

# LIFE IN NAPIER

by Geoff Conly

**M**Y NAPIER begins at my front window, high on Bluff Hill overlooking the city's Marine Parade frontage, sun dancing on the blue waters of Hawke Bay and glinting off the white cliffs of Cape Kidnappers and bouncing back from the buildings in the business centre. On the other side of Bluff Hill the view sweeps north to the distant Mahia Peninsula, with the foreground dominated by the popular Westshore bathing beach and, nearer still, the inner harbour in which nestles the fishing fleet.

Napier is about a third of the way up a crescent indentation in the coastline and, although the city has kept inching inland since the disastrous 1931 earthquake, the sea which laps its frontage is a natural and much prized asset.

That 1931 earthquake in which 162 Napier people died and an untold number

were injured helped create the new Napier. The 'quake lifted the land about two metres, making so much easier the task of reclaiming residential and industrial sites from the tidal waterways and marshland.

Four blocks of the very heart of the business centre of Napier were reduced to rubble in the 7.9 Richter scale shake, for what the earthquake didn't destroy the post-earthquake fire did. The challenge to rebuild, and to build better at that, fired a special kind of enthusiasm and a community spirit which inspired a pride of citizenship, evident today in private gifts for a public good.

*Napier, from my front window, the Norfolk pines parading along the sea frontage and St John's Anglican Cathedral glistening in the Hawkes Bay sunshine.*





*"The fishermen," a lifelike grouping at the entrance to the Hawkes Bay Aquarium, believed to be the best in the southern hemisphere.*

Stroll along the Marine Parade and begin to count these gifts, reaching from either side of the Sound Shell and earthquake colonnade where hangs the bell of HMS Veronica, the Royal Navy warship which happened to be in port on the day of the earthquake and whose sailors and marines came to Napier's rescue.

A doctor's bequest paid for the Spirit of Napier, a statue of a golden girl lifting her hands high to the sky. The now defunct Thirty Thousand Club gifted the statue of Pania, the Maori girl of offshore legend. A floral clock, a sundial, an information centre, a very popular tourist attraction in an animated village, all the materials for the construction of a kiwi house, where a kiwi is on parade daily, were given by Napier merchants.

A coloured fountain here, a splashing fountain there and a softly trickling fountain elsewhere — all gifts. Like the 20,000 pounds another citizen bequeathed for tree planting. Like the NAC godwit at the nearby airport. I can walk by these gifts and feel humble, for what is the sense of community that prompts gestures such as these?

Giving through service is the other avenue which distinguishes my city. Such as when the Jaycees, challenged in 1972 to launch a fund to establish a private community hospital, decided on a Royal ball, attended by a real live princess. And why not Princess Alexandra? Would she come?

"There's only one way to find out," the ball convenor, Ian Price, told his fellow conspirators, club president James White, and project members Tony Reid and Graham Beattie. "Let's 'phone her." They lifted a telephone and called her in London.

The Princess said she would like to come, but gently suggested the Jaycees go through the official channels. They did, and that is how Princess Alexandra came to visit New Zealand, and why the community trust hospital in Napier is the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

Those were swinging days for the Jaycees; they also brought heart doctor Christian Barnard to Napier as guest speaker at a banquet, which raised funds to establish a heart unit at Napier Public Hospital. Those Jaycees have gone on to other things and, in the world of business, each now owns or heads his own company.

Ideals of community service inspired the district's Lions Clubs to combine in a radiothon to try to raise \$80,000 to provide a body scanner at one of the two (Napier and Hastings) regional hospitals. They succeeded gloriously, to the tune of \$200,000, enabling them to provide a scanner and support services at both hospitals.

This year's high spot in community service was a jubilee appeal by the five Napier Rotary Clubs, to raise money to complete the Pub With No Beer. They raised more than \$50,000. The pub is part of a wide-ranging YMCA programme to try to resolve the problems of youth — in the pub's instance, through a recreational

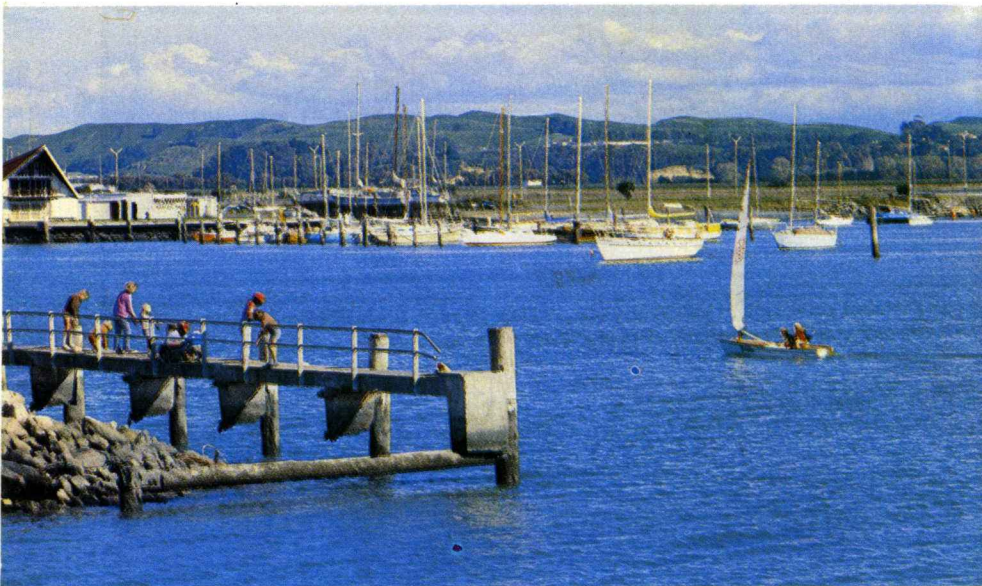
headquarters offering a disco, recreational activities, soft drinks bar.

Guiding spirit behind this and the related YMCA ventures is Pat Magill, who retired while in his early 50s to work full-time in this avenue, which extends beyond traditional "Y" activities to outreach work on marae and in areas under stress, even to providing supervised homework sessions on its premises for children from under-privileged backgrounds. A Duke of Edinburgh award-type scheme has been tailored to meet the needs of Napier's aimless children.

The "pilot city" project is an exciting scheme which harnesses those who might be described as the keepers of the city's conscience in a committee including four local Government department heads, the hospital superintendent, a magistrate, churchmen, the police and charitable groups, charged with seeking constructive alternatives to traditional punishments, to assisting potential young offenders, to innovate.

Napier is of a size where social experiment can be measured, in the hope that what succeeds there can be used elsewhere, on a scale to suit the circumstances. The Planning Council and the Prime Minister's "think tank" are monitoring progress, while "outside" advisers include the former Secretary for Justice, Dr John Robson, who believes Napier in this context is "the one place to offer hope."

Is it people, therefore, which distinguish communities so much alike in so many other ways? Napier mayor, Clyde Jeffery, thinks so.



*"Boys can wander down to the sailing club and, if they look interested, they can be crewing in five minutes . . ." The Napier Sailing Club's clubhouse at left rear, commands the top of the inner harbour, from which international yachting contests have been launched.*

"Napier is just the finest place in the world to live in and raise a family," he says, after living in the city for more than 60 years, 18 of which have been in civic service. "Look at the general environment of Napier — acres of parks and open spaces, sea breezes, the climate but, above all, the wonderful people whose friendships contribute so much to the quality of life."

Napier's population of about 48,000 measures the size of the city, including its suburb of Taradale. Official projections put the population in the year 2001 between 65,000 and 74,800.

Some workers go home for lunch. Shoppers don't have to walk far in the city centre. Three trading banks look at one another on the busiest intersection, the post office is a block away, the public library two blocks away. The main shopping street, Emerson Street, is two blocks long and the site of a prolonged and unresolved bid to turn part of it into a pedestrian mall.

The public library is below the standards for a city this size, and this in spite of Napier's pretensions to literary acclaim through its street names. Alfred Domett, first Commissioner of Crown Lands and Resident Magistrate, chose the names of the most eminent men in literature and science as well as the most celebrated English poets once he had exhausted names drawn from Anglo-Indian history (to complement the name of Napier).

So the Anglican cathedral of the Diocese of Waiapu stands on the corner of Browning and Hastings Streets, and it is

incidental to know that this church was completely rebuilt and consecrated (in 1967), debt-free, in the remarkable space of 12 years.

To visit Napier is not to grasp its appeal; to know Napier one has to live there, to be the courtesan. The main entrance roads are untidy, unimpressive introductions to a "rebuilt city", although the city council is looking at a redevelopment programme for the Marine Parade.

The Port of Napier is under threat from the shipowners' love affair with containers, and railway lines cut across busy streets to queue motor traffic. Parking meters are conscientiously patrolled, while a persistent campaign to provide more inner city parking precincts makes it not too difficult to find an empty "park."

Holiday visitors are tempted to resettle in Napier. Climate is a first appeal — sunshine without humidity, and mountain ranges which intercept approaching storm clouds, to confound television weather predictions.

Arthur Richards, chairman of the Napier District Welfare Council and closely identified down the years with its 80 or so member organisations, thinks Napier is the ideal place in which to retire. Along with Taranaki and Nelson, Napier cares for its aged, including superannuitant housing to the point where, per capita, it must lead the country.

"You buy your own fruit from the orchard gate, you have sunshine and open spaces. It's just tops," he says.

Solo mother Mary Hollywood likes her 15 years in Napier for another reason: "You can get every assistance in the recreational field for your children at a price you can afford."

She explains: Membership of the Port Nicholson Yacht Club, Wellington, would be out of the question for her boys. But in Napier, "boys can wander down to the

sailing club and if they look interested they can be crewing in five minutes." In a smaller community, she adds, "the hand of help is so much more personal."

Some 400 yachts sail out of the Napier Sailing Club's international complex, as well as 400 power boats, launched from the same beachhead. Climate also favours the Olympic Pool complex, two roller-skating clubs, all-weather tennis courts, the Big Game Fishing Club with its tuna and marlin catches, bowling and croquet greens hither and thither and, in the distance on the city's outskirts, a 50ha sports complex being developed to provide for tomorrow's sportsfolk. The usual summer and winter sports will be accommodated there, including activities such as archery and horse-riding.

Arts and crafts thrive, but tertiary education is limited to the Marist seminary at Greenmeadows, and the Hawkes Bay Community College, which caters for trade apprentices and hobby enthusiasts. Many of the best young scholars therefore leave Hawkes Bay to further their education at university or teachers' training college.

The seminary, which has a prized library, is probably better known for the winery attached to it, a tourist attraction of its own and one of eight producing wineries in this part of Hawkes Bay.

A new 300-seat Century Theatre helps boost a solid musical strata, based on good teachers. An annual festival of the arts, developed from a festival of dance, is now the largest in the southern hemisphere, with teachers brought from around the world. People again, ready to lead and inspire.

Like the people who dreamed up the Hawkes Bay Aquarium, believed to be the best in the southern hemisphere, along the Marine Parade from the Marineland where performing dolphins and sealions cavort. Like the enthusiasts, who keep following each other on stage, for more than 90 years now, in the Frivolity Minstrels — "Frivs" for short — a dink nigger minstrel show, with cornermen and all.

"There is probably more civic pride in Napier than any other place in New Zealand," says Sir Peter Tait, former Napier MP and mayor for 18 years.

"Is Napier a sincere city, Sir Peter?"

"Rather an abstract statement, but I would think yes. It is a good city. It has been good to me and to thousands of others. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

"Perhaps it was the earthquake, for people cannot have compassion unless they have suffered. And we have compassion and understanding and neighbourliness here, in Napier."

In short, Napier — a city where people count.