline,” says Hussain. “We need to be cautious on how we approach this – there is no tried and tested way to do it.”

Whether the next step is capping, flocculants or aeration, “the costs and relative effectiveness need to be evaluated carefully,” he says.

A copper sulphate dump, which was employed in the 1930s, is off the agenda. “Copper sulphate is a very expensive and short-term fix. And has poor downstream consequences for the ecosystem.

“We don’t want to introduce anything into the lake that is not absolutely necessary.”

The public also needs to be patient: a lake in trouble is not fixed in a day.

“People can have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved – subtle improvements will happen – less algal bloom and an increase in water clarity.”

Remediation will come in small steps, and a monumental effort will be needed to bring back the lake to what it was even 20 years ago,

says Hussain.

He is moving into the private sector after six years at Auckland Council, but will continue to follow his passion for the lake through Project Baseline.

“There’s nothing wrong with admitting you have a problem as long as you come up with a way ahead to deal with it.”

Pupuke ‘in decline’

Lake Pupuke is in a poor and declining condition, according to a major 2017 National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) report on Auckland’s 33 lakes.

The lake measured only 18 per cent against a standard where 100 per cent was pristine.

“This represents a significant deterioration since 2012. The main cause of the deterioration was a reduction of charophyte (a native plant) meadows in deep water. Previously, Lake Pupuke had a stable, moderate status in surveys in 1985, 2008 and 2012,” the report said.

“There was also a significant retraction of weeds across all sites compared with previous surveys in 2008 and 2012.”

In 1985, Lake Pupuke was measured at 26 per cent pristine, then improved in 2008 (30 per cent) and 2012 (31 per cent) before dropping to 18 per cent in 2017.

Its “native condition” index has also plummeted recently: 1985, 21 per cent; 2008, 35 per cent; 2012, 36 per cent; and 2017, 11 per cent.

Correspondingly, its invasive impact index has been going up: 1985, 76 per cent; 2008, 79 per cent; 2012, 77 per cent; and 2017, 84 per cent.

Water quality issues nothing new

Geologist Christian Hochstetter recorded a relatively pristine environment when he visited the Lake in 1857. He reported seeing hundreds of wild ducks swimming on IT which was said to be “abounding in all kinds of fish, especially eels”. Furthermore, “on the shore we fished interesting fresh water shells and fresh-water plants out of the water, and the wood furnished us many a beautiful fern”.

However, by the 1920s and 1930s, water quality was a serious problem, due to the surrounding land uses and lack of sewage treatment.

Various remedies were tried, including chlorination (1923), enactment of a bylaw to control surrounding land uses (1932), installation of a water purification plant (1933) and copper sulphate treatment to reduce algae levels (1934).

Lake Pupuke continued to supply water to the North Shore suburbs until 1941, when the Board of Health closed it as a public water source. By December 1942, a new pipeline had been constructed to bring water from the Waitakere Ranges to the North Shore. Pumping of the lake

waters continued as a supplementary and emergency supply until 1959, when the opening of the Harbour Bridge brought with it a new water main across the harbour.

Various water quality studies of the lake have been undertaken since 1966. Studies undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s concluded urban stormwater and emergency sewer overflows were believed to be the causes of poor water quality. Decaying water weeds on the lake bed and shoreline and black swans were also thought to be increasing nutrient concentrations and organic levels.

But of the seven lakes in the ARC Lakes Monitoring Programme in the 80s and 90s, Lake Pupuke was near top in water quality, and had clear water, and low faecal coliforms, according to reports at the time.

The lake today remains an emergency water source for a highly populated area, with high civil defence importance, and was called into play during the water crisis of 1994, with water taken by electric pump from the adjacent Quarry Lake for non-potable purposes.



The mid-water hydrogen sulphide layer above, and a diver sampling it below



Lake ‘Poohpuke’ dates back to the 1920s

In 1921, the Department of Health was called in and warned that quality of water in the lake was deteriorating, with residents nicknaming the lake “Poohpuke” due to the stench of the weeds growing at an alarming rate over the surface of the water. The weed growth and deterioration of the water became a source of many complaints that the water was undrinkable and the bath water was green with algae. In 1923 chlorinating equipment was installed and weed cutting undertaken.

By 1927 water quality was such a concern that a Water Commission of Enquiry into Lake Pupuke was set up. This found

that of 62 houses and two cowsheds in the catchment, only seven houses were on septic tanks and five connected to the sewer – with wastewater from the cowsheds and remaining houses gaining ready access to the lake. A bylaw intended to protect the lake from contamination by the surrounding land area was enacted in 1932. It banned wading, bathing or washing, the keeping of dogs or pigs within the catchment, or the keeping of horses within four chains (80 metres) of the lake edge.

During the 1930s ‘Pupuke water’ became known for its vile taste and smell due to the presence of *Ceratium* algae, which emitted

oil when chlorinated. A further water purification plant was installed in 1933 and a scheme to augment the lake supply with water from the Wairau Valley was investigated and recommended by council. By January 1934, Devonport’s Borough Engineer, Mr E Griffiths, had finally found a solution for the ‘protozoa problem’, successfully treating the lake with copper sulphate.

Pet invaders

Goldfish and red eared turtles also live in the lake.

Project Baseline has been sent a photo of a group of turtles sunning themselves on a lakeside jetty.

It is thought the goldfish and turtles were formerly domestic pets.

A battle for survival for native fish

The dominant fish populations of Lake Pupuke have changed considerably over time, from a pre-European native fish population to attempts to establish a sports fishery. The lake has a long history as a trout fishery dating from the first liberations in the 1880s. With no tributaries suitable for spawning, the trout population has been artificially populated regularly since then.

Around 1967, trout stocks in the lake were considered good. Since then, numbers have declined, although for many years 1000 trout have been released into the lake annually.

A number of exotic species such as rudd,

perch and tench have been introduced and increasingly become dominant. Koi carp have also been observed in the lake since the 1960s. Mosquitofish were introduced in the 1930s to control mosquitoes.

White swans were a feature of the lake from the 1880s until sometime in the mid-1900s, when they died out despite persistent efforts to maintain the population. The original swans were gifted by Queen Victoria to Sir George Grey, and migrated from Governor Grey’s Kawau Island residence to the preferable freshwater environment of Lake Pupuke.

Black swans continue to live on the lake.

How the public can get involved

With the increasing ability to store data, photos of anything extraordinary on the lake can be helpful. After 20 years, a database of lake conditions at various time and places creates a formidable historical database. Photos can be sent to pupuke.baseline@gmail.com

For more information go to Lake Pupuke Baseline Project on Facebook.

Bennett board chair for first half of term

Aidan Bennett is the new Devonport-Takapuna Local Board chair.

The top polling candidate for the board at the recent elections is chair for half the board's term – until April 2021.

Ruth Jackson has been elected board chair for the second half of the term, from April 2021 until the next elections, towards the end of 2022.

At the board's first meeting last week, the previous chair, George Wood, was elected deputy chair for the first half of the board's term. Jan O'Connor was elected deputy chair for the second half.

The board has used the split-term chair system in prior years with mixed results.

Board members signed declarations of allegiance to the local board and community at the meeting held at the PumpHouse Theatre.

Toni van Tonder made her declaration in both Maori and English.

• The next meeting of the board is on 19 November at 2 pm.



Around the table... (from left to right) Aidan Bennett, Jan O'Connor and Ruth Jackson

Board name change mooted

Changing the name of the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board has been raised by Aidan Bennett in his first speech as chair.

On the campaign trail, Bennett met people from across the board area including those living in Sunnynook, Milford, Castor Bay and Forrest Hill – a much wider area than just Devonport and Takapuna.

And the local board name should reflect that with a more generic name, he said.

When asked for a name suggestion after the meeting, Bennett said he had not got that far, but felt it was an idea worth considering.



First meeting... new local board chair Aidan Bennett makes his first speech, while North Shore ward councillor Chris Darby congratulates new board member Toni van Tonder



Bennett calls for unity and healthy communities

Board unity, vibrant town centres and well-managed development were key aims for the new Devonport-Takapuna Local Board, said Aidan Bennett in his first speech as chair.

Bennett and fellow board member Toni van Tonder stood on the ticket, A Fresh Approach, and that is what they promised to take.

His first job was unifying the board, which had shown signs of disharmony at the end of the last term.

Key goals included:

- Vibrant town centres in Milford, Sunnynook, Takapuna and Devonport.
- Clean beaches, particularly Takapuna, which had poor pollution readings.
- Cleaning up the Wairau Estuary.
- An emphasis on public transport and working through the Lake Rd upgrade.

Under the Auckland Unitary Plan, intensification in the board area was inevitable, Bennett said.

He was "keen for development" in Takapuna, but it had to be managed well, he said.

The relationship between the board and Auckland Council had been fractious at times in the last term, and Bennett wanted to focus on rebuilding it. Likewise, the connection with North Shore ward councillors.

"I have great respect for councillors Chris Darby and Richard Hills and look forward to working with them."

He was involved in business, education and sporting groups on the North Shore, which would provide diversity to his leadership.

Bennett said he gave 110 per cent to everything he became involved in.

Jackson advocates community focus

Local body veteran Jan O'Connor was singled out for praise by Ruth Jackson, the chair-elect for the board's second term.

She said fellow board member O'Connor had been an inspiration over the years and on the campaign trail.

She not only brought people together, but encouraged people to "stand up and do something".

Jackson said board members had one vital goal in common: to bring improvements across all areas of the community, and build up the things that make each community unique.

Jackson said the high levels of skill and expertise of residents living in the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board area were something the board needed to draw on.



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From Taka stormie to national surf champ



On a winning wave... Ben Counsell at the national champs in Raglan

A Hauraki teenager has overcome a fear of waves to win a national longboard title.

Ben Counsell, 15, took out the National Scholastic Surfing under-18 longboard championships in three-metre-high waves at Raglan.

"When I started, I was scared of waves, which isn't very good for a surfer. But that just faded away eventually."

Ben grew up in Cameron St and began surfing as a Takapuna Beach 'stormie', going out with friends when the waves were up.

"You can't beat a classic Takapuna stormie," he says.

Around five years ago, Ben started surfing more seriously with his father, Robert Counsell, at beaches north and west of Auckland, initially on a short board.

His father has always surfed on a longboard and a few years ago, Ben switched over, saying longboarding is stylish and gives the opportunity of catching more waves.

A couple of years ago, they joined Scholastics Surfing Auckland, and Ben was picked to represent Auckland at the 2018 Scholastic nationals in Gisborne, where he placed third.

At the 2019 Scholastic finals in Raglan, Ben was the stand-out longboarder all week, surfing through three rounds to qualify for the final.

On finals day, the waves increased in size, to three metres at the face.

The final was a nail-biter, with Ben and rival Billy Whelan from Mangawhai on 10 points each as the competition moved to a conclusion.

"With two minutes to go, Ben took off from out the back on the biggest wave we'd seen in the comp all day and hung 10 while performing a classy soul arch. The Auckland team went wild," Robert says.

Ben completed the wave with a big powerful bottom turn to earn seven points – and

take the title.

Ben says enjoyment of surfing is the key to success. It also builds confidence, which helps him think clearly and make good decisions.

"As soon as you start freaking out, you start taking off when you shouldn't or doing manoeuvres you shouldn't."

For training, Ben goes surfing with his father and friends, with Orewa Longboard Club and the Westlake Boys surf team.

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Kindy marks global awareness with costume walk



As part of a cultural awareness week to celebrate the diverse cultures represented among its children, Milford Baptist Kindergarten children dressed in national costume and marched through Milford late last month.

Parents also taught children to make Chinese dumplings and Kiwi pavlova, and perform a traditional Indian dance, manager Sheelagh Priest says. The kindergarten's children come from diverse cultures, including Hungarian, Brazilian, Persian, Indonesian, Korean, Chinese and Indian.



Sister act... Nina, Hayley (2) and Shannon (4) Helly



Flying the flag... Georgia (2), Helen and Indi (4) Tobia



Hand in hand... Jayden Mahadi (4) and Maricus Crocett (4)

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