

The Rangitoto Observer

DELIVERED FORTNIGHTLY

Issue 30 - May 15, 2020

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

**Budget cuts threaten
Shore projects... p4**

**High-rise apartments allowed
at Smales Farm ... p7**

**Aidan Bennett: businesses
need support... p14**

Hurtsmere Rd project off – then on again

The multimillion-dollar Hurtsmere Rd upgrade project – seen as vital to the rejuvenation of Takapuna town centre – was called off in the early stages of the Covid-19 crisis and only reinstated at the last minute.

After years of planning and months of delays, the project kicked off last week, but it was touch and go, the Observer can reveal.

With the massive economic effects of Covid-19 on Auckland Council finances quickly becoming apparent, the local authority has been in a month of emergency meetings. Only high-level lobbying from North Shore councillors Richard Hills and Chris Darby saw the Hurtsmere Rd project start construction under alert level 3.

Says Hills: “All projects were stopped during level 4, and then under level 3 almost all projects were put on review to be cancelled or delayed due to our drastic reduction in revenue, which could be up to \$600million this year alone.”

Projects that were already under way were prioritised and continued.

To page 2

Goata love moving out of level 3



Back to the beach... Saanen goats Steve and Dave were out having a walk with owner Grant Solley at Takapuna on Tuesday a couple of days prior to alert level 2 starting

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Travel modes vary across local-board area

Travel patterns for residents in the Devonport /Takapuna Local Board (DTLB) areas north of the Devonport peninsula differed markedly to those in the south, where the ferry played a significant role in getting people to work and study.

The use of a private or company vehicle was, unsurprisingly, the most popular mode of travel to work, although this varied by area. Around 70 per cent of those in Castor Bay and Forrest Hill used a private vehicle, compared to 55 to 58 per cent in the Takapuna areas.

Travelling to work by bus (11.3 per cent across DTLB) was highest in Sunnynook South (20.7 per cent) and Takapuna West (19.5 per

cent), and lowest in Milford Central (8.9 per cent) and Castor Bay (9.5 per cent).

The greatest prevalence of walking or jogging to work was in Westlake (12.3 per cent), Takapuna Central (11.4 per cent) and Takapuna West (11.1 per cent), where it could be concluded that people were living closer to their workplaces than their counterparts elsewhere in the DTLB area (5.4 per cent).

Milford Central and Takapuna (South and Central) had the highest proportion of people working from home – 16 to 17 per cent, compared to 11.4 per cent across the DTLB area; Sunnynook South had the lowest proportion (4.6 per cent).

Being a passenger in a private vehicle (26.1 per cent), or walking or jogging (23.4 per cent), were the most common modes of travel to a place of study in the DTLB, although there was significant variation between areas. Forrest Hill North saw the greatest numbers travelling in a private vehicle (36 per cent) and the lowest (9.7 per cent) walking or jogging.

The proportions catching the bus were highest in Sunnynook South (28.9 per cent) and lowest in Takapuna South (11.5 per cent), compared to 15.4 per cent across the DTLB area.

• Census data on other topics was published in the 1 May Rangitoto Observer, which can be found online at rangitoto-observer.co.nz.

Full-rent risk kept businesses closed

Some Takapuna businesses remained closed under Covid-19 alert level 3 because opening would risk them paying full rent.

Businesses had faced a 70-90 per cent drop in revenue under lockdown, Takapuna Beach Business Association manager Terrence Harpur told the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board last week.

Rental agreements with landlords were highly site specific, with some property owners offering rent discounts and rent holidays while others wanted full payment, Harpur said.

“Some (businesses) had not opened under level 3 because of the threat of having to pay rent,” he said.

The Hurstmere Rd upgrade had started, which would be very positive for Takapuna

in the long term but hard on businesses “and even harder with Covid-19,” Harpur said.

He thanked the board for its support and hoped it would continue to advocate to council on behalf of local businesses.

Issues were bound to arise during the Hurstmere Rd redevelopment, but Harpur encouraged the board to keep them in-house, as public airing of them would impact further on the fragile trading conditions.

Board member George Wood said the upgrade would take around 12 months.

Press silenced

The media was well and truly silenced at the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board meeting last week.

Under alert level 3, the board met through a phone meeting. Speakers in the public forum also logged in.

The Rangitoto Observer linked in to proceedings as well, but was put on mute.

The next board meeting is on May 19 – most likely under level two. The public will be able to attend, but seated apart.

from Page 1

Project saved at last minute

Darby and Hills argued that Hurstmere Rd should go ahead as planned because the contract was signed and its start date was during the level 4 lockdown.

“Chris and I both advocated strongly for this project to stay on track to ensure we got the much-needed investment and upgrade in our local community, to support the businesses who are desperate for this project to be done and to improve our community and help address water-quality issues at Takapuna Beach,” Hills said.

“Thankfully we were successful.”

2 The Strand: empty for 794 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 794 days. At some point, its future will be determined by Auckland Council.

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Observer

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MANAGING EDITOR: Rob Drent
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ADVERTISING: Liz Cannon

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Access all areas the aim for new dance leader

The new artistic director of Takapuna-based Touch Compass Dance Company is on a mission to ensure artistic expression is open to all.

Pelenakeke Brown is, for now, working remotely for the ground-breaking company which has its office at the Wilson Home. The 31-year-old multi-disciplinary artist and dancer is in lockdown in at a family bach at Waikanae, north of Wellington, looking forward to when she can drive back to her home city to fully embrace her new role. She's in planning mode until then, and conducting online classes.

Touch Compass is a New Zealand leader in showcasing the skills of dancers of all abilities. Run by a charitable trust, it teaches community classes and also retains a core company of up to a dozen dancers. Close links with Takapuna Grammar School see company members and school dancers sometimes stage shows together.

Brown's own connection with Touch Compass goes back more than 20 years. As a nine-year-old who had been born with cerebral palsy she was taking dance classes at Unitec when invited to join the company. "I was really really shy, but I loved it," she recalls.

For several years she danced and toured with the group, before focusing on her schooling, rounded out with a degree at the University of Auckland in Pacific Studies and English literature. After a few years in the workforce, Brown headed to New York for more studies on an arts scholarship.

After six years spent living in apartments, lockdown is something Brown is coping well with. "A lot of disabled people we stay at home a lot – so it's not so scary." The experience has got her thinking more about the use of technology, both in how to integrate this in arts performances and also how to make its daily use user-friendly. "In a Covid world if we are all at home, it's accessible in ways that's not usually the case."

During her time in New York, Brown, who walks with a cane, was far from housebound. She used the subway and participated in the cultural life of the city, taking part in performance pieces and dance programmes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New York Public Library. Themes of physical movement and the aesthetics of disability were at their



Fostering creators... Pelenakeke Brown is the new artistic director of Touch Compass Dance Company

core. Immigration and indigenous culture were other topics, seen through the lens of her Samoan heritage.

With her growing reputation in the arts community, Brown was called upon by the Touch

Compass board in an advisory capacity as it planned a move to a more disabled-led approach in its work. Adopted last year, the strategy ultimately led to her recent appointment for an interim 12-month term. A year ago, returning home was more of a long-time thought as she had a valid US visa until this September.

Brown ended up stuck on holiday in London when New York City went into lockdown. Unable to fly back to the States, returning to family here seemed her best option.

Now comes the welcome challenge of steering Touch Compass to be both for and by disabled people – as a "world-class lab space in Aotearoa". Acknowledging diversity and drawing on the skills of the wider arts community are part of her plan to provide more opportunities. "I want [Touch Compass] to be a space that fosters and supports disabled creators," says the woman who went from being a founding dancer in the company to being its guide to a more inclusive future.

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Drought becomes real

Several thousand homes from Belmont to Takapuna were without water or had low pressure earlier this month due to a broken water main in Huron St, Takapuna.

Water was gradually restored to residents over the following days.

The fault, at the same time as Auckland is under drought conditions, was found next to a construction site.

“Residents were given bottles of water and a water tanker was also on site,” a Watercare spokesperson said.

Development creates demand for more street names

Hundreds of new street names might be needed on the North Shore due to infill development.

Te Uru Lane was approved by the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board last week as the new name for a 13-lot development at 59-61 Karaka St, Takapuna. The name means bush or grove and reflects its proximity to Smith’s Bush.

Board member George Wood wants some clarification from council on street-naming policy.

Some driveways in the board area served more than 10 properties and did not have a street name. Wood suggested a street name only be given to a development of more than 20 plots.

Fears Shore projects could be shelved

Public toilets at Milford Beach and other civic projects on the North Shore appear to be under threat from reduced council budgets, post Covid-19.

Nothing appears to be guaranteed at the moment, as Auckland Council faces up to the budget implications of the Covid-19 economic fallout.

Council is holding emergency meetings, with key budget decisions due to be made in June, prompting both the Milford Residents Association (MRA) and Castor Bay Residents Association (CBRA) to petition the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board to go into bat for already-planned projects.

Debbie Dunsford, of MRA said the beach toilets had not been upgraded for 40 years.

“Tenders have gone out and construction is set to start in the spring of 2020... we would be very disappointed if it did not go ahead.”

Milford residents knew that some projects “would have to be chopped”, but Dunsford

asked the board to try to lobby council to be fair on all areas.

Milford often seemed to be left out of council priorities, she said.

Vital work by Healthy Waters and Safe Swim on investigating the pollution sources of Wairau Estuary which flowed out to local beaches needed to continue, Dunsford said.

Hamish Anderson, of CBRA, was also concerned its area could miss out on “our fair share” of council spend.

Castor Bay priorities were: beach water quality, safety concerns around footpaths, the control of pests and support of the birdsong project, and work conserving Kennedy Park tunnels and its historic barracks.

Rangitoto Observer back in letterboxes

This is the first Rangitoto Observer delivered to letterboxes in a month. During Covid-19 level 4 we published online, and our last issue was printed and circulated via stands and dairies.

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Teens just a phone call away for isolated seniors

A North Shore teenager is building bridges across the generations, helping relieve loneliness for isolated elderly people living in retirement villages and rest homes.

Evy Hwangbo, a Year 12 student at Kristin School, has recruited other student volunteers -- mainly from her own school and Westlake Girls High -- to be part of Genafriends. The group was launched during lockdown and pairs each student with an elderly person for regular conversations. So far, 24 students and four homes are involved, including Parklane Village in Forrest Hill. The initiative is set to grow, with another 20 students being schooled up.

"The demand has been crazy, even rest homes we haven't contacted have reached out to us," says Evy. All this has happened in the month since she first contacted Settlers Lifestyle Village near her school and won its support in matching residents with young volunteers.

The idea is that Genafriends will continue beyond the Covid-19 crisis. "We're hoping to do face-to-face visits in time." Expanding nationally is also an option, with a handful of students across the bridge and one in Christchurch already involved.

With a grandmother who lives alone in Christchurch and her grandfather in South Korea, Evy appreciates how much regular contact matters to older people who are sometimes neglected. But she also sees the scheme as having two-way benefits. "Students learn to communicate with someone of a different age

and can make friends beyond their generation."

They are chosen after completing a questionnaire to assess their suitability and then given tips on how to keep the conversation flowing or activities such as Sudoku to work on. More than three times those that were selected applied to help.

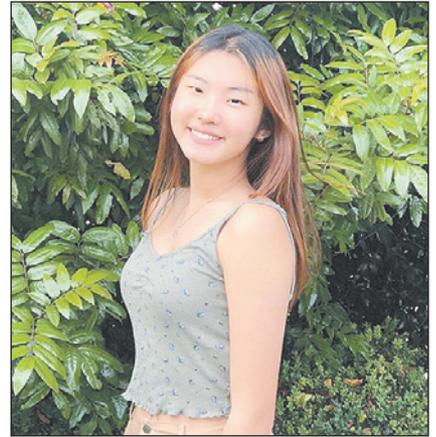
Students commit to making at least one half-hour call a week. Each is matched with one resident, rather than rotating contacts. "That makes it more of a friendship and more manageable."

In most cases, contact is by phone, "because that's what they are most used to", but if the elderly are willing Evy says students can teach them to use Zoom or video links.

Once the elderly feel comfortable with their student friend, the interest in being guided to use newer technology is often there, she says.

Sixteen-year-old Evy has her eyes set on university, maybe overseas, with a view to studying chemical engineering and business, but she isn't fixed on a career yet. Musical theatre is another interest.

Her leadership abilities have seen her involved in a number of student conferences. Networks she has built have come in handy setting up Genafriends. Among those she sought advice from was GirlBoss New Zealand founder Alexia Hilbertidou, whose organisation promotes young women succeeding. "I've been really lucky to be surrounded by people who have been positive and inspirational."



Reaching out... Evy Hwangbo has recruited student volunteers to keep in touch with elderly residents

That, along with the influence of family and her school, were motivation in wanting "just to help people", said Evy who grew up in New Zealand until she was seven, before spending some time in the United Arab Emirates.

Her grandfather is proud of her Genafriends initiative, says Evy, although phone calls can be tricky because his hearing is no longer the best. "My grandmother wants to get on it, although she is quite bad at English, but I'm trying to convince her it will be okay."

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Westlake Girls student shares the love

A little love can go a long way it seems – all around a neighbourhood for starters.

Westlake Girls High School student Tahara-Jayne (TJ) Rusden Rowley hand-made 300 origami hearts, wrote messages on them, and delivered them around her community. The Year 11 student, who lives in Waimauku, took inspiration to brighten spirits from a time of darkness.

“We had a power outage at my house after a car went into a power pole right at the start of lockdown, and since I had no power to do anything I decided to learn how to make origami hearts,” she says.

“On the first night, I stayed up with a candle and made about 30, so then I decided to make it into a project and give them to all my neighbours around where I live.”

It took TJ around three weeks to make the hearts and write an encouraging message on each of them.

“The hardest part was having to glue all the flaps down and getting glue all over my hands,” she says.

Delivering the hearts into letterboxes turned into a two-hour daily dose of exercise. “All the houses are very far apart because I live in the middle of nowhere – as I call it. It took me three days to deliver them all, but I did it on my new bike I got for Christmas, so it was fun.”

Because the hearts were delivered to letterboxes, TJ didn’t get to see people’s reactions. It wasn’t until someone posted on the local Facebook page, that she knew she’d brightened people’s days.

“I didn’t tell anyone what I was doing so when I saw that someone had posted about how much they loved the hearts I felt really happy. Lots of people were commenting on how happy it had made them,” she says.

TJ has previously written kindness quotes on cards and dropped them into letterboxes



of immediate neighbours. “I’ve been researching new things to do, around the school work I’ve been set, so there are more kindness acts coming,” she says.

Special delivery... Tahara-Jayne Rusden Rowley delivered origami hearts to her neighbours



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High-rise apartment blocks allowed at Smales Farm



Residential allowed... An artist's impression of what high-rise apartments at Smales Farm might look like

By Bob Dey

Buildings up to 100m high – about 30 storeys – at Smales Farm office park have been given the green light by planning commissioners.

Any development of the site is likely to occur over the next 20 to 30 years.

The planning change allows substantial residential development at the site, which is currently an office park.

The change runs contrary to the theory that the tallest buildings in the region should be reserved for the central business district, stepping down through larger to smaller suburban centres. It also provides for a significant amount of residential development, largely in apartments.

Smales family company Northcote Rd 1 Holdings Ltd mooted the long-term development proposal in 2016. Its formal application, through private plan change 23, was notified just over a year ago, on 12 April 2019.

Much of the hearing process was completed last year, but some details hung over to the first quarter of 2020. The commissioners – chair Ian Munro with Kim Hardy and Matthew Riley – released their decision this month.

A small complication in the hearing pro-

cess was that the development proposal was largely about the planning concept of a transit orientated development, or TOD.

Chair Munro noted that this term wasn't used in the Auckland Unitary Plan, largely finalised by Auckland Council, with most appeals decided, in November 2016.

In the decision, he noted: "This is in summary a model of development that is well traversed in planning and urban design practice, and all of the commissioners are very familiar with it.

"It is based on the principle of maximising the efficiency of passenger transport networks, and minimising automobile dependence, by enabling high densities of employment and residential activities on or very close to major passenger transport stations."

One sticking point was to apply terminology that fitted the Unitary Plan, rather than writing a whole new set of rules.

The decision is open to appeal until 12 June, after which the terminology will be finalised.

The precinct sits on 10.8ha at the corner of Taharoto and Northcote Rds, Northcote, beside State Highway 1, the Northern Busway and Smales Farm bus station.

• Bob Dey produces the Bob Dey Property Report website.

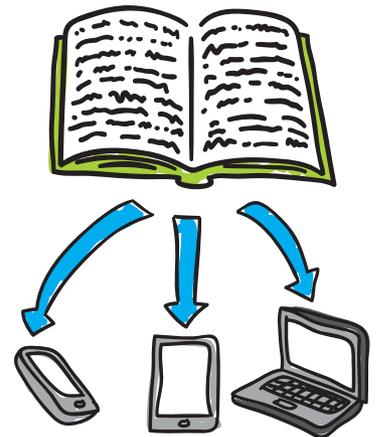
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Milford ready to rise – with local support

“We’re here, we’re near and we care” – that’s the new catch-cri for Milford businesses looking to trade out of tough times.

With more than a third of the shopping district already back in action last week, the value to community of shopping local is being reinforced by the Milford Business Association.

“They’re not in it for the money at the moment – they’re just saying we’re here,” explained association manager Murray Hill.

Of about 160 members, around 60 were actively trading, including eateries and stores selling goods online only.

Milford was in generally good spirits, Hill said, with people finding common purpose in revitalisation. The association had even picked up a few new members and was focusing on plans to promote Milford in ways that were affordable and appropriate to the times. A list of stores that were already trading was online and being regularly updated. (Find it at www.milfordshops.co.nz.)

Hill said social media and emails to databases were also being used to spread the word. Competitions to raise awareness of the area had drawn big entries. A snail race was staged that was live-streamed to 2500 people, providing a touch of light relief in lockdown.

The need to promote Milford itself, as well as its shops, should help reinforce the value of the area. Its walking paths were among at-

tractions to draw people in.

Individual businesses were also having to be nimble and adapt strategies. “One of the sad things for a lot of small businesses is that they’re not very tech savvy,” said Hill. The crisis meant this was changing fast, with new ways of ordering, paying and communicating having to be quickly adopted.

Looking forward to Level 2 – when more stores including the mall would reopen – labels and signage needed for customer protocol information were being prepared. This had been offered by the Benefitz company.

Despite being determinedly upbeat, Hill admits it won’t be plain sailing ahead. “It’s not going to be business as before.” Yet, he was heartened that thus far the word was a number of landlords were being supportive of their tenants.

Once in Level 2, with social distancing in place, many businesses would, however, likely only do around half their usual trade. “Older people may be reluctant to come out too soon.”

Others would be eager to hit the shops. For cafes, being able to fully open their doors and sell more than coffee and muffins was something they were holding on for.

Hill hopes one lasting positive outcome will be that “the local community are really going to be looking more at shopping locally.”

Wairau Estuary projects not ready for funding

The lack of attention given to the polluted Wairau Estuary over many years meant it could not be considered for government infrastructure funding.

To kick-start the economy post Covid-19 lockdown the government asked councils to submit “shovel ready” projects. They needed to be costed at more than \$10 million, planned, consented and ready to go, so jobs could be created immediately.

“There is no such project that would fit that criteria for the Wairau Estuary,” says North Shore ward councillor Richard Hills.

A co-ordinated approach to the estuary has only occurred recently.

Business cases are being done for the Wairau Industrial Area, Hills says.

“Safe networks is an already-funded activity – it had already been under way addressing issues in the catchment, and I have been discussing this with [council department] Healthy Waters and hoping it will kick off again as soon as we have a better idea of our finances.

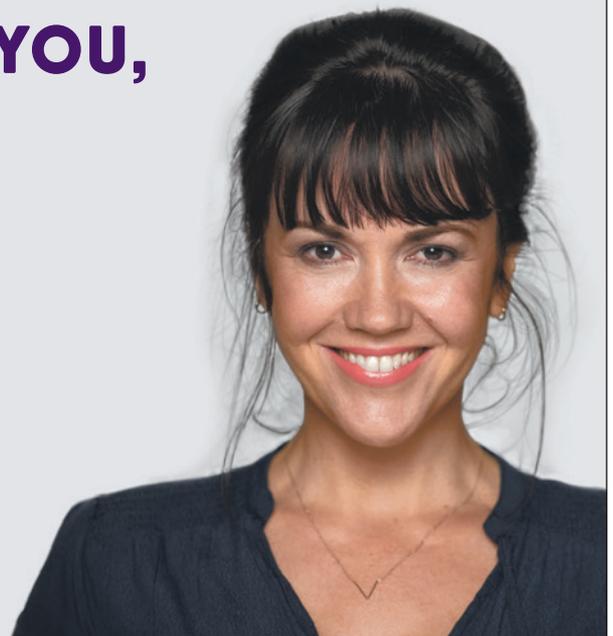
“The safe networks programme continuing for the Wairau is a top priority for me and Healthy Waters,” Hills says.

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Events centre construction resumes

Earthworks are again under way for the new events centre at Westlake Girls High School.

And a community fundraising push to help raise the final \$2 million needed to pay for the much-needed facility is soon to launch.

The multipurpose building on the southern corner of the school's Taharoto Rd site will seat 1300 people. It replaces a smaller hall.

The \$10 million centre will have a large stage and a foyer suitable for exhibitions and functions. Flexible backstage space will support performances and be used for teaching and music.

The school's strategic relationship manager, Kim Dowden, was looking forward to kickstarting fundraising. "We've been planning this campaign for a while now and we're excited to finally launch it once we are at Level 2," she said. "This event centre will provide a heart for our school – a place for our students to gather, perform, learn and socialise. We also see it becoming part of our wider community, including Westlake Boys High School, schools in our Community of Learning (COL) and local groups. It's been a long time in the making, and we're excited to see the foundation finally starting to form."

Westlake's property manager, Grant Brown, says work on the site halted in February when a small amount of contaminated soil was found, and then once construction was able to begin again, alert level 4 came into effect. "We are currently awaiting the release of a revised construction programme, but it's safe to say we have fallen behind schedule."

Contractors were back onsite installing drainage and digging the foundations. It was likely the building, estimated to cost \$10 million, would be completed in May next year,



Behind schedule... An artist's impression of the new event centre (above), and Matua Eddie Hudson at the ground-breaking ceremony in December last year

rather than earlier in 2021.

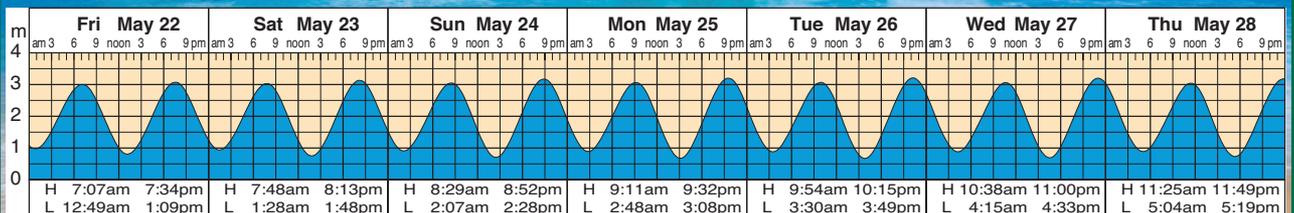
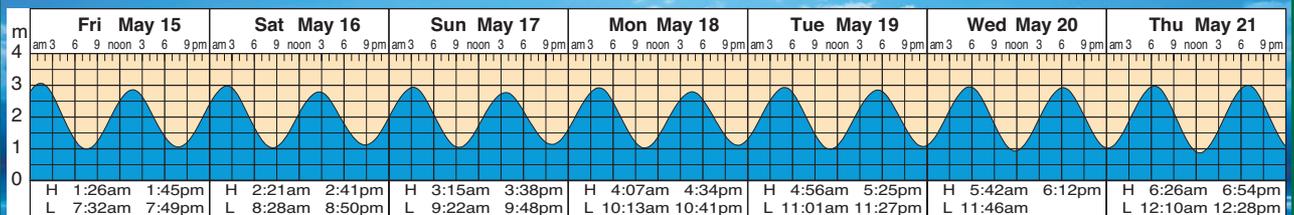
"Because our students aren't at school, we are definitely making the most of this opportunity to complete as much as possible." Restrictions under Level 3 around social distancing meant things were a little slower, but progress was still pleasing "We hope Level 2 will be even better," Brown said.

Dowden said the final \$2 million to be raised would include money from flexible sponsorship opportunities for businesses or individuals, including naming rights and the purchase of a seat with a commemorative plaque.

To find out more, please email Kim at kdowden@westlakegirls.school.nz



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Small bubbles at schools

Local schools report teaching just a handful of students in class during Covid-19 alert level 3. The vast majority remained working online, doing lessons from home.

At Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, numbers attending in person had been between five and eight a day, from a roll of 600 learners, said principal Wendy Sandifer. "They are in one bubble at school."

Takapuna Primary School principal Devika Tagg also reported "very few" studying in person, while schools waited to see how level 2 would unfold. "We are just focussing on managing the situation as best as we can."

At Westlake Girls High School, just one small bubble of one to three students had been attending. "The students have been conscientiously working on their assigned classroom tasks and have been supervised by teachers who have volunteered to come into school," said deputy principal Lucille Vukets. "It has gone exceptionally well with everyone following the safe practices that have been recommended."

Rosmini has had 13 boys at the college each day, in three separate bubbles, from a total roll of 1120, said headmaster Nixon Cooper. "It has gone well so far."

Sister school Carmel College was mostly empty, however, after the parents of two girls who had attended for two days made alternative care arrangements. Principal Chris Allen said student leaders were playing a role in remote

school learning, having created a website with resources for fellow students to access. It was a "resounding success", she said, featuring things to do during lockdown, ranging from academic links to physical activities. The Carmel sports Instagram account was similarly full of challenges that had helped keep students engaged.

"Our focus has always been on the mental and physical wellbeing of our students and staff during the lockdown, Ms Allen said.

Campbells Bay School had a maximum of 13 in class in the first week of May from its roll of nearly 1000 Year 0 to 6 students. They were successfully split into two bubbles, said acting principal John McGowan. "But as the concept of social distancing is an alien concept for young children, particularly those in the five-to-seven year age group, consistency of maintaining social distancing has been variable! Schooling on site at alert level 3 is school, but not as we know it."

Online learning had also been very much about learning for both students and teachers, he said. Programmes had been modified to improve them based on teacher observations and feedback from students and parents. "Having the opportunity to 'Zoom' each day has been a wonderful way for classes to stay in touch, although there is nothing like the real thing.

"We are very much looking forward to returning to school being fully open," McGowan said.



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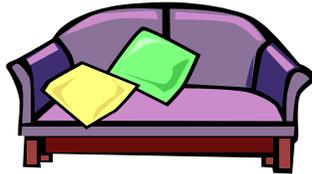
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Takapuna NEEDS YOU!

Takapuna, our beloved town centre filled with vibrancy, life and laughter, needs YOU to get through this COVID-19 situation. Our local businesses have been hit hard by having to close and change the way they operate. For many, this might be too much and we may lose some of our beloved businesses. If we want to keep Takapuna as the vibrant, fun place we all love – we need YOU to SHOP LOCAL and support our local businesses over the next while.

There are lots of benefits to YOU shopping local too!
Here are 10 things that happen when YOU shop local.

1 You take advantage of great customer service and expertise

You are their friends and neighbours, and locally owned businesses have a vested interest in knowing how to serve you. They're passionate about what they do. Why not take advantage of it?

2 You create and stimulate "Community"

Local business owners know you, and you know them. Studies have shown that local businesses donate to community causes at more than twice the rate of international chains.

3 Local businesses are more entrepreneurial

Creativity and entrepreneurship are what the New Zealand is founded upon. Nurturing local business ensures a strong community and keeps NZ as a pioneering country.

4 You embrace what makes Takapuna unique

You wouldn't want your house to look like everyone else's in NZ, so why would you want your community to look that way? Supporting our local owned businesses helps to keep Takapuna town centre unique. Its keeps a wonderful shopping experience next to our beloved white sand beach.

5 You create more choice of shops and services

Locally owned businesses pick the items and products they sell based on what they know you like and want. Local businesses carry a wider array of unique products because they buy for their own individual markets.

6 Keep Takapuna a beloved destination for locals and visitors

The more interesting and unique your community is, the more we will attract new neighbours, visitors and guests. This benefits everyone!

7 More of the money you spend stays in our community

Studies show* that for every \$100 you spend at a locally owned businesses, \$68 will stay in the community, compared to only \$43 when you spend at a neighbouring centre/overseas owned business.

8 Spending locally creates more jobs for you and your neighbours

Local businesses that are doing well create more jobs and higher-paying jobs for you and your neighbours. When you shop locally, you help create more jobs in retail, hospitality and personal services, as well as professional support jobs.

9 Reduced environmental impact

Buying from a locally owned business conserves energy and resources in the form of less fuel for transportation and less packaging. – help reduce waste and climate change!

10 Spending locally frees up Auckland Council/ Govt spending to be spent on other things

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So come on, support local! - Support what makes Takapuna what we all love and treasure.

Terence Harpur,
CEO – I LOVE TAKAPUNA / Takapuna Beach Business Association

Support your LOCAL SHOP TAKAPUNA

*Sources: Civic Economics – Andersonville Study of Retail Economics.

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Businesses need support in Covid-19 world

With many businesses on the North Shore under pressure, Benefitz owner and Devonport-Takapuna Local Board chair Aidan Bennett outlines the difficult path ahead.

To say we are in challenging times would be an understatement.

My business life started over 40 years ago as a young pimply-faced advertising cadet at the *New Zealand Herald*. The year was 1979, I was 16 going on 17. Erebus had just happened. Rob Muldoon was the prime minister. Nine years later, I started our business Benefitz. It was August 1988, as New Zealand was battling with the fall out from the share market crash of 1987. Things were starting to bite.

In hindsight, it was a crazy but good time to start out in business. It was a character-building time for all. Just two years prior, Michelle and I had bought our first home with the assistance of my parents. We paid \$76,000 and the rate on our \$40k mortgage was 24 per cent!

In the 32 years I have been in business we have navigated some challenging periods: those recessionary early years; the introduction of the personal computer and the internet that have both challenged and changed our business; the ups and downs of several economic cycles; the tech-wreck years; the GFC years; the emergence of the smart phone, social media and online communication. We have navigated it all and grown to employ 70-80 people with a consistent turnover north of \$15million annually.

But this Covid-19 problem is on another level in terms of being a challenge for our business. Like nothing we have ever faced before. All these previous challenging periods happened more slowly, so businesses had time to react and adjust to the problem.

We were ordered to shut by the government for the good of the country. I am proud that prior to this period, despite employing hundreds of people over the years, we had made only a handful of people redundant over three decades. This is because in troubled times good businesses can alter their business models to suit the new environment and limit the damage. Businesses were never faced with having to completely close down overnight for weeks on end, before facing an immediate recession at the other end.

Business people have no control over any of what we are dealing with now.

It has been disappointing to see and hear comments from what I believe are uninformed people casually saying that “good businesses will survive and not-so-good will fail” – with a “so what” flavour.

The purpose of this message is to respond to that thinking, and clearly outline the unprecedented position businesses like ours are now in.

In the case of our business, we have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past six or seven weeks. We have a good business. Nobody has been getting filthy rich from Ben-



Massive hurdle to overcome... Aidan Bennett with dog Tui

efitz, but we have been trading well for a long time, providing good lifestyles and livelihoods for the owners and our team. Prior to Covid-19, we have had years of positive trading, and the simple equation of debtors versus creditors was well in our favour on 26 March, day one of lockdown.

But all this has changed during this Covid-19 problem period.

Along with thousands of other Kiwi businesses we are fighting for survival, battling to protect our livelihoods and that of our people and their families. We will be drawing on all the experience we have from 30-plus years of trading to get through this. We are well equipped to succeed. But this is a massive hurdle to overcome.

“The government must not walk away from good businesses.”

So what do we do to get through this period and come out the other side? Firstly, we took stock of our current situation. We quickly got an accurate handle on what our current financial situation was just prior to lockdown. We reported that position to our bank so they were fully in the picture. This also allowed us to work out what remuneration we could offer to our team during the lockdown period.

The government’s wages-subsidy scheme

has been a big help. It enabled us to propose remuneration of 80 per cent for our entire team (owners included) for the lockdown period. I applaud the speed at which this wage subsidy was approved and made available by the government.

We then needed to set about eliminating costs from our business. Our desire from the outset has been to try and protect the livelihoods of our team. In the belief that once we were through the problem we would be well set – with our valued team intact – to grow once again in the post-Covid-19 environment. Our landlords have been good. Our key suppliers have been good. Our staff have been very understanding and flexible – we’ve now cut remuneration for all to around 60 per cent, again supported by the wage subsidy. A combination of all these things has enabled us to reduce our overheads to approximately a third.

Now, in the level-3 work environment, we are focused on generating sales and a margin to cover these new level of overheads. We are just over a week into this. Over the coming weeks, we are hoping that business will slowly increase so we can pay the increasing overheads and start adjusting remuneration towards more normal levels.

But we have some huge obstacles to overcome.

The drastic reduction in overheads is largely on the back of having the wage subsidy of \$585.80 per week for every staff member. That support at the moment only lasts to mid-June. The uncertainty beyond that is a massive

problem. Particularly if the market is totally damaged as a result of the Covid-19 problem and related lockdown, something we and all other businesses had absolutely no control over.

That's why it is absolutely important that the government doesn't walk away from supporting businesses that have been dropped into this dilemma. Good businesses will fail if they don't get the balance right. If support ends after the current wage subsidy on 17 June, I believe the consequences will be severe for business.

In summary, there will be those who say "you have made a decision to go into private enterprise so you should fend for yourself." If we were talking about normal market forces they would be absolutely correct. But what we have here are not normal market forces.

We have a situation where the government

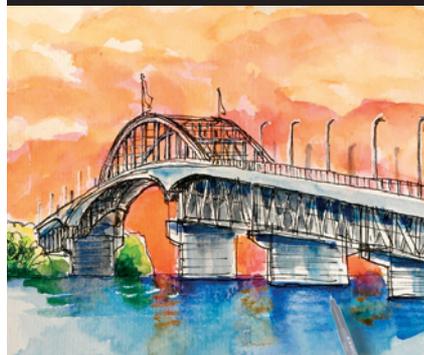
has been dictating what we can and can't do (mainly can't do) since 26 March. It is subjective if what they have done is right or wrong.

What needs to happen now is a total focus on protecting the livelihoods of people in what were good businesses before this problem. Our own business is probably indirectly responsible for providing livelihoods for 200 to 300 people. If it was left to fail in a fragile economy, many lives of good people will be severely affected. Multiply our business by hundreds or thousands of other businesses throughout the country and you will appreciate the damage and the problem that will eventuate for New Zealand.

The government must not walk away from good businesses.

Strong support must continue.

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