

Focus on fun continues with the river toys in place for summer

Hundreds of kids of all ages have made a big splash at the wharf this summer thanks to the addition of some purpose built play equipment installed by Council in a move to improve community access to Opotiki's river and coastal resource.

The \$30,000 structure which was finished in time for the Fun Unplugged summer festival, replicates the old fashioned rope swing in a willow tree that many of us remember. It has provided hours of fun for children and spectators and is undoubtedly something that tomorrows adults will look back on with a smile. More summer activities overleaf.

At the official opening on 23 December Mayor Forbes, Deputy Mayor Fisher and Councillor Howe tested the structure in front of hundreds of spectators and declared it to be really good fun.



Computer facilities are a popular addition to the library



The library is now a popular destination for travellers who want to catch up with friends and relatives using the library facilities or logging onto the Aotearoa People's Network Kaharoa via their own lap top.

The number of visitors to the Opotiki District Library jumped by around 235 per month since installation of the Aotearoa Peoples Network Kaharoa computer suite.

Four new computers providing access to the internet were installed in September last year and a wide range of users have been making the most of the free service. Comparative figures show Opotiki sitting well above Whakatane and Kawerau in the number of user sessions with Opotiki recording 174 sessions, Whakatane 91 sessions and Kawerau recording 80 sessions for the month of November. This statistic could reflect the relatively low percentage of Opotiki people who have access to computers at home and support ongoing development of a technology suite for Opotiki.

"The kumara vine seems to be working very well as the facilities have attracted a wide range of users without the aid of advertising," says District Librarian Nethia Morgan. "Many visitors are new users from sectors of the community who in general, are not your typical library users. Of these a large

proportion are young people undertaking research and social networking or travellers keeping in touch with family and friends.

"Aotearoa Peoples Network Kaharoa is a government funded initiative to enable more people to access the internet at broadband speed. It is run through the National Library of New Zealand in conjunction with public libraries. The Network provides the computers and network connection for free and manages the network. Local libraries provide the accommodation and staffing required to monitor use of the equipment and help prevent inappropriate use of the network.

"The Network filters out pornography and viruses and can shut down access or remotely control the computers. We also have our own policies around acceptable behavior and the use of equipment and can control access to the facilities by shut down or by refusing entry to the computer suite or banning from the library if necessary. However, we have had little trouble and people are generally appreciative of the opportunity they have," Mrs. Morgan says.

Summer activities

The annual Fun Unplugged Holiday Festival is now in full swing, with a diverse range of activities and adventures on offer to the communities of Opotiki as well as those choosing to holiday here.

This is the fourth Fun Unplugged programme run under the auspices of Opotiki District Council, with Whakaatu Whanaunga Trust contracted to provide co-ordination.

More than 40 organised events and activities are being held with some of the favorites such as the Big Fishing competitions and the Rodeo being included.

Opotiki District Council initiated Fun Unplugged in 2006 to provide low cost activities to visitors and residents, especially those with families.

Fun Unplugged 2009 - 2010 is now into its second week but reports indicate good participation in events and activities held so far. The festival ends on Auckland Anniversary weekend.

Coming Events

Mark these coming events on your calendar

Opotiki River Swim	10 January
Opotiki Save the Children Garden Day	10 January
Slim's Family Fishing Competition	29-31 January
Opotiki A & P Show	13 February
Go by bike day	17 February
Lions Club Paddy's Market	20 February
Mataatua Kapahaka 2010	19-20 February
Show Jumping	20 February
Mayoral Challenge	23 February
Let's Du it Duathlon	25 February
ITM 3 Fish Classic	19-21 March
15 th Charity Concert	19-20 March
St Joseph's School Fair	20 March

Other recent council projects include . . .

The creation of a formed access and parking area beside the Otara River has improved river access and public safety in the area. The project cost is less than \$2,000.



Toilets have been provided at the Ohiwa Harbour boat ramp and at the Omaio Reserve and changing facilities have been constructed. These facilities cost around \$65,000 each to construct.

Also completed is the purchase of the Awhi Credit Union building in King Street. Council was investigating the viability of expanding the neighboring library when the Credit Union building became available. The purchase enables new options for the expansion of the existing facility to be explored.



Fizz and Chip help the animal welfare cause

Adorable ambassadors for animal welfare, Chip the dog and his feline friend Fizz have made a considerable impact on the number of dogs that have been microchipped in Opotiki since making their appearance in support of microchipping and desexing.

There has been a 22% increase in the number of microchipped dogs as a result of the Cheap as Chips campaign and a further 45 cats and 25 dogs made a visit to the SPCA Desexing caravan when it visited in October.

The goal for Opotiki is to get close to 70% of all dogs microchipped by 2012. That is all dogs excluding those registered as working dogs which are excluded by law.

"We have a long way to go but we also have made considerable progress over the last year and are well on target to achieving our aim," says Environment and Planning Manager Robert Schlotjes.

Other goals include the registration of all dogs and a significant decline in the number of unwanted puppies and kittens in the district.

"There are many benefits for the community when the animal population is well managed including a decrease in health issues, reduction in nuisance caused and improved visual appeal of the town and district.

The sight of a neglected animal is distressing for most so Council is making it easier for all to take responsibility by providing affordable services and reduced registration costs for desexed dogs."



Opotiki Harbour Update

With the recent identification of aquaculture as a priority area for economic development in the Bay of Plenty, support for the development of the Opotiki Harbour entrance is increasing.

As world demand for seafood increases and catches of wild stock continue to decline the 3,800 hectares of water off the coast of Opotiki that has been consented for aquaculture development has been recognised as one of the most favourable marine environments for aquaculture in New Zealand. While test lines have been located in the marine farm area for some time consent owners Eastern Seafarms Limited will be starting the more rigorous commercial trials in February. This involves putting another five km of lines down to test the growing structures and mussel growth rates. In the absence of a manageable port the large vessels that will be used to construct the farm will operate from Whakatane or Tauranga.

While mussels will be the main product of the marine farm investigating farming other compatible species is underway. Pond farming of sea cucumber is also scheduled for trial this year.

Research being undertaken by Cawthron Institute indicates that the viability of marine farming in the Eastern Bay will depend on the provision of a working port, on-shore processing facilities and supporting infrastructure. Further research will give more

information on the types and numbers of jobs that will be created at various stages of growth.

Further emphasis is being given on the need for a workable harbour in the Eastern Bay as oil industry representatives consider port access to support an indicated significant oil find off the East Cape and the Minister of Fisheries intends to clarify and address any gaps in the Government's oversight of aquaculture.



Electronic eyes in the sky are an asset for Opotiki

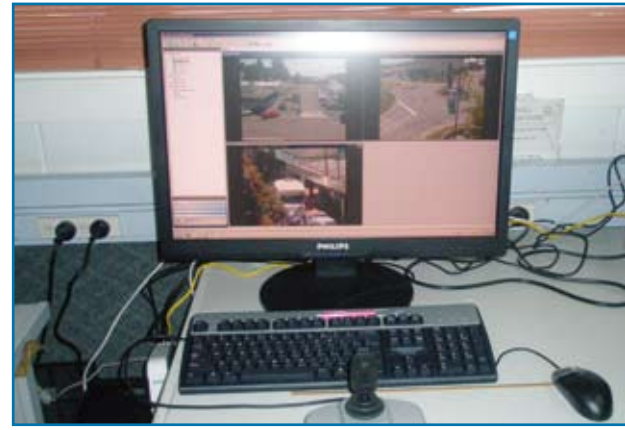
The clarity and detail of pictures from the new security cameras is excellent and the system will prove a good investment for the town according to police.

Three cameras were installed in town prior to Christmas and another two, including a mobile unit will soon be in place. The cameras are remotely controlled and monitored by the police and provide a 360 degree view from each location and zoom capability that shows faces and number plates with exceptional clarity.

This system is already paying dividends according to Constable Steven Collins.

"We are able to keep an eye on what is happening in the town even while we are in the station and have the ability to focus in on and record activities with high definition picture quality. It's better than having an officer on the beat because we can be in many places at once and can track and follow activity from a good vantage point. The system is definitely an asset for police and we will see a reduction in crime in the town centre as a result."

The installation of the fourth camera and use of the mobile unit will further increase policing efficiency throughout the district. These units will be in use this month.



Top: Rooftop locations and all round views provide full coverage of the town. Relocatable cameras will also be used to cover 'hot spots' and trouble areas as required.

Left: Constable Steven Collins learns to drive the monitors positioned around the town.



Councillor Comments

Councillor Doug Leeder
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In this column Opotiki District councillors are invited to share their views with residents. The views expressed are those of the individual councillor and not necessarily of the collective council.

March will see the departure of our Chief Executive Officer, Vaughan Payne, to a senior position at Environment Waikato.

Vaughan has given dedicated and professional service to this community over the past years, but sadly I think some memories of his time here will be coloured by the less than professional antics of some of our elected Councillors.

Councillors are elected to govern, not manage. Their role is to participate in the preparation and approval of budgets and

strategy documents and then to monitor and hold the Chief Executive accountable for performance relative to those set targets.

Councillors employ only one person and that's the Chief Executive. All other staff enjoy the privilege of confidentiality around their terms and conditions of employment. The Chief Executive Officer's remuneration however, is publicly available through disclosure in the Annual Report of the Council. Councillors debate and then set the level of remuneration for the Chief Executive Officer and have available to them,

a host of comparative and performance data to assist them in making that decision.

The ethic of collective responsibility means that the debate takes place in the Council Chamber. Differing views are exercised but, ALL Councillors should stand by a decision once it is made final.

This is where things have come apart.

For some of our Councillors to engage the media and to put forward a convenient but unsuccessful alternative view, is nothing short of electioneering. This action has the effect of damaging the very fabric of respect that should exist between the Councillors and the Chief Executive. This is a small community and the effect that a public debate on this issue will have on our Chief Executive and his family, should not be underestimated.

If we truly believe that Opotiki District Council is a good employer and that future Chief Executives and staff would like to work and participate in the success of our district, then we need to lift our game, or we will be destined for mediocrity.

New decade for Chief Executive

Opotiki District Council is on the look out for another Chief Executive Officer who can lead the organisation and community into the new decade.

Current Chief Executive Vaughan Payne and his family will be leaving to further his career and to be closer to parents who live in Hamilton and Auckland. Vaughan takes up a position of Group Manager Policy and Transport for Environment Waikato in March.

"It has been rewarding to give something back to my home town and district. Community work is an important part of our family history. In the 1970s I enjoyed going to the housie evenings that were organised by my maternal grandparents (Tira and Brian Kelly) at Tukaki Marae, Te Kaha. These evenings helped raise money to build the current Te Kaha RSA. On my dad's side, the Du Pontet and Payne families also have a very strong history of working for the Opotiki community," Vaughan says.

Another reward for the Payne family has been having the children grow up knowing where they are from. "It has been a pleasure for them to know that they are related to half their classmates!" Vaughan began working at Opotiki District Council in 2001 as Environment and Planning Manager moving up to the position of Chief Executive Officer five years ago.

"I've really enjoyed building upon the platform set by previous Chief Executives. I also appreciate the support I have received from the community, the Mayor and Councillors, and staff. Organisations don't run themselves. They need good people, working as a strong team to make things work and this united and committed approach has made my job that much easier. It also allows Council to punch well above our weight in the local government arena."

Vaughan's connection to Opotiki provides a basis for his vision of Opotiki in the future.

"As companies grow by having a clear vision and by developing a competitive advantage, so to do districts and communities. These advantages are developed by matching strengths with opportunities. Opotiki has major strengths around the natural environment and our strong community spirit. We encompass 25% of the land and 50% of the Bay of Plenty's sea areas. With the World Trade Organisation projecting a 50% increase in global food demand over the next 20 years and with the demand for seafood increasing by 75%, developing a competitive advantage around growing and processing high quality food 'makes sense'. It also matches our district values and our inherent strengths.

But these future opportunities will not be captured without future focus, commitment and strong and positive local leadership. "Vaughan emphasises the role the Opotiki community can



Vaughan catches up on paper work before council offices open for the new year.

play in helping to build a strong and positive future.

"It is up to individuals to keep the vision alive, to hold leaders in the community such as local media, community spokespersons and representatives accountable for balanced reporting and commitment to the future as well as attention to the day. Ratepayers should ensure that they vote wisely during this year's October elections, choosing strong and positive leaders, who can work as a team, to take the district forward."

Vaughan is confident that if we continue to strengthen our vision and leadership he will be able to float his boat right out the harbour to the marine farm in the not too distant future.

"I am just one member of the Opotiki community and I consider it a privilege to have had the opportunity to make a difference. I know that there will be more opportunities for me to continue to contribute in future. Where ever I live my heart will always be in Opotiki.

Mayor John Forbes says working with Vaughan has been great. "Running a council is full of challenge and Vaughan has risen to every one."

In the strategic area there has been a significant increase in Tangata Whenua and community understanding of Council's Direction through the Ten Year Plan reviews, working parties, the Coast Community Board and Council Committees.

Four strategic focus areas, Economic Growth, Quality of Life, Strong Community Spirit and Environmental Quality have been defined.

Public Debt has reduced by 47% (\$5.9M to 3.1M), improving Council's balance sheet to enable borrowing for key future infrastructure projects and assets increased by 33% to \$170million.

Council has achieved clear audit reports and the 2006-2016 strategic plan was ranked 1st equal nationally for ease of auditing.

A major step has been achieved with the approval of consents for the Opotiki mussel farm and harbour infrastructure and strong Tangata Whenua, community, industry and regional support established.

One of Vaughan's personal goals was to see the establishment of a community owned trust to increase the social and economic wellbeing of the community. The Opotiki Community Trust has been formed.

Progress has also been steady on the operational front.

The average annual rate increases over the last 5 years have been around 4% (after growth), being close to inflation. The ratio of capital works expenditure to total revenue increased from 14% (2004) to between 17% and 21%. The increased capital works programme has been achieved without external borrowing.

Vaughan has been a keen supporter of the community. New community initiatives such as volunteer and youth achievements, events, new activities and facilities have been given encouragement and resources.

A bit of a kid himself Vaughan was quick to support the annual 'Fun Unplugged' festival which enabled local groups and local businesses to financially capitalise on the high visitor numbers over summer. Fun Unplugged and in particular the Mud Slide attracted valuable national media coverage for our district.

On a more serious note Council managed to achieve building accreditation despite requirements that have made it particularly difficult for smaller councils to attain registration.

We rank first and second in the Eastern Bay of Plenty and Bay of Plenty for the timely processing of resource consents and improved our national ranking from 49th to 26th.

The move to increase shared services has also progressed with Opotiki and other BOP Councils and Gisborne forming a company to improve efficiencies. This has produced some significant savings, particularly in insurance and other forms of procurement.

We are trying to put the council in a strong position so we can proceed with the harbour entrance when the time is right. This will set up a heap of options for the future," Mayor Forbes says.



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