

Lighting up Paeroa

HDC Citizen Awards 2014 - **Colin and Gloria James**

Christmas is a stressful time of year for many, but you won't see a grumpy face at Paeroa Christmas Lights. That's the best bit for Gloria and Colin James, who, along with around 40 hardworking volunteers, have organised the glittering event, held at the Paeroa Historic Maritime Museum and Park, for four years running.

"Last year more than 5000 people came through the gates and I never saw one unhappy parent or child – there was not a single incident where a parent was growling or a child was sulking, it just puts everyone in such a magical space," says Gloria.

Locals since 1973, when they moved into the area with their three children to milk cows, the community minded couple put their hands up for numerous school and sports committees, sat through countless meetings, and carted car loads of local kids to Saturday morning sports games. In 2008 they joined the Paeroa Historic Maritime Museum and Park Committee. Involved in improving the park grounds, as well as opening the site up for community events such as weddings and private functions, the couple's long term plans include helping the Committee to build new wharves, and encouraging a range of small businesses to operate alongside the river.

The Christmas Lights first flickered into life when local woman Ellen Cooper, approached Gloria about lighting up the Park flagpole in 2011. Securing funding from New Zealand Community Trust, the Park Committee decided to take the concept several steps further and with the help of Ellen's lighting expertise and assistance, lit up the entire Park. You could probably have seen it glowing from the moon.

"We had an enchanted forest filled with fairy lights, Santa's Grotto, snow and bubbles, a laser show, a



Above: Mayor John Tregidga congratulates Gloria and Colin James on contributing to the the community spirit with the annual Paeroa Christmas Lights event.

remembrance tree – even a haunted house. That first opening night was phenomenal and since then it's just become this ruling giant. Every year we try to do something different, it's getting bigger and better all the time," says Colin.

Last year people from as far away as Auckland booked motel rooms in Paeroa for Christmas Lights opening night. One lady heard about the Paeroa event while visiting the Franklin Road Christmas Light Show in Auckland and drove down especially. Grown men in gumboots clomped into Colin and Gloria's chainsaw shop beaming from ear to ear and full of Christmas cheer after visiting the show the night before.

"That's what blew me away the most," says Colin, "You'd expect kids to love it, but these were big burly blokes."



Paeroa Christmas Lights

Paeroa Historic Maritime Museum and Park
 Saturday 13 December to Wednesday
 31 December 2014
 8.30pm – 11.00pm (gates close at 10.00pm)
www.paeroachristmas.com

Funds raised from the event help pay for ongoing site improvements at the Park and benefit other community groups as well.

It's a huge commitment. While most people are putting away their Christmas decorations and swearing they'll never eat another piece of cake in their life, the Park Committee is already in planning mode for next year. Physical work starts at the beginning of October, but stories like the one Gloria heard recently about two young children who'd just lost their mum to breast cancer make the hours of hard work worth it. Facing a bleak Christmas they visited Paeroa Christmas Lights on Christmas Eve and left with smiles on their faces for the first time in weeks.

"The most satisfying thing is being on the gate and seeing people leave happy at a very busy time of the year. It really is magic."

End of an era for hall

It's time to farewell an old Council-owned building – the Paeroa Contract Bridge Club hall at the foot of Primrose Hill.

The building was formerly the Paeroa Pipe Band Hall. The Bridge Club took over the lease in 1982, but the lease wasn't renewed when it expired in February 2004, due to a drop in membership.

For the past 10 years the Wood Street building has been used for exercise classes two days a week, but is now showing its age and would need major repairs and refurbishment to bring it up to current standards for public and disability use. The work would cost an estimated \$300,000.

Councillors considered this at their meeting last week. "One idea was that the building might have made a wonderful youth centre," says Paeroa Ward Chairperson Julie Bubb. "But sadly, a close-up look and a report on its condition have shown that wouldn't be practical. With construction materials such as asbestos cladding, it's past its use-by date."

The report to Councillors also included an option of demolishing the existing structure and constructing a new multi-purpose building of similar size, at an estimated cost of almost \$380,000.

However, as there is no community group as a prospective long-term tenant, and other venues in the town are available, the Council agreed to tender the building for removal or demolition, with the intention of converting the site to a public carpark.

Julie says this will benefit many residents using adjacent facilities like the kindergarten, and the Scout and Guide Hall which is home to many community groups and is undergoing a major upgrade.

In addition it will serve people going up Primrose Hill, whether on special occasions like Anzac Day when parking is a squeeze, or to enjoy a walk. The area is set to become even more popular for recreation in future, with a planned walkway development.

Tenders for the removal or demolition of the hall will be advertised soon.

Gift doubles Kaiaua's fire fleet

Our volunteer firefighters are known for going beyond the call of duty – in the case of one member of the Kaiaua Rural Fire Force, using his own van fitted with lights and siren to transport crew after the six-seater fire truck is full.

That's where we've been able to help out, with a 4WD double-cab utility that has served the Council since 1998 and is no longer required. Last week, Councillors agreed to gift it to the fire force, which will fund its conversion to a fire response vehicle.

The brigade's official appliance is an ex-urban New Zealand Fire Service Hino, too small to fit a full turnout of 10 to 11 volunteers, and with limited off-road capability. So the Toyota Hilux ute gifted from Council, which can be driven on a

car licence, will be a well used and appreciated secondary vehicle, says deputy Principal Rural Fire Officer Peter Smith.

"It will probably roll out every time the appliance is called – that's about 35 to 50 times a year. Besides men, it will carry pumps, hoses and equipment, and with its high ground clearance will be able to negotiate farm tracks or the beach or spots where St John assistance is needed," he says. "It will also be available for Civil Defence situations."

Should the utility not be needed in the future, it would be returned to the Council.

The District's other Rural Fire Force, at Whiritoa, already operates two appliances.

Ferretting out the rabbits

Bunnies may be cute and fluffy... if they're the storybook or marshmallow kind, however rabbits in our cemeteries are just a pest – leaving holes in the lawns and causing distress when they burrow around grave sites and memorial stones. Also, old rabbit bones sometimes surface, which can likewise be upsetting for cemetery visitors.

The problem we've inherited dates back to the 19th century, when European rabbits were introduced to New Zealand for food, fur and sport. Site-appropriate control has proved elusive: shooting or trapping would raise safety issues, and laying poison has barely "scratched the surface", says Parks and Reserves Manager Steve Clark. It reduces only the adult population, not the juveniles underground, so it has a short-term impact on the fast-breeding species. Even with frequent use, this method has become less effective as the rabbits learn not to take the bait.

However, a recently launched trial could provide a solution, in the form of a single trained ferret. While the introduction of this predator in the wild failed to control rabbits – instead endangering many native bird species – the domestically raised ferret in our trial works under the command of its accompanying owner/handler, sniffing out rabbits in their burrows.

In the first of three forays at the Paeroa Cemetery, the ferret found 36 rabbits. On the second occasion it found nine, and on the third attempt it could not locate any. To date at Waihi Cemetery, an initial hunt has found 50 rabbits.

This is far more effective than the chemicals we've been using at \$2000 per dose, and at a cost of less than \$500 for both cemeteries, it would be far cheaper. So in such a contained area (unlike hundreds of hectares of farmland), paying an animal to do the job two or three times a year might be the best option – and already, word of mouth has prompted interest from other councils.

