

Humble as ever

Jill unaware of award nomination

By JILL CLEAVE



TOP GAL: Jill Bradley was surprised to learn she was a finalist in the Metlife SeniorNewZealander of the Year Awards.

A Paeroa businesswoman who has no interest in the tokens of commercial success, flash cars, luxury boats and holiday homes, did not even know she had been nominated for the Metlife Senior New Zealander of the Year Award until the day of the finalists' dinner.

Jill Bradley, 65, said the first she knew was her son Tane telling her he was going to an awards dinner.

"He told me I had been nominated and had made the final list of 10 and he knew I wouldn't go," she said.

About 900 people were nominated for the awards in several different categories with only 60 making it through to the finals.

Jill, co-founder of Agrisea in Paeroa, said she did not feel all that special and found it embarrassing.

"There are a lot of people out there who feed healthy lunches to kids in need and teach young ones how to cook, or coach sports who should be New Zealanders of the Year," she said.

She is very humble and underestimates her contributions to the environment and to families who are making a living because of her innovative use of seaweed.

At least 70 families in small coastal settlements, sometimes the whole settlement, are involved in harvesting, drying and packing seaweed needed to keep Agrisea producing. There are also 40 families who are dependant on Agrisea in their factories in Paeroa and Gisborne.

From humble beginnings, researching how to get the best out of seaweed to grow nutritious vegetables in her backyard, to making seaweed nutrition available to thousands of Kiwi farmers, growers, vintners and home gardeners, she is now using her energy to set up a way to sustainably farm what could be a major new multi-million dollar earner for New Zealand from the export of animal, human and pastoral health products.

She is the chairwoman of the Seaweed Association of New Zealand which she co-founded to build a long-term sustainable seaweed industry while protecting the marine coastal environment.

She said at present seaweed used by AgriSea, *Ecklonia radiata*, can only be collected by hand when it gets swept ashore.

"SANZ is working on options to present to government for safely harvesting seaweed after a million dollar research project has proven the seaweed grows back more densely when harvested," she said.

Jill is passionate about the children of our country receiving nutritious food and being educated in growing and sustainability. Agrisea is a principle sponsor of the Enviroschools Foundation and the Rural Woman's Network.