

## Honours for Syd and Marj Sharpe

Margaret Goodwin of the Coastal Garden and Art Safari Committee asked me to a BBQ dinner held to conclude their busy open weekend of 9–10 February.



*Syd and Marj Sharpe with their Garden Safari presentation of a Margaret Scott print.*

As I arrived at Margaret's house the street was filled with parked cars. I was surprised by the large attendance and honoured to have been invited to what was also a surprise presentation to Syd and Marj Sharpe, the couple who initiated the opening of the gardens in the region.

It had been threatening to rain all day, but the weather was kind to us. Tables and chairs were dotted about the garden and everyone was chatting among themselves,



*Margaret Goodwin's garden seat.*

commenting on the dedication and hard work that goes into opening a garden and the privilege of visiting so many beautiful ones.

I was able to wander through Margaret's "secret garden" tucked at the back of her section. My eyes were drawn to a novel bed end with a bath instead of a bed base. Another nook revealed a child's haven with fairies and mushrooms peeping out from pebbles and fairy lights dotted among the foliage. The fibre-optic lights were popular with my kids as the sun started to set and they became more obvious. You never know the delights one can find hiding behind other people's fences!

The formalities began with a speech from Committee member Rose Ratahi, who presented Marj and Syd with a lovely painting by Margaret Scott, thanked them both for all their support for everyone over the years and announced that the Committee is honouring them by making them patrons.

Marj and Syd Sharpe had been unaware that they were to be made patrons, but suspected something must have been up when they saw the large turnout of guests invited to share in the occasion. Marj said, "I was blown away. It is so lovely to see so many people here tonight and we have had a great day visiting other gardens that we are not usually able to visit because we have our own garden open."

Rose also thanked all the participants for their generosity in entering into the weekend. "It is very much appreciated as without you all, this event could not happen." This year's Coastal Garden and Art Safari was a huge success, with 29 entrants, 16 of whom participated for the first time this year.

Rose pointed out that without a gathering at the end of their weekend, they would



*Margaret Goodwin's outdoor tub.*

not be able to meet up with the other participants and put faces to the names. A big thank you went to Margaret for hosting the evening and for going out of her way to organise everything.

A lucky draw was also held. Iris Putt, Shirley Goodin and Merle Clement won the Lucky Visitors draw, and the Garden Owners draw went to Nicky Vanderpoel and Pat Burkitt. MTA vouchers and plants were the lovely prizes, kindly donated by several businesses, whom the Committee thanks very much for their generosity.

For all those who bought tickets and visited the gardens, the money raised had not yet been tallied at the time of writing, but they are sure to have a considerable amount to donate to the wonderful Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust.

It's a shame to have to wait another year to see all the wonderful gardens/exhibits again!

### a peek inside

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# editorial

FROM THE TOM ZONE

Well done, Okato. Your *TOM* is doing a great job of depicting the fine community that you are – one that is rich in history and strong on support. I love reading the stories about the locals and the reports from the groups and organisations that represent you. Five issues ago when we published the first *TOM Okato* I knew we were on the right track to giving the readers what they want to hear and learn more about. Keep it coming and don't hold back on getting information or leads to us, as what is obvious to one person is news to another. As you will have gathered from the issues so far, *TOM* is about celebrating the good stuff. With what we so often hear and see in our news media these days, it's easy to forget that the good that is happening around us far outweighs the bad, and it helps to be reminded of that from time to time.

Until next time  
*Tracey Lusk*

**Shane Herbert - Lawyer**

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# TOM

*TOM-Okato is a free, monthly publication, delivered on the second Wednesday of the month to all homes and post-boxes from Timaru Road to Bayly Road.*

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# rich pickings

Hello all. I hope everyone has settled back into school and everybody is keeping safe and well.

I have just come back from a weeks' holiday. I spent a fair whack of it trying to catch the elusive "big one" and win a prize at the Cape Egmont Boat Club. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful in getting a prize, but I did have a great time – better luck next year!

Talking about fishing, did you know that a shark is the only fish that can blink with both eyes at once – not many people know that?

Anyway, it is still cannabis growing season and I'd be very grateful to receive any information you may have on the location of any plots around the area. Rural areas are ideal for growing and you may have noticed an increase in activity.

Also, at this time of year I get a lot more calls relating to the theft of petrol and other small items such as electric fences. If you've got any information, let me know.

All information will be kept confidential.

I would like to thank those of you who have taken the time to obtain the vehicle registration numbers of the idiots who abuse their right to drive a motor vehicle. I have spoken to a number of these offenders, including their parents who have been very supportive. I hope that as a result those of you who are affected by these idiots will see a decline in their activity.

Anyway must go – busy, busy. Take it easy, everyone, and be safe. Don't forget to pop in and have a coffee one day.

*Rich*

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# The shaping of Milly Carr

Milly Carr, born to Neil and Janice Lusk at Opunake Cottage Hospital, was christened Andrea. An avid TV watcher at the age of four, she loved *George and Mildred* so much that she announced to her Mum one day that henceforth, she was to be known as "Mildred". "Milly" stuck.

Milly was the baby of the family, "the youngest by far," she says. For her first four years, Milly lived on Parihaka Road, where her Mum and Dad were dairy farmers and the family loved it there, so it was a tragedy when, while building an implement shed, Neil was struck on the head by a huge beam and almost killed. He was in hospital for months, Milly recalls. Her Mum worked the farm for a while, assisted by relatives and friends, but it became too much for her and in 1978 or '79, the family moved to Oakura and Neil became a livestock agent.

Milly had a great life there. She remembers the sense of freedom. She attended Oakura Primary School, went to Christian camps and played on the beach and among the bamboos on the banks that overlooked it. She played tennis and roller-skated, skateboarded and loved her dolls – especially all the Strawberry Shortcake ones. Her Mum's still got them!

Five years on, Neil's job took them to Putaruru. The move was hard on her Mum, she reckons, because her two older sisters remained in New Plymouth, working. Milly found it hard too. "I'd always been close to my family and knew absolutely no-one there," she says. But it was within handy reach for the family and they would come up for holidays, despite the cloying heat in Putaruru in the summertime. "It was like a marae – we'd have mattresses on the floor to accommodate everybody," recalls Milly.

Eighteen months later, the family returned to New Plymouth. Milly remembers it was the year that Cyclone Bola struck – 1988. She attended New Plymouth Girls' High School and was uninspired by academia but loved playing sport, especially soccer. She just preferred "doing things". Her school Guidance Counsellor confirmed that she would be suited to a caring career and she'd always said she'd go nursing, so after her sixth form year, she went to Taranaki Polytechnic to earn her nursing diploma.

Her first post-graduate job was at Tainui Rest Home but after only six months, she won a position in the neo-natal unit at Hamilton Hospital. She loved nursing the babies but had fallen in love with Richard, who'd bought a villa in New Plymouth. That meant juggling a stressful job with commuting to spend time with him. Consequently, she "burned out" and was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. In 1996, with no choice but to abandon her job, she moved back to New Plymouth and Richard tackled the even tougher job of rehabilitation. As her health improved, she took on a little work at Taranaki Base Hospital and then cared for people in their own homes. This led to her taking on one of the most physically and mentally challenging jobs of her career – nursing a ventilated tetraplegic.

Meanwhile, Richard had been offered a three-month contract as project manager, building a telecommunications network in Sri Lanka. "It was too long," says Milly. "I stayed at home, crying." Then, even worse, Richard's contract was extended. Milly quit work and went over to be with him. "It was an amazing, wicked experience!" Milly reflects. The contrasts between New Zealand and that developing country made a huge impression on her.



*Milly in all her glory!*

She loved the people – they made her feel like a queen – and she clearly relished being "a lady of leisure". She explored the countryside, "from the hills to the beaches." "We got engaged there and we bought my ring there," she says, eyes sparkling almost as much as her stunning engagement ring. She and Richard were married that same year.

It was "the year of the washout," Milly recalls, referring to the Tataraimaka Road washout of 1998. They were to

have been married in the sunshine on the cliff top above Mimi Beach, but they were married in Jill and Phillip Carr's lounge instead. When Richard took redundancy from Telecom, the young couple moved to Auckland. Soon afterwards, Brittaney was born and two years later, Blake. "It was a pretty hectic time," Milly assures me. "We knew no-one, had no family around and had two children." Besides, the people weren't like those they had left "at home".

In 2001, Richard was made redundant from Telstra Clear. "Yes!" shouted Milly, punching the air. And so it was that they bounced back to Taranaki. But having spent most of her life in New Plymouth, she didn't know anyone on the coast either and found it hard adjusting to her new environment. "Delwyn, my sister, told me to get into Plunket and Playcentre and suchlike, and I did," remembers Milly. And she didn't do it by halves! She immersed herself in Playcentre activities and courses, and became the local Plunket group's president for a couple of years.

At first, she and Richard rented the Williams's cottage on Lower Puniho Road. They loved it! Milly was content making her own little home, with its vege garden and lack of concrete. "It was a children's haven," she smiles, "with lots of mud for making mud pies!" A year later, they bought their present property at the end of Cumming Street, where Milly lives in the company of one husband, two children, two cats, two beefies, two sheep, five chooks, the next door neighbour's cat, Baxter and one kunekune pig called Libby. She loves it here now.

Milly has honed her barista skills at "The Waiting Room" café and currently works as a Teachers' Aid and Sports Coordinator at Coastal Taranaki School. She's played mid-week tennis and indoor netball and in February this year, participated in the team event of the Round the Mountain cycle race. She just might "do the whole thing" next year, to "knock the bastard off." And in 2004, she joined the local volunteer fire brigade. "I wanted to give something to the community," she muses, "and with my nursing background, I felt I had something to offer." She hasn't come across anything too horrendous to date and the incidents she's attended haven't involved anyone she knows. "Yet!" she says ruefully. "It'll come." And another thing...Milly writes for *TOM*.

It's hard to believe she has any time to spare, but she assures me that she also loves to socialise and to bake. Her bubbly personality and winning smile must assure her of friends aplenty, while the brownie that I tasted during our interview attests to her skill as a baker. But most of all, Milly loves to be among family. "We have a great lifestyle," she beams. And a busy one, I vouch.


*Story and photo by Kerry Lilley*

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# Coastal Garden and Art Safari – a visual feast

It's Saturday, 10 February and it has dawned bright and clear for the first day of the Coastal Garden and Art Safari. As many will attest, I'm no gardener but I love to take pleasure from the horticultural efforts of others. It's a community service! I set forth excited and expectant, having marked thirteen of the twenty-nine venues as "must sees". Do my feet have wings?

My first stop is at Tania Brown's three and a half acre park-garden behind the cheese factory in the sleepy hollow of Tataraimaka. The Timaru River enfolds it on three sides and everywhere I go there are the sounds of tumbling water and singing birds. The



*A quiet corner near the dam in Tania's garden.*

*Pongas provide the bookdrop for a river shaped boulder.*



background traffic noise seems simply to remind me that I'm taking time out from my "real world". While cared for lovingly, the garden is not too restrained. Maples, scattered throughout the garden, are testament to Tataraimaka's microclimate. There's a stage/retreat complete with stone-circle fireplace down by the river and a lone, river-sculpted boulder, a drop in the pool of mown grass surrounding it. A rarely trodden path leads to the dam that once supplied water to provide power for the factory and there's a lovely stand of native trees on the other side. Further on, I dangle my legs over the edge of a little bridge and watch the water below me tumble over a little waterfall and down miniature rapids. When I finally encounter Tania again, she tells me she was thinking of sending out a search party. I tell Tania she must think she's in heaven!

As I cross the road to Ngaire Scown's garden, I'm attracted by the ordered, colourful display of bromeliads that front her former shop/petrol-stop home. Like any window display, it's a taster to entice you in and on entering her garden, I'm not disappointed. It's a visual feast of colour and form – flowers, succulents, bromeliads and vegetables congregate under a canopy of native bush. There's a stream, a bush-walk and a couple of amusing sculptures. This garden is a triumph for Ngaire for in October 1998 it was practically destroyed when a section of Highway 45 was washed out, taking her and her husband Des's garden with it. It has risen again, like the phoenix from the ashes.

I stop briefly to admire Brian and Judy Moss's young garden on Okato's main street and am greeted by a row of fruit tree sentinels set in a rectangle of crunchy stones. I am in awe of the vegetable garden with its huge trusses of ripe, red tomatoes and before I leave, I enjoy two white, concrete doves sitting on the edge of a white, concrete birdbath and chubby, white, winged cherubs lounging amongst the flowers beneath – it's quite heavenly. I visit Alby Carter in Okato too, browse his art works and promise to visit him another day soon.

Down the coast on Ruakere Road, near Warea, I visit Maria and Hugo Vanderpoel's property. It belonged to my husband's brother

before them, to Aubrey and Kit Lilley (my husband's parents) before that and to Aubrey's parents too. Bert and Francis's ashes lie there under two of the oldest native trees. While the garden benefits from its legacy of such large, established trees and its backdrop of native bush, it is Maria who has developed this graceful, peaceful country garden, featuring glorious red, pink and white roses and box hedge garden borders. Today stunning quilts hang on the washing line, enhancing the atmosphere, and craft works decorate the modern villa's expansive verandah. I relax awhile in the shade of an awning on the lawn, sipping a glass of red wine with friends.



*Maria on her verandah.*

There's just time left to visit Ann and Murray Donald's small country garden on their Warea Road farm. I'm greeted by an exquisite piano recital that seems to emanate from an old piano that stands against the hedge separating garden from farm and I look in vain for a pianist. Laughing, Ann tells me that at least one other visitor has mistaken it for a pianola and shows me a sound system hidden in the garden beneath. She calls herself a novice gardener and is proud of what she's achieved in a short time, in gardening terms. It's a lovely, semi-formal summer garden with roses and annuals, small shrubs and box hedging. There's a corner with masses of yellow roses and a garden seat – a memorial to her Mum who died in 1996. There's a splendid vegetable garden, a new formal garden and the cutest, rustic playhouse I've ever seen.

It's 5 o'clock already and my time has run out. I've missed treats all around the coast, from Tataraimaka to Rahotu, but there's only so much one can fit in. All that's left is to thank everyone who opened their gardens and studios to raise funds for the Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust and give us an opportunity to enjoy the results of their vision and effort. What a feast!

*Story and pictures by Kerry Lilley*

*The old soak in Ngaire's garden.*



*The playhouse at Ann and Murray's place,*



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# Okato Grill 45 – red hot!

As you drive down the main street of Okato, you may notice a few changes to the local fish shop. Yvette Billing has purchased the new shop and has been operating it for just on a month now under the new name Okato Grill 45. She is still in the process of finishing off painting the exterior of the building, which is looking fabulous so far, with just a little more work required on the walls and then a new paint job to the roof.

The shop window displays a unique sign, designed by Yvette and put together by the people at the Sign Shop. The flames at the top of the word "grill" represent hot flaming food, while the blue "45" resembles the surf along our Highway 45. A lot of time and thought must have gone into this.

Yvette's dad, Terry Dobbin, is a chef with fifty years' experience so it's not surprising she has a passion for food and cooking. "I learnt everything from my father and I was exceptionally good at the good ole Kiwi roasts, my flatmates loved this!" she recalls. She's always enjoyed the food industry and has worked in many different food establishments around Taranaki, owning a mobile food business in New Plymouth at one stage and working in several cafés, but a lot of her experience has been in fish and chip shops.

At present she also owns and operates the Healthy Heart canteen at the local school. She holds a certificate in Food and Hospitality, levels two and three.

Yvette has family ties within Okato. Her grandparents Zena and Reg Furze farmed in Warea for several years, then retired to Gossling Street in the village. Her mother Cheryl Furze attended Okato Primary and then the Okato College and it is rather neat to think that her grandchildren are now attending the same school. Another unusual twist is that Reg loved the fish and chips that Gillbanks provided at the time and his granddaughter is now providing the same for the locals.

Yep, you have to try these take-aways. They are very nice, and affordable too – you definitely get value for money. Newly on offer are the chicken and chip packs. These are already cooked and can be ready to go within minutes. You must go and check out the other choices in store.

I have been very impressed with the service from Yvette's staff and her focus is to give the young people in the community local employment opportunities. She expects her staff to maintain a professional manner with a friendly attitude and she believes having a good rapport with them is the key to good business.

In the future Yvette hopes to open during the day, but at the moment her hours are: Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 5pm–8pm; and Thursday to Saturday 5pm–8.30pm.

Yvette is looking forward to the challenge that the job brings and has been very overwhelmed with the lovely welcome from the people in the community. Thanks everyone.

Story and photo by Milly Carr



The revamped fish shop.



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# burning issues

Things have been quiet recently, with only one (or is it two?) call outs this month. Maybe this can be credited to you the public being so diligent in observing the fire ban – we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your perseverance on this front.

Talk of perseverance takes us to the building site. Have you seen the progress? From the photo you will see how much has happened since work commenced after the holiday break. It is looking pretty impressive and of considerable size.



Station renovations well under way.

As this goes to print, Mark Fox will have completed (or shouldn't be far off) the roof and most of the framing will be up. From there we can put the windows in and then the cladding can be started. We will keep you posted in the next issue of TOM.

Remember to keep safe and be fire wise!

Story and photo by Milly Carr

# Okato Lions Club

Greetings to everybody.

Our tea meetings are under way for the year. We meet on the first Wednesday of the month at 6.30pm for drinks, with dinner at 7pm, followed by a guest speaker. For some tea meetings our spouses join us.

Our bike ride is still in the planning stages. As soon as we confirm details, we will advertise the event.

The bus shelters are on our programme for this autumn. We will be painting, repairing and placing our Lion's logo on them. If any person knows of an unused shelter or where there is a need for one (where a group of children gather at one point, for example), please let a Lion member know.

The Vintage Hay-Making Day was a great success. Some of the Lion's helped to set the equipment up and generally helped out during the event.

Until next month (with some beneficial rain – hopefully!)

Lion Merv Hooker, Phone 752 4086

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# TOM SPORTS

## Okato Swimming Club and community pool

The Swimming Club and Okato's community pool have had a very active and successful season so far, thanks to a combination of great weather (for swimming, if not for farming) and talented, generous, committed local people.

The Swimming Club's Annual General Meeting, held in December, saw the resignation of Secretary for eight years, Caroline Charteris, and the installation of Sue Crowley as her replacement. Outgoing Treasurer, Sally McEldowney, has moved from the district and Jeanette Crawl has taken on that role. Fiona Lacey was elected Coaching Coordinator, while John Puller has retained the position of President. Race nights and squad training have been held weekly and about forty children have been attending Swimming Club lessons on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. In addition, more than fifty children from pre-school age to twelve-year-olds took advantage of New Plymouth District Council's "Learn to Swim" programmes during the school holidays. "It's awesome to see the improvement in the kids and the confidence they've gained," Caroline commented. Seven-year-old Zak Hetherington was unable to put his head under the water before his lessons, but by the last of the holiday series he was swimming, diving and proudly showing his newly acquired skills to his mates.

There have been great opportunities for adults to have fun and achieve health benefits at the pool too. New Plymouth District Council has been running an aqua-aerobics programme, as well as a summer challenge for lane swimmers. About forty people have enrolled and the aim is for each participant to attend thirty-six sessions over the summer period.

The pool is scheduled to close on 30 March so as TOM hits the letterboxes, you will have just a few days left to enjoy swimming there. I hope the weather's fine.

Story by Kerry Lilley



Zak demonstrating his diving at Okato pool. Picture by Janine Hetherington

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# Alex Rodger – bringing the spark back into your life!

**He's the new electrical business in Okato, and he's bending over backwards to help in more ways than one!**

When meeting new arrivals to Taranaki, locals often wonder, "What brings these people to our doorstep?" The lifestyle, the mountain, the surf, work, family? But yoga! That's one that I hadn't heard before! Well, that wasn't *really* Alex's reason to come, but it's part of the reason to stay.

Having dabbled for years in the discipline of yoga, it wasn't until coming to Taranaki that he found a teacher he could really gel with. That teacher was Aileen Pennington. Coming from a farming community, "she was a very practical yoga teacher," says Alex. She always used to say, "You need your feet on the ground before you get your head in the clouds," so that's what Alex has been doing for the last three years – working with the local Okato community to get their feet, hands, knees, elbows and numerous other body parts on the ground!

Alex is not the stereotypical yoga teacher. Hearing his broad North English accent, with the big boots and the No. 2 haircut, he definitely appears more industrial than spiritual. "I really enjoy the work I have been doing here in Taranaki, working out in the rural landscape." Coming from the windswept North of England, he's no stranger to a 'bit of weather'. He says, "Honestly, I have not yet experienced a winter's day here in Taranaki like out on the North-west coast. Over there it literally takes your breath away!" And early mornings are not a problem for him either – he's up before dawn most days, doing his yoga. He claims it was his milk delivering days as a boy that trained him into an early riser.

But Alex is not just a yoga teacher, he's a sparky too...

Alex has been living in the Okato district for about four years, working with local New Plymouth companies Fitzroy Yachts and New Plymouth Electrical. He's enjoyed his time working for both, but has decided it's time to go out on his own and concentrate on his local community. He is ready to fill the void left by the closure of the last electrical company in the area. Working from home, he is able to keep his overheads down and his prices realistic. He carries a wide range of stock with him and is able to deal with most eventualities on the spot.

His electrical experience is vast and varied, from wiring turbo generators on nuclear submarines, setting up integrated touch-screen monitoring systems on super-yachts, to rigging fluoro lights in cow-sheds. "I'm definitely happier outside than being cooped up inside a claustrophobic factory all day," he says. "None of those jobs are as glamorous as they seem. I like to be out meeting real people, or real animals, which ever the case maybe!" And often has been the case on some of the far-flung farm jobs he has done.

Alex says he and his family have integrated well in his Tataraimaka Community, becoming good friends with the neighbors, with a bit of reciprocal back-scratching going on. "I've had the odd Sunday afternoon electrical emergency," he admits.

Since starting his business in the New Year, he has slowly started to pick up work around Okato, mainly generated by his little yellow flyer in the trusty 4 Square window, where everyone seems to look from time to time. You may also have seen the same flyer in red in your letterbox. The majority of Alex's work so far has been re-wiring some of the old original weatherboard homes. "People don't like the idea of that old brittle wire that's been

sitting in steel conduit for years. I've seen a few scorch marks on people's ceilings, and it makes me shudder. Also having the meter reader come into the home, as is still the case for some, is a bit un-nerving for people. So what I've been able to do is to split the old fuse box and meters into two, putting the meter box outside, but leaving the switchboards inside for easy access. Upgrading the wiring is cheaper than people think."

Although climbing around in roof-spaces is not something he relishes, Alex is built for the job and his "racing snake" build helps him in this department. "It was the same working on the boats," he says. "I used to 'yoga' myself into all kinds of tight spots down in the bilges. Harry Houdini springs to mind a lot. He was a yoga master – that's how he was able to stay in those air-tight boxes for extended lengths of time with hardly any oxygen. He could slow his heart rate until he was at the point where he was just doing enough to keep himself alive. We learn all that in my classes at the Okato College," he laughs.

So if you're caught in a tight spot, no electrical problem is too big or small – for all your domestic and commercial electrical needs, contact Alex at Flexible Electrical today!



*Alex Rodger sticking his screwdriver where other mere mortals fear to poke.*



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# coastal taranaki school **news**

A very warm welcome back to all students, parents and staff returning to Coastal Taranaki School for 2008. A very positive and cheerful tone is readily apparent.

## New students

A special welcome to the following new students and their families:

- Year 1: Grace Fisher, Jacob Hooker, Mia MacGregor, Cara Moffitt, Scarlett Warner, Vincent Bolton, Ocean Noble-Komene, Georgia Jones, Morgan Pollard, Jacob Whittle and Hayley Vanner
- Year 2: Nicole Whittle and Regan Cutts
- Year 5: Ruby Luke-Hurley, Sheldon Brown, Rei Marshall and Harmony Reid
- Year 7: Jurnee Brown
- Year 8: Stevie Reid, Jahrim Mataria and Zjahmyn Baker
- Year 9: Dylan Maxwell, Thomas Young and Shalaya Mataira
- Year 10: Stanton Brown, Arisa Konishi and Risa Kurata
- Year 11: Courtney Young and Damen Taukamo
- Year 12: Rana Searle
- Year 13: Briar Burwell and Maija Haapakangas

## 2008 Student Leaders

CTS Head Students for 2008 were announced at an assembly on Monday 18 February. In the presence of many of their parents, the following students learned of the important roles they had been selected for:

- World Vision Team**  
Ashley Hetherington  
Laura May Jones  
Rachel Moffitt
- Student Council**  
Ashley Hetherington (Chairperson)  
Rachel Moffitt (Secretary)  
Josh Ramsey (Treasurer)
- Cultural Captain**  
Lacey Mason  
Mere Mason (Deputy)
- Arts Captain**  
Jake Van der Heyden  
Briony McAnelly (Deputy)
- Sports Captains**  
Dom Yardley  
Codie Tahere-Tahau  
Marcus Warren (Deputy)
- Deputy Head Pupils**  
Briar Burwell  
Becky Riepen
- Head Pupils**  
Laura Swannell  
Kenny Carr

## Upcoming events:

- March 2008
- 10 Taranaki Anniversary Day  
12 Senior Athletics Years 5-13  
9am-3pm
- 13 Junior Athletics Years 1-4  
10am-2.30pm
- 21 Good Friday
- 24 Easter Monday

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# The Waiting Room and what unfolds . . .

As I approach our local café, "The Waiting Room", there are cars parked outside and people flowing onto the footpath on their way to get their caffeine fix.

I've come to chat with the new owner, Laurent Manderson, to fill you in on what this guy is about and what he will bring to us, but it's so busy I am a little unsure about the possibility of gaining a snippet of his time.

It's wonderful to see the buzz of people relaxing in the atmosphere of this popular little haven for coffee connoisseurs. In the short time I spend there, many people come and go, either taking something tasty away or staying to try one of the many delicious treats on offer in the cabinet (my eyes are drawn to the carrot cake and I can just hear it calling out to me) or choosing one of the many blackboard specials Laurent can whip up.

As I wait for a lull, I enjoy the range of music that fills the room, song after song. Laurent tells me it's the local radio station 88.1. The talent in our community is showcased on the walls, where the art of Peter Lambert and Sandy Hickey is displayed among other pieces.

Laurent pulls up a seat next to me and sips his flat white, completely unfazed by the busy spell he has just had. The couples next to us have enjoyed their fill and are lounging on the sofa,



*Laurent Manderson*

reading the paper in the sun. I like the look of those loungers out the front – they're pretty cool.

Laurent brings to his business many years of experience in the food industry. He had his first stint of kitchen work as a dishwasher at the age of 16 to earn pocket money while still at school in Wellington. He sometimes helped the head chef, which inspired him to take a Professional Cookery course. He moved to New Plymouth while still doing the course and on completing it was employed as a chef at Burnt Toast. Laurent has also worked at MacFarlane's (Inglewood), Tupare – which he says was a wonderful learning experience with a great boss – Burgess House and Andres.

Laurent spent a further six years working in various restaurants in Auckland and expanding his cooking knowledge. But with a second child on the way, the priority was to be closer to family in Okato and so the family shifted back to the heartland in 2006.

At present Laurent and his partner Jessie are leasing the business off Alwin and are very grateful to him for giving them the opportunity. They intend to purchase the business in six months' time. Laurent's main kitchenhand/cook or "all rounder", Tom, is busily working away out the back and they seem to be a steady team. On the weekends Laurent is able to call on Pip or Becks to help out with coffee making and front-of-house.

Having worked as a chef for many years, Laurent says his new

role of working front-of-house in the café has been a nice change, but he is looking forward to being able to spend more time out the back cooking. The prospect of opening in the evenings in the not too distant future should give him this opportunity. Let's hope we can sample some of his favourite pasta dishes. Yum, can't wait!

Laurent's aim is to get a license for the café and open initially on Friday and Saturday evenings. He'll offer a blackboard menu that will change weekly. You'll be able to dine in and there will be take-aways too. He says he may also look into catering for private functions if and when the need arises.

With time and finances, he would love to have more outdoor furniture made by Tom's father for the outdoor area and we may see some palms and outdoor lighting setting the scene before long. Laurent says he wants the café to be a place that is child friendly and affordable, a place where people can relax, enjoy themselves and have fun.

He is very appreciative of all the work his partner Jessie does in holding the fort at home with the two children, then coming in for the afternoons to help clean up, and she also does the paper work. He is also very thankful for the support from the children's grandparents.

The Waiting Room's hours of opening will remain the same for now – 8am–4pm everyday except Tuesday, although he is flexible with his closing. It's all dependent on the day and I can tell you myself he will never turn you away when you want a coffee!

Go in, say hi and make yourself known. Laurent is a very chatty, bubbly guy who I feel is the right person for our "little haven", plus the food and coffee are great. Check it out!

*Story and photo by Milly Carr*

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# Okato Historical Society

Last month, Milly Carr outlined the history and activities of the Okato and Districts Historical Society. This month, we are happy to report that they have secured exclusive use of the main body of the Community Hall on a year-to-year basis. This means that they can now erect permanent displays, which can be viewed by arrangement with either Iris Putt (phone 752 4182), Nora Fox (phone 752 4062) or Nola Corbett (phone 752 4404). The Society also plans to open their doors for public viewing on a more regular basis.

Iris reports that they've had good feedback from the last TOM article and an excellent response to their recent open day, held in conjunction with the Taranaki Coastal Garden and Art Safari during the weekend of 9-10 February. People have come forward with some interesting articles to add to the archives, including an early map showing "all the Maori forts, et cetera," donated by Frank Roebuck.

Iris Putt, who has recently taken up the reins of Convenor, says the Society is indebted to Nola, "who got it off the ground" and who had led the group since its inception twelve years ago. Remember, if you have anything you think would be of historical interest, please contact Iris, Nora or Nola. Written material and photographs can be copied and returned to you and you can donate items or lend them to the Society, knowing that they will be safely held and that they will become a valuable resource for our community.

Story by Kerry Lilley

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