

ALL HIS WORLD'S *their* Stage



The same beaches where he saved lives here became one of the big playgrounds where Maitakere City's economic surge is taking place. While some would say the twenty-plus MFRAs mean lives are being saved using troublemaker writer, cinema doyen and city Mayor Boo Henry saw that doing the good work of helping you (that's you) sustainably and show business could produce both financial and social returns.

Then there was the even grander idea of a city council, becoming a world leader in the right way, enjoyed by the success of such pioneering movies as the *Piano* film and the *Whale* movie. In 1990, the council started calling the tune, the scale of the opportunity was just what the grand old city was looking for.

Somehow, where Boo Henry is concerned, you would not want to miss anything.

In 1992 when Bob Harvey rode into town as the newly-elected mayor of Waitakere City the west couldn't have been much wilder. High unemployment, higher crime and generally low levels of public and private investment were the themes running through his long-time home but newly won electorate.

"You had a sense of the area being totally unsafe which created an extremely difficult environment to encourage people to come here to work and live. It was a very sad case of urban and suburban neglect which was being exacerbated by negative press, a poor self image and what I saw as a leadership and direction void."

His advertising and marketing instincts told Bob Harvey that the 'brand' was in serious trouble. As well as ground level and grass roots work, he believed that a 'big idea' was needed to saddle the turnaround to.

"As well as changing the mindset from being West Auckland (which was a Police district) to Waitakere City we developed the notion of eco city as a marketing device which gave our redevelopment programmes heart and vision. This branding, with the linked ideas of 'looking back, going forward' covered many of the requirements that I saw could be used in the overall repositioning, and rebuilding, exercise."

The eco city concept became the canvas which allowed Bob Harvey to paint a picture of a sustainable and exciting future. One which played on the area's strengths and one that put forward the promise of new initiatives which would be economically viable and appropriately vibrant. It was the 'touch stone' he felt that was needed to have the backing of his Council and around which jobs could be built. Most importantly, he says, the device created an aura of 'invitation' versus 'command'.

"Being from the area, I knew that 'Westies' will do anything if you ask them, and nothing if you tell them. The creation of the eco city concept also satisfied a strong belief I have that it is wrong to be right too soon. Any idea/concept has its time and in this way, slowly and softly, the vision could be associated with what we were doing to reinvigorate the area."

The challenge for Bob Harvey and his council was to avoid what Ken Kesey has called the syndrome of 'sometimes a great notion.' In other words, would this undertaking be conceptually fine but lacking in substance? To help him with

going forward the idea of Waitakere City becoming a filming location came into focus as one of the areas of sustainable opportunity.

"Some of the scenic areas like Titirangi, Piha and Karekare were our gems and the epitome of the 'wild west' but the trick would come in keeping the 'wild' part of the equation solely with nature rather than our population."

Through his advertising work, friendships with the likes of Roger Donaldson developed during the filming of *Sleeping Dogs* in nearby Huia and Henderson, 'hanging out' at his beloved Karekare Beach when *The Piano* was being filmed, it would seem that his association with the movies was in the more recent past.

SELLING ICE CREAMS & IDEAS

In fact, his working life began in the cinema.

"My first job was in the movies—selling ice creams at the Cameo Theatre in Grey Lynn. From a young age I was utterly hooked on film—even then I had a feeling that one day we in New Zealand could make our own feature movies."

"What gave me this idea was the MGM production of *Green Dolphin Street* based on Elizabeth Goudge's best seller. It featured some of the biggest stars of the day—Lana Turner, Van Heflin and Edmund Gwenn. At almost 2 ½ hours long, it was a hefty piece of work and all about New Zealand."

"Although filmed in black and white the *New York Times* called it plush and romantic."

"The sets of the Maori pa were super sized and over-built, but someone had paid attention to the authentic carvings and the recreation of the great earthquake of 1855. Regrettably, however, they hadn't even bothered to come to New Zealand to make the film. They had shot it on the back lots of Culver City and the Maori extras, of which there were many, were Mexicans and Latinos."

"If such a movie could be viable then, why not now and why not using the real locations rather than some non-descript back lot."

Buoyed by the success of *The Piano*, and the opportunities presented through the television series *Hereules* and 'spin off' *Xena Warrior Princess*, Bob Harvey set about putting the building blocks of 'Westiewood' into place.

As a member of the New Zealand Film Commission he knew all about the 'wants/needs' of those making movies.

Conversations with local apple and pear grower Wally Nola resulted in the Council purchasing a number of enormous sheds he owned for around \$4 million. Renamed the Henderson Valley Studios this facility provided the perfect in-door balance to the areas wealth of outdoor locations.

“I knew also that rural settings so close to a city had to be positive. There is a total offering of whatever scenery you want to recreate—the jungles of Vietnam, the sand dunes of the Kalahari, and having just had the BBC production of Kidnapped filmed here with wild coasts of Scotland. Having the outdoor offering it made sense to develop an indoor infrastructure in creating the studio environments.”

Part of the power of the offer also came in helping productions work through various regulatory bodies, and issues, which could stymie their creations. The pledge made was: “come here and we’ll make it easy for you”.

Along with other responsibilities Enterprise Waitakere was delegated to provide a comprehensive ‘one stop shop’ application and approval service for any filming in the region. The city has also led the region in developing a ‘film friendly’ regulations and processes and was one of the first accredited locations under the New Zealand Local Government Film Protocols.

SUSTAINABLE IMPACT

In conjunction with Auckland City – and working with various players in the industry – Waitakere City has developed a 3 hour DVD called Location Auckland and Waitakere providing a visual feast of the locations, facilities and production skills available. They then collaborated to establish Film Auckland as the industry-led destination marketing office.

While there is no ‘hard’ economic data on the overall impact of these endeavours on Waitakere alone in its first two years of operation, it is estimated that projects using Henderson Valley Studios were worth \$64 million per annum to the economy and provided 350 full time jobs. From Bob Harvey’s perspective, the ‘flow on’ effects have ended up creating close to 13,000 new jobs and, in keeping with his original vision, pushed crime statistics down by 40%. Waitakere City is also on the map as having the world’s only Council-owned studios.

Pleasing for Bob Harvey is that the plot continues to evolve in a positive way. In order to continue to attract big scale: big budget productions, the infrastructure spending rolls on. New Zealand Trade and Enterprise has provided conditional approval for a grant towards the cost of a new \$7-8 million soundproofed studio being created on the Henderson Valley. Wellington City is another council keen to attract the local and international film industry. Weta Workshop is already a major player but a new sound proof studio being built by production company Camperdown will, according to Positively Wellington Business, give Wellington regional economy \$250 million over 10 years if it can attract one mid-range movie every two years, and \$650 million if it attracts a big budget movie every two years.

As Bob Harvey says, it is all about finding something compelling, enduring – and even glamorous – that people want to be involved in and support.

Looking forward, the area currently has three Hollywood movies on books, 7 commercials and is in the running, if the box office results are there, for the second installment of The Chronicles of Namia. All proof, he says, of the significance of the flow-on effects where everyone is a winner.

For those who might criticise Bob Harvey of being swept up in the hoopla and secretly harbouring dreams of being New Zealand’s Daryl Zanuck, he is quick to say that the development of Westiewood is all about leadership.

“Mayors are the captains, the navigators of the local ship of state. To me, being a Mayor is about leadership and about holding onto the vision. It’s about the big dreams.

“Leaders interact with the world around them and a Mayor has to be able to sniff, feel and touch every part of the city and nurture it. Leading is about influencing, from the front as well as from within. It’s about ability and authority. Suffice to say a Mayor needs to be skilful in many respects.” ■

To discuss any aspect of film or television talk to an expert. Call Michael Stanley at Ernst & Young on 0274 899 414 or email michael.stanley@nz.ey.com

MADE IN WAITAKERE

Waitakere City has played host to the cast and crew of feature films, teleseries, television commercials, music videos, fashion shoots and music recordings. The City has provided the studio base, support services and locations for a long list of well-known productions including:

- **The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe**
- **The Piano (Academy Award® winner)**
- **Xena: Warrior Princess**
- **Hercules: The Legendary Journeys**
- **Lucy - The Lucille Ball Story**
- **Boogeyman**
- **Redhead - The Lucille Ball Story**
- **Ike - Countdown to D-Day**
- **In My Father's Den**
- **The Bridge to Terabithia**
- **NZ Idol**
- **Outrageous Fortune**
- **Power Ranges**
- **Shortland Street**
- **What Becomes of the Broken Hearted**
- **BBC tv series Madigan's Fantasia**
- **Number 2**