



Wairoa In Focus

Your Community, Your Future

Long time employee leaves engineering legacy

Nearly 40 years of taking care of the district's road and services is almost at an end for long serving WDC Operations Manager Bill Lewis. Bill joined the staff in 1973 as a labourer for the Water Works, going on to work his way through the ranks as Foreman, District Overseer, Assistant Engineer and finally his current role. Originally from England, Bill and his wife Avril intended to stay with family in Wairoa as a stop-gap while considering job offers in Auckland. "We saw that this was a better sort of lifestyle and decided to stay," he said. Having worked with five engineering managers, witnessed amalgamation,

and worked with many mayors and councillors, Bill has a wealth of experience to offer his current colleagues. Amongst his memories, Cyclone Bola stands out as an interesting time. Water and sewerage lines were lost when the bridge was washed away, presenting a major challenge for Bill and his team to get things up and running again.



Bill Lewis overseeing construction of the now completed Mahia walkway/cycleway.

"Seeing people pull together in extraordinary circumstances is something I'll always remember," he said. Among his achievements is planning and overseeing the construction of the Wairoa River

the district, nothing has changed over the years.

"However there have been many improvements to how certain tasks are carried out," he said. Over the years, Bill has devoted a lot of his own time to the job and as a result has been instrumental in progressing the district's road and service infrastructure. Having worked since he was 14 years old, Bill is now looking forward to the luxury of operating on his own schedule, with plans to travel, spend time with family and enjoy life in general.

Council staff share earthquake zone experiences

Councils around the country have been supplying a steady stream of staff to either Christchurch or Wellington to assist with the earthquake recovery. Wairoa District Council has played its part by continuing to send people as required – a situation that is likely to go on for months. Building Control team leader Corinne Hamlin started her work in the city on Day Five of the national emergency. She joined the 800 other building control officers, welfare officers and earthquake commission representatives that made up Operation Suburbs. Corinne started each day at the headquarters in the CBS Arena in Addington. People became identifiable only by which shade of yellow, orange or red high vis they wore as they assembled into their allotted teams to receive their briefing for the day. After picking up backpacks loaded with paperwork, dust masks and lunch packed by volunteers, it was time to hit the streets. Corinne's team, one of 223, consisted of an Earthquake Commission representative, two welfare officers and herself. Over the next five days, the teams picked through the rubble and silt littering the roads, yards and homes in the suburb of Avonside to carry out rapid assessments of damaged buildings. The task was to obtain a picture of the health and safety of residents and the state of their homes. Where extensive damage was observed a red placard was placed on the building, and an engineer was called in cases where there was imminent danger to occupants. Initially the teams were allocated 20 minutes per dwelling, but it soon became clear that this time had to be cut down in order to complete the mammoth goal of inspecting 56,000 houses by the end of that week. Inspection time was halved, and

in some cases even less time was applied to each site. To provide some scale, on one day alone 223 building control officers involved in Operation Suburbs inspected over 17,808 homes and completed all the necessary paperwork for each dwelling. There were also nightly summaries to enable operations personnel the chance to plan for the following day. Challenges were many. For some residents, having people turn up in high vis jackets was the high point in what was inevitably yet another hard day. "People needed to talk. A common sentiment was that while they soldiered on after the September earthquake, this one was proving to be too much," Corinne said. "The key will be getting services restored. It makes a huge difference having the basics. For example, over the five days there were no Portaloos for the whole of Avonside." Strong northwesterlies on the third day Corinne was working provided another obstacle to getting around quickly due to the amount of dust swirling around from silt piles – at times she couldn't even see her hand in front of her face. "By the end of the day, when I removed my mask, my face was black except where the mask had been. Everyone was the same." Frequent aftershocks were a constant reminder of the reality of the disaster. Some just created a ripple of movement underfoot, but others resulted in a much sharper jolt that got the heart pumping. Corinne said she was happy to get to steady ground at the end of her five days in the disaster zone. Des Jane, Russell McCracken and Ropata Ainsley were also involved in the earthquake recovery, but on a very different level. Des and Russell were among the first to travel from Hawke's Bay to the National Crisis Management Centre, situated in an underground bunker beneath The Beehive in Wellington. Ropata travelled down as part of a

Walkway. "It has been a satisfying job and it is great to see people using it. I won't have to get up at six in the morning to use it myself now," he said. He says that in terms of the physical work that has to be done around

later wave of personnel. The job facing these men was to carry out logistics tasks on a huge scale. Des said requests were flowing in from Christchurch for all manner of things, from people to machinery. "It was mind blowing – tens of thousands of items. It was similar to our training, but magnified to beyond anything we could have imagined," he said. Working with an unfamiliar computer system (which was due to be updated this year), the team worked their way through sourcing and ordering around 30,000 chemical toilets and Portaloos, as well as arranging the movements of hundreds of personnel. "The secret was to take your time and work through methodically. One mistake could have huge consequences." Russell said a particular challenge in moving people around was that every single person who crossed the Cook Strait had to be logged in and recorded, then checked off on arrival to ensure everyone was accounted for. "This included people travelling on naval ships, troop planes and commercial flights, so it was a huge undertaking." Lessons are being passed on and experiences shared in order to make sure WDC is better prepared should a similar disaster strike closer to home.

Consultation open

Public consultation is currently open on a proposed amendment to the Public Safety Bylaw that will exempt licensed restaurants and cafes with alfresco dining from the liquor ban area, allowing patrons to have a drink with their meal. The draft Alfresco Dining for Licensed Restaurants and Cafes Policy is also out for public consultation, and has basically been designed to support the by-law amendment. It was necessary to create a policy for an amendment to the by-law so that the by-law could not be abused. The policy makes it clear that the exemption would relate only to establishments in the liquor ban area where the principle business was sale of food, rather than alcohol. The policy lays out all the detail and supports the by-law amendment. Both the proposed amendment and the draft policy can be viewed on line at www.wairoadc.govt.nz, or at council offices on Queen Street, the library and Wairoa i-Site Visitor Information Centre. Submissions can be made on the official form, and must be received by 5pm on Friday, April 8.

For the diary:

Council meetings:

- April 12
- May 10
- June 14
- July 12
- August 9
- September 13
- October 11
- November 8
- December 13

Forum dates:

- April 26
- May 24
- June 28
- July 26
- August 23
- September 27
- October 25
- November 22

Maori Standing Committee

- April 29
- May 27
- June 1
- July 29
- August 26
- September 30

Check out the Civil Defence Special on page 2. This features important information about what to do in case of an earthquake or tsunami. Act now to prepare yourself and your family.