The Rangitoto Observer
Takapuna, Milford, Castor Bay, Forrest Hill and Sunnynook
DELIVERED FORTNIGHTLY Issue 163 – Oct 31, 2025 AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

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Beat squad boosts Takapuna police presence

Beat cops will return to the streets of Takapuna from Monday next week.

A dedicated team of six constables and a sergeant will bolster the North Shore police presence from 3 November, adding to the work of the six-strong community policing team already based at the Anzac St station.

Acting Inspector Tim Williams, who is Prevention Manager for Waitematā East (the North Shore Policing Area), said curtailing retail crime and violence in public places would be priorities for the new beat team. It would also engage with the community and provide visible reassurance.

The aim is to lower crime statistics and build public confidence and trust in police.

"We're really focused on holding people to account," he said, as had been directed from a national level.

For many years routine beat patrols have been a lower police priority.

The new beat team, led by Sergeant Shane Bainbridge, who is transferring from the Takapuna community team, will operate flexibly across three main North Shore town centres: Takapuna, Glenfield and Albany. Members will normally work in pairs, across early and late shifts and on all days of the week.

"We don't want them to be tied up in the police station. Yes, they'll arrest people, but not be bogged down on paperwork," said Williams. "We want them to talk to the shopkeepers and say hi to people on the street."

Takapuna was a focus because it was a metropolitan centre and a transport hub.

Williams, who spoke to the Observer just days after an aggravated burglary at a Takapuna bar (see story, page 2), said the North Shore was actually "very safe" compared with other North Island police districts and behind only Rodney in crimes per 10,000 people in Auckland. Serious incidents were "sporadic", he said.

Dual effort... Constable Siobhan Campbell of Takapuna's existing community police team with new beat team member Constable Ben Heap, who will be out on patrol with his colleagues from next month

Vehicle crime and burglaries in the area were down this year. A recent focus on prosecuting store thefts meant that since June fewer such offences were being reported.

But he acknowledged residents' concerns about anti-social activity and increased homelessness. "It's not just about being safe, it's about feeling safe."

The police have briefed local groups recently. Attendees included the Takapuna Residents Association and Takapuna Beach Business Association (TBBA), which had

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New police grads will hit beat to help learn the ropes

From page 1

both called for more local policing.

Both welcomed news of the new beat team. The TBBA, which has paid for security guards to patrol the town centre, will continue with them for now.

The North Shore initiative follows the recent reintroduction of such teams in the Auckland CBD and Henderson. It is among the early areas in a wider rollout.

Williams said the team was made possible by the addition of more police to the area.

Since Covid, officers had been redeployed from core roles. In Takapuna, the beat team was in addition to a community team restored to full strength several months ago.

Bainbridge and three experienced constables (Ben Heap, Jo Nelson and Senior Constable Brent Stewart) were ready to hit the ground running, with two more constables coming later next month.

Graduates from Police College would be brought into the beat team to learn about community engagement, Williams said. "It's a slightly softer landing for them than frontline policing."

The beat team would coordinate with community officers to maximise visible coverage of Takapuna. Its presence would free up the community team and a second one based in Browns Bay, to focus more on neighbourhood issues and road policing.

The beat team and the two community teams will be managed from the North Shore Police Centre, off Constellation Dr, by Acting Senior Sergeant Alex Waworis.

Safety on the Northern Busway and around its stations is another policing focus.

Williams said the public might see beat team members riding on buses to and from Takapuna.

Machete-wielding burglars flee after failed raid on bar

Two new staff members on closing-up duties were confronted by two men brandishing machetes in an early-hours raid at the Takapuna Bar on the corner of Anzac St and Hurstmere Rd.

The barmen were mopping and sweeping up when a locked glass side-door on Anzac St was smashed around 1am on Saturday, 18 October. The offenders ran into the premises.

"The staff just parted like the Red Sea and the men ran to [the tills], but they were already emptied," said bar manager John Sweetman.

The incident had been "very scary" for the staff, one from Scotland and one from Nepal, who had only two weeks on the job.

They had done just what they were told to in training – not to put themselves at risk and to step back.

"The offenders got a bit of a fright themselves," said Sweetman. They had seemed surprised to find anyone in the bar. Realising there was no cash at hand, they fled in a vehicle.

Police responded quickly and located an abandoned car on a nearby street.

Sweetman and bar owner Alistair Davidson were called in from their beds and spent an hour or so supporting the staff.

"Al and I were super-concerned about the lads' well being." Despite an offer of a few days off, the pair returned to work the next day.

"Rajan, the Nepalese man, was a bit shaken. He never expected something like this to happen in New Zealand."

Sweetman said the crime seemed opportunistic and not well planned. "I'm just so happy they [the staff] did just what we had told them to do." The bar had been targeted before, so had processes in place which it regularly reviewed.

A policeman later told him he had done a patrol in the area around 10 minutes earlier and had been at BP Hauraki when he got the incident call.

Police told the Observer inquiries into the aggravated burglary were continuing.

After threatening the barmen, the offenders had fled in a stolen vehicle which was found abandoned shortly afterwards.

"Thankfully, the employees were not harmed. However, they are understandably shaken by the incident and are being provided support," a police spokesperson said.

Police are asking the public to come forward if they have information or dashcam or CCTV footage. They can make contact through 105.police.govt.nz (clicking Update Report) or by calling 105, using the reference number 251018/4690, or anonymously through Crime Stoppers on 0800 555 111.

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Mulch mates... Grow Forrest Hill garden volunteers Bruce Ward, John Cambridge and Graeme Treeby at the group's spring festival at Seine Reserve this month. Fellow community helper Akiko Alexander (below right) sold seedlings.

Garden's spring festival draws crowds

Tomato seedlings and free ice-creams from Milford business Scrunchy Millers were top drawcards at the annual spring gathering at Grow Forrest Hill community garden. Hundreds attended the day at Seine Reserve, where the next project will be wetland planting on boggy patches in conjunction with Pupuke Birdsong Project.

Ice age... Lapping it up are (from left) Kate (4) and Patrick Thompson (7); Jesse Shin (3) and (at rear) sister Jane (8), with Danielle (5) and Gabrielle Choi (10)

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Would-be chiefs jockey to lead local board after election's split result

As many as five hats are in the ring to take a turn as chair of the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board, the Observer understands.

The newly elected board of six will be sworn in on 4 November. The chair and deputy roles are usually agreed in advance, but votes on formal nominations take place at that first official meeting, so nothing is truly decided until then.

All members confirmed to the Observer that the field looks congested. Talks were ongoing among them, with options extending to rotating roles mid-term, which some do not favour.

But with two members elected from each of two tickets and the preferences of two independents to factor in, accommodations have to be made. Only second-term member Gavin Busch has declared he is not seeking the top job at this stage.

His Communities & Residents running mate, George Wood, who was the top-polling candidate ahead of Busch, said after the election on 11 October that he was keen to be chair in what will be his final term. "I haven't got a clue where it is going to end up," was his latest take late last week.

Various scenarios were in play, he said.

Trish Deans, who placed third in her return to the board after a term away, said: "I see myself as an independent and the results from the public tell us they want us to work together." All six members should come to an agreement, she said, emphasising her experience.

Garth Ellingham, an independent newcomer who polled fourth, would not be drawn on his aspirations while discussions were ongoing, but other members have said both he and new member Scott Macarthur are keen to flex their skills.

Macarthur – who polled sixth behind his A Fresh Approach running mate and former deputy chair Terence Harpur – said chair and deputy roles would be of interest once he had settled in and got his training wheels off.

Harpur said after three induction sessions together and informal chats, board members were starting to form their views as they got to know each other.

"Partisan division is not the way the community wants to see us act." He added: "I couldn't put my money on who it will be, but I just want a constructive chair."

He was keen, but others had merits and he would work with whoever was chosen.

Council staff have confirmed that if the board is deadlocked on deciding between two candidates to be chair, a coin toss can come into play.

• Meet your new councillor and local board members, pages 10-11.

Briefs

Halloween hotspots

Ghoulish sights aplenty are guaranteed for Halloween, with a skeleton (above) having made an early appearance at the Hauraki Corner shops. The Lake House arts centre in Takapuna is hosting a Day of the Dead Cultural Celebration on Saturday 1 November from 5pm to 7pm, with Mexican music, art and food and a traditional altar lighting ceremony at 8pm. Bayswater School's annual Halloween fundraiser is the same day, 4pm to 7pm.

Cabrra AGM

The Castor Bay Ratepayers and Residents Association holds its AGM on 5 November at the Kennedy Park Observation Post at 6.30pm. All welcome.

Early Xmas

Twilight Christmas by the Lake returns to Carmel College on Friday 14 November, with markets and carols. The annual event runs from 4.30-8.30pm.

High schools' top sports performers recognised

Jack Buckley has been named Westlake Boys' Sportsman of the Year after spearheading the high school's stellar senior rowing performances and representing New Zealand in the under-19 eight at the Junior World Rowing Champs in Lithuania. He won the Under-18 Pair (with George Langley), the Springbok Shield with the Under-18 Four and Maadi Cup with the Under-18 Eight.

• The rowing senior eight was Team of the Year and its coach, Andy Hay, Coach of the Year. Best all-rounder was Ollie Davies for cricket and rugby.

Maisey Lendrum is Carmel College's Senior Sports Woman, chosen as its most outstanding volleyball and beach volleyball player and the school's senior athletics champion. She was selected for the New Zealand under-20 volleyball development team and was in the bronze-medal-winning North Harbour U19 team at nationals. On the sand, she came second at U19 nationals. Maisey's school coaching, incuded the Junior B volleyball side and Year 8/2 netball team.

• The Junior Sports Girl was Elyse Llewellin (volleyball and netball). Team of the Year went to Junior Volleyball.

Imani Rasmussen, a Year 11 dual basketball and netball premier team defender, was Westlake Girls' Sportswoman of the Year. She was in the basketball team that won the secondary schools nationals for a fourth year in a row, then helped the netballers to a bronze medal a week later. Imani was named in the New Zealand Secondary Schools netball team last weekend.

• Junior Sportswoman of the Year was Charlotte Handley, part of the premier sailing team, which was Team of the Year. Coach of the Year was basketball's Bronwen Davidson. Best Sports All-Rounder went to Charlotte Mawston (basketball, netball, rowing).

Matthew Dalton is Rosmini College's Sportsman of the Year, recognised for his place in the premier basketball team for three years and as the 2025 school sports captain. He is a North Harbour representative, now at under-20 level, and this year debuted for the Auckland Tuatara in the National Basketball League.

• Junior Sportsman was Sebastian Unga, a Year 9 all-rounder who plays basketball, volleyball, tag and rugby and was part of a North Harbour Sevens Championship win.

The premier basketball team, which placed sixth at nationals, was named top team.

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Grandmother's spring after winter

For Elaine, the realisation crept up slowly. First came the hesitation before lifting her youngest grandchild. Then the excuses when they ran to her with arms outstretched.

"I couldn't pick the little ones up anymore," the active grandmother admits, her voice catching at the memory. "I was unsure – am I going to drop them, or am I going to have to let go?"

The discomfort in her elbow had quietly stolen one of her greatest joys – those spontaneous cuddles and carries that grandparents treasure. Every morning brought familiar stiffness and another day of careful movements and missed moments.

That changed one evening when Elaine decided to try Koru FX, a natural New Zealand-made cream she'd heard about at her local pharmacy.

"I applied it to my elbow that was really bothering me that night," she recalls. What happened next caught her completely off guard. "In the morning, I got up and actually didn't have to worry about it. I thought, oh wow, this is what I've been looking for."

The transformation Elaine describes is almost poetic in its simplicity. "You know how you feel between seasons, winter and summer, when the sun finally arrives? That's how I'm feeling now."

For months, she explains, the discomfort had been constant. "You're always thinking about it, instinctively bracing yourself in the morning because you expect it to be there."

But that first morning after using the cream brought an unfamiliar sensation – freedom. "I got up and didn't have to think twice. I just moved naturally."

Now, Elaine's mornings start differently. Instead of hesitating, she reaches for her grandchildren without concern. The natural cream, containing ingredients like arnica, mānuka, and black pepper oils, has become part of her daily routine.

"Just last night, she came running in and jumped up," Elaine shares, smiling at the memory. "I just grabbed her and picked her up. No second thought. Those moments – you can't get them back once they're gone."

The relief isn't just physical for Elaine. "It's mentally liberating too. When you stop worrying about your body letting you down, you can just be present."

She's particularly pleased the product is natural and locally made. "I prefer natural products, especially being around the kids all the time. Finding something that works AND aligns with my values – that's special."

Elaine and her grandaughter spending some time together.

Elaine is among thousands of New Zealanders who've discovered Koru FX, seeking natural support for tired joints and muscles. The Christchurch-based company has built a following among Kiwis looking for locally-made alternatives.

For Elaine, the change has been profound yet simple. "When my granddaughter runs at me now, I don't hesitate. I just open my arms. It feels like spring after a long winter."

Her advice to others missing out on life's moments? "Don't accept limitations as permanent. I spent months avoiding cuddles, thinking that was just how things were now. But sometimes the right support can bring your spring back."

Elaine keeps a bottle of Koru FX in different places around the house.

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Legal identity's treasures on

Alex Witten-Hannah is retiring and moving on from his Takapuna base. He tells Rob Drent about a life in the law.

After 55 years as a lawyer, Alex Witten-Hannah is facing his toughest brief yet.

He's got just over a month to pack up his Takapuna office, which doubles as his home, and is a repository of a massive collection of memorabilia he's collected from travels to 50 countries and gifts from clients – criminals and artists among them.

"I've got a couple of people I can call on to help," he says slightly nervously as we survey his office which contains treasures including "King John", a set of armour from Naples which greets clients as they enter what Witten-Hannah dubbed "Magna Carta chambers"; an early Dean Buchanan painting of Cave Rock at Karekare; a typewriter airlifted behind enemy lines in France during World War II to collate resistance reports; a Victorian facsimile of the first Māori *Bible* and another of Shakespeare's first folio; 5000-year-old pots from an Egyptian pyramid; Māori cloaks and carvings; and works by artist Peter Siddell – a gift for legal work.

"Colourful – yes I'm happy with that," Witten-Hannah smiles looking around his collection when I suggest the word might describe him.

After 35 years practising out of the historic former Post Office building in Hurstmere Rd, Witten-Hannah (76) is retiring. Both his practice and the building have been sold.

He's moving out to his beloved baronial mansion at Karekare, which he built in the early 1970s. He has a 12-metre yacht berthed at Bayswater "which will be my inner-city flat... I want to spend quite a bit of time out on the gulf.

"It's time for me to stop solving other people's problems and enjoy a stress-free retirement."

Karekare is a spiritual place for him. His father began taking him tramping in the Waitakeres from the age of eight. As a young lawyer working in the land-transfer office he spotted a subdivision application for a Karekere farm. He bought 10 acres on Lone Kauri Rd for $3200: "I thought it was extortion at the time." It was before electricity came to the area – he built the house himself using hand tools. "I always wanted a house my children (identical twins Gabriella and Angelina, 37, and Sasha, in his 40s) could come back to." It has music galleries on each side of the dining room and houses Witten-Hannah's 600-bottle wine collection. "I've tied it up in a trust so my great-, great-, great-grandchildren can go out there and breathe fresh air."

He's the longest serving marriage celebrant in New Zealand. "I do about three a year at the moment and hope to do more in my retirement – I really enjoy them."

Typically, the services come with a theatrical flourish: poetry and pageantry, including whipping a historic cavalry sword out of its scabbard and swiping off the top of a champagne bottle. "People tend to remember my weddings... I'm pretty careful and have only had one accident."

Around 15 years ago at a Castor Bay clifftop ceremony, Witten-Hannah took the cork off with the sword but it flew out and "sliced the bridesmaid on the left breast".

Witten-Hannah was apologising profusely when the bridesmaid lifted her dress to show "Holden" tattooed on her inner thigh. "Don't worry," she said, "I can take a bit of pain," recalls Witten-Hannah.

He grew up at Castor Bay, going to Westlake Boys High School from 1962 until 1965 and on to Auckland University where he graduated with an LLB honours with a thesis titled "Law, Liberty and Morality". After a spell in the United Kingdom, it was back to New Zealand, where he eventually became a partner in a Takapuna firm before going out on his own as a barrister and solicitor.

He began his career when lawyers did a bit of everything for their clients: criminal, family and property law – whatever was required.

He bought the former Post Office building in 1990. His then wife Amanda Taylor-Ace ran a daycare centre next to his law practice, and by night they operated La Poste Restaurant. "I was behind the bar, she was the extrovert front-of-house person... we had a lot of fun."

He represented Bastion Point protesters in the 1980s, famously cramming the court with Māori and challenging the police to identify the alleged wrongdoers. "I think I got around 30 off because the police could not reliably identify them."

He was counsel in a 1981 Springbok tour riot trial when activist and future MP Hone Harawira, representing himself, called Bishop Desmond Tutu to give evidence. "I had the remarkable opportunity to spend half an hour one-on-one with Tutu."

Witten-Hannah had many Māori clients "mainly from up north", following in the footsteps of his father, a Taupo lawyer who had represented Ngāti Tūwharetoa in the central North Island for 20 years.

He was involved in one of the most high-profile criminal trials of the early 1990s, alongside top defence counsel Simon Lockhart and Peter Williams, representing North Shore businessmen Stephen Collie, who was convicted of assaulting K'Rd sex workers.

Overall, Witten-Hannah says the highlight of his legal career was in 2006 as the last

the move as colourful career draws to a close

Legal combatant... Alex Witten-Hannah in his Takapuna law offices, dubbed Magna Carta Chambers.

"People tend to remember my weddings... I'm pretty careful and have only had one accident."

Kiwi lawyer to appear in a civil appeal before the Privy Council law lords in London.

Submitting on a fire insurance case, Witten-Hannah was particularly chuffed at being singled out for rare praise by the bench: "Their Lordships are grateful to him for the clarity of these submissions and for the careful and attractive way in which he developed them."

Witten-Hannah was involved in plenty of colourful cases. Representing notorious prison escaper George Wilder in the 1970s, he made the case for the return of used bank notes from a Rotorua robbery because Wilder argued they belonged to him due to possession being "nine-tenths of the law".

"The judge was amused, I was amused and Wilder had half a day out of Pare prison." Wilder couldn't pay Witten-Hannah's fee, but gave him a painting of himself signed by Ron Jorgensen, another infamous criminal renowned for his part in the Bassett Rd machine-gun murders in Remuera. It hangs in Witten-Hannah's office, near the old post office safe.

"The painting's probably worth $20,000 now, so not a bad hourly rate."

Some cases have ended in frustration: he had hoped to settle the Firth property saga – with ramifications for the coastal walkway north of Takapuna – with a direct appeal to "Mr Fix it", Mayor Wayne Brown.

The idea was to remove the historic classification on the property to free it for sale and guarantee access to the walkway which runs across the site. Brown declined to intervene, and "hates me to this day" for challenging him publicly, Witten-Hannah says.

Many of his clients have become friends. Take weightlifting legend Precious McKenzie, who immigrated to New Zealand after winning gold at the 1974 Christchurch Commonwealth Games. Witten-Hannah and McKenzie got to know each other at the Les Mills gym, leading in a bizarre set of circumstances to Witten-Hannah representing New Zealand at weightlifting in Las Vegas in 2003. McKenzie was one of the leading lifters on the bill. Witten-Hannah was along as manager of the team, but at McKenzie's bidding competed on stage after another New Zealander pulled a groin muscle.

"I didn't come last as a couple of lifters failed to lift any weights." Suffice to say, he wasn't back for a repeat performance, but he still works for McKenzie, now aged 90.

Looking back, Witten-Hannah says: "I have got great satisfaction in my life helping people in what is often the most difficult and stressful times in their lives."

As the years progressed, he enjoyed his clients' life stories as much as their legal work. They included local identity Frank Blennerhassett, who spent much of his life roaming the North Shore streets, dropping in regularly on the lawyer, who helped manage his affairs.

"I never made much money from the law," Witten-Hannah says, partly because he was often travelling, frequently with his old mate Peter Hillary, who Witten-Hannah met when he was working on a Sir Edmund Hillary school building project in Nepal around 1978-79. It led to a lifelong friendship including three trips to Tibet and four to Antarctica among numerous other adventures such as climbing Mt Kilimanjaro in Africa.

Witten-Hannah almost died in an 1982 attempt to summit Lhotse, in the Himalayas. An avalanche swept away ropes and chain lines, killing a Canadian climber lower on the slope. Witten-Hannah had to navigate a dangerous route to safety. It was the end of his mountaineering career. "I had an eight-year-old son at home who deserved to have a father."

The mountains, though, are again calling in retirement, with Hillary "wanting to get me down to the Southern Alps". For Witten-Hannah, who had a knee replacement 18 months ago, they will be tramping rather than climbing trips. "If we want to go up high, we will be starting with a helicopter – there won't be any mountaineering involved."

Other trips are planned with Albena, his Bulgarian partner of five years. And he will carry on with pro-bono work with the Hillary Himalayan Foundation and as honorary solicitor for the Karekare Surf Life Saving Club.

• Witten-Hannah Howard ceases to operate on 3 November. Witten-Hannah's partner in the firm, Susan Howard, is also retiring.The client base is transferring to Muir & Partners. Witten-Hannah vacates the building on 12 December.

Meet the newly elected North Shore representative on Auckland Council

New councillor has politics pedigree and local focus

John Gillon grew up with politics and brings to his role as a new councillor plenty of background knowledge of North Shore issues.

This includes his top priority of seeing flood remediation measures through for the Wairau catchment, locking in funding for stormwater infrastructure and safeguarding at-risk homes in Milford.

On this, he aligns with the other North Shore councillor, Richard Hills, who was re-elected for a fourth term with the most votes of any councillor across the city.

But Gillon and Hills, who had a celebratory drink together with Kaipātiki Local Board members on election night, won't necessarily agree on everything.

Gillon (47) pledges that in stepping away from his two terms as board chair into regional decision-making on Auckland Council, he will remain a strong local advocate.

"I'll work on a case-by-case basis with Richard and anyone else I need to work with, for the North Shore," he told the Observer.

First up, he may need to draw on his years in politics to get on side with Mayor Wayne Brown, who after the election was quoted in a *New Zealand Herald* story about new councillors as saying Gillon seemed "a bit negative".

Gillon's working relationships with re-elected Albany ward councillor John Watson and the defeated Wayne Walker – whom Brown has dubbed the Albanians – presumably played into this.

For any advice on dealing with cross-table comms, he need only sound out his father Grant Gillon, who was an Alliance MP, then a North Shore City councillor, before serving on the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board.

At university, John studied politics and sociology before working for a time as a technical writer. "We've always talked about politics around the table," he says of Grant and mother Kirsty. Sister Paula is very much part of the conversation too. She has just been re-elected to the Kaipātiki board, which is based in Glenfield. John's first local body role was on the Glenfield community board in 2007. "Both my parents are really happy and really proud," says Gillon of their response to his and Paula's election success. His retired father has just finished a law degree.

Gillon says the low voter turnout is concerning, underlining why local government needs to be part of teaching civics in schools.

His own education included attending Takapuna Normal Intermediate School, then Takapuna Grammar School from the fourth form (Year 10), after the family returned from a spell on a farm up north.

His own family is based in Beach Haven. He has two daughters, aged 12 and three. The younger is blind.

Alongside local board work, he has been on the Auckland Kindergarten Association board and a school board.

Delivering community facilities, including the Kauri Glen walkway, was a high point of his time on a united Kaipātiki board, which also pushed back on asset sales and council moves to reduce rubbish bins in public areas.

Council is also looking at reducing residential rubbish bin collections from weekly to fortnightly, something Gillon opposes, along with looming "fairer funding" cuts to boards.

He believes council should have pushed back harder on the extent of intensification required by government for Auckland.

Hills, as planning committee chair, is tasked with steering through Plan Change 120, which provides for the more targeted housing intensification and flood-area downzoning council wanted.

Both men have said they want the area's boards and the public to look closely at PC120 and make submissions from next month.

"I'll take on board what people have said and push that," Gillon says.

He will lobby for upgrades to the congested Lake Rd he drives on to see his parents at their Devonport home. "I'm sick of Lake Rd," he says. He has made securing funding for it another priority.

He laughs when the paper suggests his "Let's Fix Lake Rd" billboards may prove famous last words.

He supports "quick fix" smaller works, which are in the pipeline, but knows options for any more extensive upgrade depend on getting buy-in to keep the project moving up the regional list of long-term transport plans.

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and two less familiar first-timers on the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board

Home is the sailor, tacking into local body politics

Garth Ellingham was perhaps the bolter in the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board election. Young(ish) at 38, he had no local body experience and his campaign consisted largely of a website he made himself. But as an independent candidate he came in fourth of six successful contenders.

Ellingham (pictured) gives a succinct summary: "I put myself out to the community I have a love for and have had support back, so I will see what I can do."

He grew up in a yachting family. "I was on the boat when I was six months old," he says. The family home for Garth, sister Kate and parents John and Pauline was a couple of hundred metres from Narrow Neck Beach. Yachting became his priority, with his parents involved at Wakatere Boating Club and he and Kate competing.

Garth regularly placed in the top five or 10 nationally in Optimist and P Class racing, and in 2004, aged 17, he won the national Starling champs. Kate was the first girl in the P Class champs in the same year, and sixth overall.

Ellingham went to Vauxhall Primary, Belmont Intermediate and Takapuna Grammar. He studied civil engineering at Auckland University during the week and did sail training at the weekends. After finishing his degree – during which he became interested in the environmental apects of engineering, including stormwater and wastewater – he committed fully to yachting, joining the world match-racing circuit, with the long-term aim of becoming

an America's Cup sailor.

For the next 10 years he led the life of a professional yachtsman: glamour mixed with grind. Living out of a suitcase, often couch surfing and trying to eke out slim budgets to travel the world for events, mixed with "a side hustle" of crewing on boats for the mega-rich. "It was all pretty surreal for a kid from Devonport – sailing multimillion-dollar boats and drinking champagne in St Tropez."

Ellingham helped form Waka Racing, winning a clutch of events and twice finishing third in the World match-racing champs. He sailed for the Chinese team in the America's Cup pre-regatta in San Francisco in 2013 and also "B" boats used for training races in the America's Cup in Auckland. But by his early 30s he decided to come home.

He'd bought a unit across the road from Wakatere and moved in during Covid. "It made me fall in love with the area again – being close to the water made me happy."

He founded Lucke – a sustainable workwear company that began making re-usable masks during Covid then moved on to other lines. The operation has three employees and has opened an office in Australia.

With the company finding its feet, Ellingham began working part-time in reception for old friends Terry and Siobhan Holmes of Chiropractic Alchemy in Milford.

Chatting to customers was a great way to get "an idea about people's priorities for the area and they got to know me as well".

But he realises: "A big challenge will be adapting from being a small business owner, where decisions are made and problems solved quickly." Council processes took time and "I know I'm not going to be some sort of silver bullet".

He's interested in protecting the environment and coastline – "the very reasons we live here" – and finds it unpalatable "that we can't swim off the coast after it rains".

He hoped to put his engineering training to use on issues such as flood protection, stormwater upgrades and roading.

While he's single, without kids, his sister, who lives in Hauraki, has two. "And I can see how much sacrifice is made by parents – what my parents did for us... so [local board work] is definitely giving something back."

Newbie keen to bring planning know-how to board table

New Devonport-Takapuna Local Board member Scott Macarthur's election campaign, which asked residents how they would like to see local issues tackled, made for a point of difference with other candidates.

His career as a town planner, giving him a strong understanding of council processes, may also have struck a chord with voters.

"When I'm sitting there getting advice, I can question," he says.

By picking hot-button topics like traffic congestion and intensification, Macarthur (pictured) tapped into shared frustration, though he doesn't claim all the answers.

"I didn't say I'll fix Lake Rd, but just came up with ideas," he said, suggesting his video clips made a difference.

"I felt quietly confident, but you never know," he said of coming sixth of six places on the board, having started the race as one of the lower-profile of 20 candidates and lacking any long-established local links.

Macarthur, a Belmont resident of five years, stood on the A Fresh Approach (AFA) ticket, sharing collective promotion and hoardings. He was the only one of its can-

didates to join incumbent member Terence Harpur on the new board.

The 44-year-old said he decided to stand because he thought he could contribute. Town planners seldom ran for office – given they often worked for councils and faced a conflict. But after 15 years at Auckland Council, including Auckland Transport, he moved on several years ago, setting up his own company, Urban Planning Consultants.

Drawing on his knowledge of how the Resource Management Act worked, which included stints on planning hearing panels, would help in hitting the ground running.

Among things the keen e-biker wants to achieve is the Green Path from Devonport peninsula to link further north via the long-sought pedestrian and cycle link from Francis St, Hauraki, to Esmonde Rd.

During the campaign he also spoke of balancing intensification with better urban design and green space rules and the management of on-street parking to meet residents' concerns. He wants all bus stops to have shelters and would like water slides installed at the Takapuna Pool and Leisure Centre.

Macarthur had a circuitous path to the North Shore. He grew up in Pakuranga, studied at the University of Auckland and bought his first house in New Lynn. The lure of being close to the sea and in modern housing first brought him and his partner across town. "I don't think we'll be moving anywhere soon."

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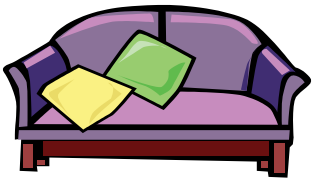

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Hauraki Corner death 'reminder of homelessness impact on women'

The death of a woman in the Hauraki Corner public toilets last month underlines a growing problem across Auckland, says the project director for the Coalition to End Women's Homelessness, Victoria Crockford.

"Her death is a painful reminder of how homelessness strips women of safety, dignity and the simple comfort of a place to rest. We hold her in our thoughts with respect," Crockford told the Observer.

"While we may not know her name or her story, we know she mattered.

"She was someone's daughter, someone's friend, someone with hopes and struggles, and a life of value."

The death, which is not considered suspicious, has been referred by the police to the coroner. The woman's body was discovered by a toilet cleaner on 24 September.

Crockford, whose group has recently issued a report, "Understanding Barriers and Solutions to Women's Homelessness in Aotearoa", says the latest Census showed 57,000 women and 54,000 men experienced severe housing deprivation – including rough sleeping, living in someone's garage, sleeping in a car, staying on a couch, or living in uninhabitable housing.

Homeless women were less visible on the streets than men, due to safety fears that meant they would do what they could to avoid sleeping rough, she said.

This also made them less visible to the community and often to social services.

Emergency and transitional housing options were often mixed gender and women were reluctant to access them because many had experienced trauma at the hands of men in the form of domestic or sexual violence.

The coalition's research had further identified that women with children and a growing number of older women priced out of the rental market were particularly impacted, said Crockford.

"Our young mums and our nanas are at risk because we do not have viable, long-term choices available for them.

"Organisations like De Paul House on the North Shore do brilliant work and urgently need the types of policies and funding that enable them to provide for women and families with wrap-around support.

"That requires a bipartisan strategy on housing and homelessness that strives to understand and meet the needs of women. We are nowhere near that right now," said Crockford.

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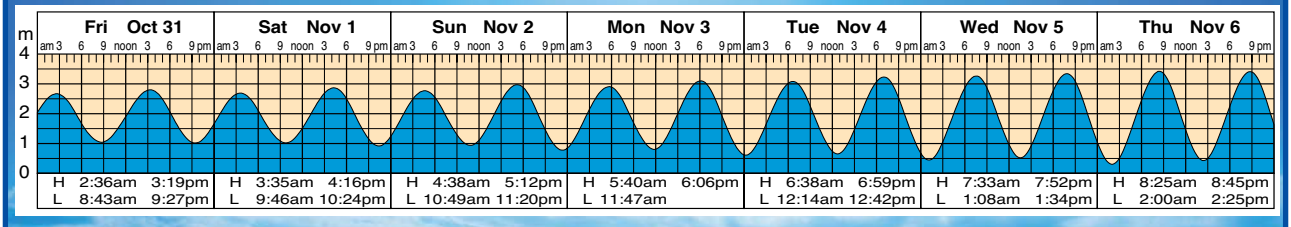

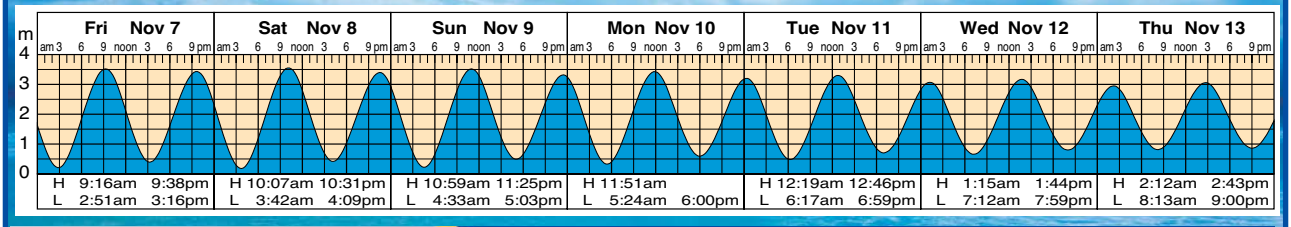

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Look at these cave women go in Kiwi carpentry comedy

Director Kate Birch says the stage is going to be a sixth character in Kiwi comedy *The Pink Hammer*, which opens at the PumpHouse theatre in Takapuna this week.

"It's replicating a typical man's man cave, with tools and woodworking," she says.

Throw four very different women and a grumpy male workshop owner into the setting and a cosy bloke's retreat becomes the centre of some comic clashes in the Phoenix Theatre production.

Birch says the experienced North Shore cast of five are a joy to work with and the on-stage action at carpentry classes is set off by the backstage crew's creative staging.

From power tools to sawdust, it's a perfect backdrop for a hit play she was particularly drawn to during read-throughs. "I liked it because it was a Kiwi play."

The story grabbed her and she appreciated the way playwright Michelle Amas had the characters develop depth.

"People are my business really," says Birch, who lives in Bayswater and runs her own coaching, leadership development and team-building courses. "I'm always interested in how they come together."

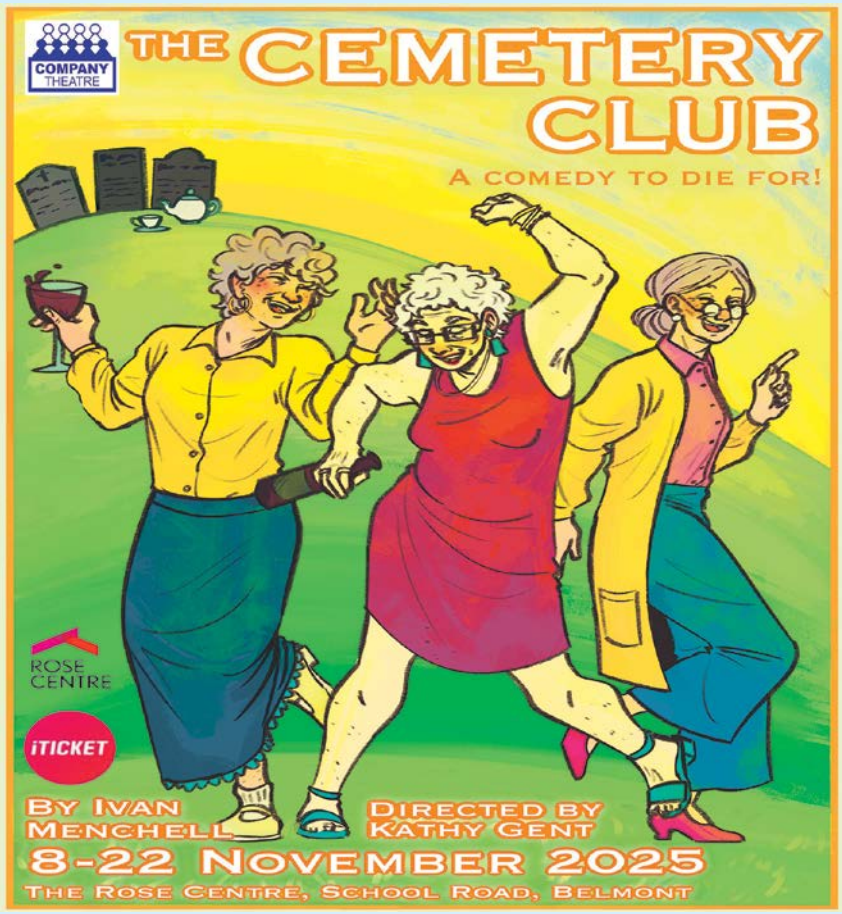
She recently became a marriage celebrant as well, saying she does "all the things that bring me joy".

Workshopping... Director Kate Birch (rear) with actor Braydon Priest and (from left) Vikki Cottingham, Rebecca Wright, Zara Gilbert and Liz Cannon

Directing fits nicely into her skill set, which includes acting, starting with attending a stage school in England as a youngster then getting into amateur dramatics before raising children put that on pause.

She and her husband moved to New Zealand 14 years ago, when he took up a job at Fonterra, and when her daughter became interested in drama while at Takapuna Grammar School it reignited Birch's own interest, initially with Belmont-based Company Theatre.

Her first directing gig was *The Death*



Comic-drama role snares award

Nikau Alexander, a star of a combined Westlake high schools' production this year, was named Best Performer in a Lead Role in a Play at the Showdown Awards.

The annual awards recognise performance and staging excellence in secondary school shows from across the Auckland region.

Nikau (pictured) played the role of Stephen in *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, a comic drama set in the art world. He received his trophy at an awards night held at the Bruce Mason Centre in Takapuna on 9 October.

North Shore schools picked up several other major awards, with Kaitlyn Darroch from Takapuna Grammar School named Best Performer in a Lead Role in a Musical. She played Nurse Alison Raynor in *Shortland Street: The Musical – Teen Issue*.

The overall Showdown Best Production for 2025 went to Rangitoto College for *Les Misérables*.

at PumpHouse

Trap, put on at the Rose Centre in 2017, then *God of Carnage* in 2022 and *Rumours* a year later, all with Company. Through the group she got to know fellow actor-director Liz Cannon, who went on to found Phoenix Theatre, with Birch now its vice-president. Last year she acted in *Call Girls*, which Cannon directed.

The roles are now reversed, with Cannon, from Narrow Neck, in *The Pink Hammer* cast alongside Rebecca Wright from Devonport, Braydon Priest from Glenfield, Vikki Cottingham and Zara Gilbert.

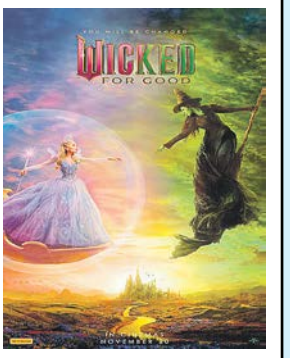
Cannon says Birch has a knack for getting the best out of her cast, understanding character-driven comedy and blending humour with emotional depth.

For her part, Birch reckons the audience is in for a good night out, with the play offering a late plot twist.

"Audiences will laugh, but they'll also connect with these characters in such a meaningful way."

She says she is "not at all" into DIY herself, but thinks there's an analogy in the play: "Give the women the right tools and they will succeed."

• The Pink Hammer is on from 30 October to 8 November at 7.30pm, with two weekend matinees, at the PumpHouse in Takapuna. Tickets: pumphouse.co.nz



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