

Council

**Wednesday, 16 December 2009
Commencing at 5.30 pm**

REPORT OF THE MAYOR

**SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA FOR A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL TO BE HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER AT WAITAKERE CENTRAL, 6 HENDERSON VALLEY ROAD,
HENDERSON, WAITAKERE, ON WEDNESDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2009,
COMMENCING AT 5.30 PM**

6 REPORT OF THE MAYOR

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council resolve to:

Receive the Report of the Mayor.

The year of the ox

How could the Chinese get it so wrong? They promised this year would be like the ox – slow, traditional and even a little tired and sluggish. In other words, they promised me a workmanlike year. Look what I've had. A year of enormous change. A year where the ground shifted for all of us in Waitakere.

I came back from holiday to the Chinese New Year celebration on 26 January. It is a showcase for Chinese energy and the unveiling of the year to come. In other words, it's one of those events you don't want to miss. Prime Minister John Key came to make a very memorable speech. He announced that he was born in the year of the ox to great applause and then promptly fell down the stairs.

Falling over in front of crowds of people is a politician's worst nightmare. We try very hard to keep on our feet. The Prime Minister slid ungraciously along the floor, breaking his arm in two places. I happened to be in the front row and I felt for him. As an old lifeguard, I was able to give him some assistance. It was the beginning of a friendship which has endured throughout the year.

John Key promises to be a political phenomenon. By occupying a middle ground, he has become enormously popular with people of all backgrounds and views. Mayors of New Zealand from all political leanings have turned to him for assistance and support in 2009. He is on his way to being the most well-liked Prime Minister since Norman Kirk.

He demonstrated his charismatic charm at the Indian Business Awards on 16 November, possibly being photographed with everyone in the room. That charisma is a genuine asset for any politician and it's something we've now got in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Although Barack Obama's charm is wearing a little thin, all three countries have hugely popular national leaders. I spoke to the Prime Minister about the Obama phenomena. He certainly understood how important it is to identify with people. He'd studied the American Presidents. Clinton could never shake hands without touching the person on the elbow. Obama is similar. Key knows that closeness is compelling.

What the Prime Minister now needs to add is assertive leadership on issues such as Auckland Governance. He's left much to Rodney Hide. Indeed, too much. In the same way he has let Maurice Williamson run the leaky buildings deal. To us mayors, it feels like the policy is being written by Tokyo Rose and goosed by Berlusconi. We're not going to fall for deals like the one proposed.

Nevertheless, it's a powerful government. Opposition has all but vanished, although Phil Goff, to his credit, has reinvented himself. He is gaining traction and credibility with his strong stance on Hone Harawira and his email tirade.



But to us in local government, this was the year of the Royal Commission. In January, nothing was more important. Waitakere's submission to the Commission was developed under the leadership of Graeme Campbell, the Director: Strategic Planning and his team and presented brilliantly by Deputy Mayor Penny Hulse. Councillors contributed willingly and openly to the process. We had high hopes for Waitakere's concept of four equal cities. At the conclusion of the hearings, we felt we'd made an impression.

The Commission's findings were delivered in a massive tome. Few of our suggestions were adopted, but we could live with the findings. In the Trusts Stadium, our Chief Executive Officer, Vijaya Vaidyanath, brief gathered Council officers on the Commission's report and conclusions. We congratulated the Commissioners Hon. Peter Salmon, Dame Margaret Bazley and David Shand on what seemed to be a reasoned and well thought out plan for Auckland's future.

Sadly, their efforts were ignored. Within weeks, the Government had shredded the Commission's report into a 30 page response. A new structure was imposed by Local Government Minister, Rodney Hide. City names were erased. Maori seats were thrown out. A whole tier of government was demolished. He rammed his proposals through Cabinet with indecent haste, making no secret of his ownership of the overhaul.

The second round of consultation on Auckland's future was deeply unpleasant, wounding and disheartening. Those of us that had worked in local government for decades were distressed at seeing the cities we have been committed to for years dismantled.

It seemed to me that the excellent work of Salmon, Bazley and Shand had been for nought. They, like their report, were tossed out.

As this difficult year ends, I would like to acknowledge their work, their understanding of local government, of cities and communities. I'd like to acknowledge it for the sake of history and integrity.

The new Hide agenda set the tone for the long cold winter that would follow. At Council, there was a feeling of disquiet and unease. Officers, unsure of their future, naturally felt despondent and depressed. So did Councillors. I make no secret of the fact that I suffered long months of despair, depression and grief. We simply were unable to see any light at the end of a bleak tunnel. The power of political democracy seemed to be moving steadily towards some address in downtown Auckland.

It seemed this vision for a super city was driven by a desire to look and feel like Brisbane, Melbourne or any other dumbed down version of city leadership. That's not what Auckland needs.

I wanted to see a unique, world class Kiwi city reflecting our Pacific heritage and rich multi-cultural tapestry. All I heard about from Government was our OECD ratings. We were to be a city sponsored by VISA with a soul sponsored by AMEX.

The city of my dreams is one of vision, empowerment and a sense of worth. Auckland has always been a city unsure of its identity, uncomfortable in its own skin. That has led the region to grow its culture out of suburban cities. Each is unique and powered from within by vastly different ethnic and sociological flavours. Maori and Pacific people have been supplemented by Chinese, Indians and a wealth of new migrants in the last two decades. They have given each area its own flavour.



Now the invisible borders between cities will be broken down. Just as when the Berlin Wall fell 20 years ago, people are going to flow west. New town centres will spring up in Massey/Westgate. It will take on an influx of a million people or more in the next 20 years. With the motorways sweeping through the region, we're going to see these new and different community hubs. What used to be will never be again. This is the way cities grow and rebirth.

In that new environment, we will see the need for a second airport at Whenuapai. The reason that I have always intensely supported development of the Whenuapai airbase is because of our great need for it in future. I feel now with the airbase firmly entrenched in Air Force use, its future is assured. Our grandchildren will see its potential realised. It will be the second airport of the Auckland Region.

The boundaries announced by the Local Government Commission will pave the way for that future. For once we got almost what we wanted. I like the new Whau Ward. It will certainly shake up the tired face of Avondale. After all these years of begging, we might even get some waste bins for the Avondale market. It has ineffective waste and rubbish management and is in urgent need of some good eco-city philosophy.

I'm sure there will be some excellent candidates for councillors from the Waitakere Ward to give it some new energy. As for the rest of the wards, we are going to see a return to community councils of the old, the retired and the easily winded. I'd like to see a new crop myself, but I doubt I will.

The rise of the right continued through the winter. The new Government had waited nine years for a return to the Treasury benches and they let everyone know that they would cut costs in health and social welfare. Structures that had been built up over a decade were torn down.

Meanwhile, Waitakere was building for the future. Funding was confirmed for the \$300 million New Lynn Transit Oriented Development. It will revive New Lynn's town centre and revolutionise its transport systems. When it is completed in October 2010, we will have a town centre that will last for generations to come. It will be delivered on time and on budget.

We started the diggers on the biggest private-public partnership in the country at Hobsonville. The development is set to relieve pressure on our urban limits and open up kilometres of harbour waterfront.

Our infrastructure spending for a new Westgate town centre was conditionally approved by the Auckland Transition Authority. The new town centre will have capacity for 4500 jobs and a residential area for 4000 people. It will be a commercial hub for future generations. The decision to approve funding was a much needed relief after nervous months worrying about the future of this important project.

Upgrades to State Highway 16 (SH16) and State Highway 18 got underway. They are the first major works on SH16 for more than 50 years. Improvements to the dreaded Te Atatu interchange were announced. Work continued at speed on the double tracking of the Western Rail Line from the foothills of Waitakere to Britomart.

But the project closest to my heart was the redevelopment of Lopdell House in Titirangi. This beautiful art house is a treasure of our City and a great asset to our art and culture. It was designed by architects Bloomfield and Partners in 1930 and bought by the Waitemata District Council in 1982. It is deeply treasured by the majority of Councillors. Together, we have ensured that it will be entrenched in our City forever.



I make no secret - I am looking for more legacy projects that our grandchildren will feel proud of and enjoy. The Hillary Trail is one of those projects. The concept for the trail came from my long friendship with Sir Edmund Hillary. We would often talk about a trail mooted by Ed's father-in-law Jim Rose in his history of Anawhata. His conclusion stated: "My family look forward to the time when we will be able to walk from Huia to Muriwai on public walking tracks like the old time Maori could do." This trail will see that dream realised. Linking our iconic beaches Whatipu, Karekare, Piha and Muriwai, it will be one of the great walks of New Zealand. Sir Ed would have loved it.

So, many of our projects have now been locked down. But much is still at risk. The Corban Estate gives me concerns as I believe it will not be safe in the new Auckland Council structure. Hard and long fought battles over Orangihina, or People's Park, are ongoing. Its future is uncertain.

I fear for the strong cultural and community sector we have built up in Waitakere. I am still unconvinced we will be seen as anything but minority neighbours of an Auckland City superpower, like Bosnians under Serbian rule. There are so many festivals and events that are unique to us, so many projects devoted to fostering our talent and involving our communities. The Going West Books and Writers Festival is a lifeline for our local authors. Project Twin Streams is internationally applauded and awarded as a monumentally successful community initiative. I hope both have a place under the Auckland Council.

Relationships need to be retained. Under my leadership, Waitakere City Council has established close links with Maori and Pacific people. Te Taumata Runanga was the first Maori advisory committee established in New Zealand. The Te Kawerau a Maki tribe has ancestral roots stretching back 900 years in the West. They have been acknowledged as part of the fabric of this City and brought back into leadership.

The Waitakere Pacific Board has been closely involved with many Council decisions since 1990. It is empowering the Pacific people that now make up 15 percent of Waitakere.

We have established close bonds with our sister cities, Ningbo in China and Kakogawa in Japan. They should not be broken.

Those initiatives and relationships are part of the legacy we have created in Waitakere. That work was set in stone with the launch of *West: A History of Waitakere* in June. Its 480 pages are an account of our historical past. We built a City for future generations with bustling town centres around public transport hubs, thriving sustainable businesses, internationally applauded eco-initiatives and communities that care for their environment. Our crowning achievement came last year when the Waitakere Ranges were protected by Government.

I'm proud of that list. But none of it would mean anything if it weren't for Westies. Unlike Auckland City, this place and its people has developed an identity of our own. It's not airbrushed or made up, not all of the cracks have been papered over, we have our flaws, but being a Westie means something. It means you care about this community and you're committed to building a better future for our children. For 17 years, I have poured my heart into this place and Westies have been beside me all the way. Nothing we have done – no project, no community initiative - could have been completed without that. When I look back on what we've achieved, it's the people of the West I'll remember. Their stories are the ones I'll tell. At its heart, this city is not mortar and stone. "He tangata, he tangata, he tangata." "It is people, it is people, it is people."



Now let's look forward to 2010. According to the Chinese calendar, it will be the year of the tiger. The tiger is meant to bring a lucky, lively and engaging year. Among its attributes are incredible bravery and a willingness to engage in battle with undying courage. Chinese say having a tiger in the house is the very best protection against burglary. For the sake of our city, let's hope they're right.

Thank you

I want to say thanks to a few of those that got us through 2009.

Deputy Mayor Penny Hulse has been a rock in tumultuous times. Her well-grounded and forthright advice has helped me professionally, while her friendship and support has meant a lot personally.

Te Taumata Runanga Chair Warahi Paki has been a stoic support in a year we lost a great Maori leader, Hariata Arapo Ewe.

Council Chief Executive Vijaya Vaidyanath has supplied inspirational leadership through challenges and triumphs. Her empathy and compassion is set against a toughness that allows her to stand up for her views, her staff and this organisation.

Our team of directors have done an excellent job of providing leadership while dealing with the personal cost of the transition to an Auckland Council. They have made a commendable commitment to their staff. I'd like to say a special thank you to Public Affairs Director Wally Thomas, who has dealt with a storm of media and transition work in the last three months.

Our officers have again been exceptional. We are lucky to employ people who are passionate about their work and believe in this City and its vision. It has achieved great results.

The team in my mayoral office has withstood a whirlwind year. I'd like to thank my dedicated and unflappable Personal Assistant, Kerry Harrington, my mad scientist Mayoral Office Manager Alan Rodgers-Smith and my new Media Advisor, Hayden Donnell.

Finally, I thank you Councillors, Community Board Members and Te Taumata Runanga members for another year of service to Waitakere. I look forward to working with you productively in 2010. It will be the year we will ensure the Waitakere Way becomes the Auckland Way.

Waitakere's Peace Bell

Waitakere is now the second city in New Zealand to have the honour of being donated a Peace Bell from Japan.

The beautiful bronze bell, which measures 95 by 49cms and weighs 105kg, is a gift from our sister city of 17 years, Kakogawa.

It is a symbol of the peace principles needed to build a great city.

There are now peace bells in major cities around the globe. They are a very symbolic and respected gift. The United Nations has one at its headquarters in New York. There are others in Vienna, Warsaw, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Berlin and Los Angeles. Christchurch has a large bell in its Botanic Gardens. Now Waitakere has one in our Japanese Garden at Waitakere Central.



I first mooted the idea of crafting a Peace Bell for Waitakere during a 2006 visit to the Shosha Temple in Hiroshima. My suggestion was wholeheartedly endorsed by Kakogawa Mayor, Shoichi Tarumoto. He considered it an appropriate gift for our city's 20th anniversary and to recognise the long standing relationship we share with Kakogawa. His council passed an order for construction of the bell in 2008.

The Peace Bell is cast specifically for Waitakere and has in its casting the acknowledgement of the sister city friendship arrangement. Its engraving says:

THE PEACE BELL

This peace bell was presented
to the city of Waitakere, New Zealand
to commemorate the 20th anniversary
by the city of Kakogawa, Japan
in November 2009

Kakogawa asked that the bell has its own separate housing, in accordance with a Japanese tradition not to hang a peace bell in any other building or pavilion. The housing was designed by our Senior Arts Project Co-ordinator, Mark Osborne and approved by the Kakogawa City Council International Affairs Office. The casting was from one of Japan's most famous foundries, who specialise in large bronze casting projects ,

Peace will always be at the heart of everything we do in Waitakere and Kakogawa recognises us for it. This bell is a message of peace across our communities. It's saying we want homes without violence and neighbourhoods that support each other.

We will ring it on special occasions such as national days of celebration and to mark the loss of special people. I'm going to ask the council to get a set of protocols that will remain when the City ceases to exist so the bell does not sit silent. It needs to ring out across this city in the years ahead.

2012: A doomsday flick with Super City links

You all need to go and see the film 2012 which is running at West City and Westgate. It's a perfect film following those NorSGA marathons that you have been attending lately. But spoiler alert for those of you who haven't: I'm about to give the ending away. Mind you, even knowing the ending won't spoil this one. The world ends. But it's not as they say the destination that matters, it's how you get there.

It seems that about 5000 years ago the Mayan empires, who were serious astrologers and mathematicians, created a calendar which has rarely been wrong. It predicted all the planets, comets and galactic heavenly spins and positions. Pretty hard to do without binoculars or a good telescope. Unfortunately for us, the calendar finishes abruptly on 10 November 2012 (so at least we get to see the Rugby World Cup) and then says the Mayans, the earth starts heating up. Not warming but seriously boiling. If you are serious about this and I'm sure you are not you could look at the excellent Mayan calendar site on Google.

But now back to the movie. This is the disaster movie to end all disaster movies, more outrageous than Independence Day, and certainly a long way from The Towering Inferno or Battlestar Galactica's rag-tag battlefleet, even The War of the Worlds. The whole of the crust of the earth is pulled apart piece by piece, and then of course there are huge alterations in the earth's crust causing waves over a kilometre high that swamp everything, including the Himalayas. I guess little old New Zealand would be swamped very quickly, in fact, even Mt Cook would be under water. Doesn't leave much hope for the Piha and Karekare folk.



But wait the good, the bright and the super rich including the Queen, the White House staff and every head of state - I guess that will include John Key and Phil Goff - are given a ticket and a berth to join a bunch of saviours of the human race bunked down on a fleet of concrete and steel "arks" built in China in the years 2010 and 2011. They are ready to go like rockets and when the waves hit they float up and the gates open and there's triumphal music with powerful chords and the sea is beautiful and it's a new day dawning and - oh wait 7 billion people are dead. To be honest, the movie is certifiably nuts but then I often think local government falls into that category too - now and then.

For those of you working in local government in little old New Zealand, this will be a familiar scenario. We know there aren't enough lifeboats for the Elected Members, let alone the officers toiling away in the engine room. I smell doom. The institutions that we have built up carefully over the last twenty years are being systematically pulled apart. They had been built to last for a century, and they are simply being ripped this way and that as the governance reforms simply sweep us all away.

If we were really honest, these reforms were not just about efficiency and transparency and the usual bureaucratic nonsense. No, it's much more than that - it's because we all know what goes on inside these massive institutions. We have known for the last twenty years.

What is in a good Council is a code for living together as human beings. It's filled with people who try and give you the time of day. Who try and get things right. Who form plans that try to improve things for everyone? Who don't live as if profit and power and selfishness and survival were the only way of dealing with each other? We're like an alternative to the entire banking system.

It ain't utopia. But it's a place where there are ideals about public service still held. It's a best shot at making things right with the world.

We are now right in the midst of the rage over Copenhagen. We know it will all possibly end in failure and with that the end of the world as we know it will occur and there is not a damn thing that any of us can now do about it. Because we were all given a chance to get it right, to unify and turn the damage that we had all caused around. Truly, to save the world.

My version of that, our version, Waitakere's version, was called the eco-city. We worked at it for 20 years. That in a sense is our contribution to Copenhagen. It came from a conference they held 20 years ago about sustainability called Rio. From that, we made changes and united people and healed the land and tried to turn people away from roads and cars towards rail and reducing waste and saving the forest and the water and everything good. We stood for peace. Not everything worked, I'll grant you that. And there are always those who jeer and cross their arms and say good honest selfishness is a lot more efficient. Do nothing.

But the point of the world is to engage with it, to try and change it for the better. To try and be something more than a tiny little cork on a great capitalist ocean where there are no landscapes to enjoy, no way of navigating a better future. Our job as human beings is to try and set out a course and take people with you, because sure the journey really means something. But so does getting there.



I really have no idea any more whether our central Government really gets it. Not even the entire world's governments can see it though the facts are plain as day to their faces. My own attempt at railing against the destruction of the world – together with thousands of mayors and cities – is being systematically taken apart and there is not a damn thing I can do about it.

This is the way the world ends for us. We have done our best. We have nothing to regret or to be afraid of any more because there is nothing more that they can do to us.

West City has a deal where for a reduced price for staff and for those of you who are of Senior Citizen status - you can get in for half price. It's about time you get in a movie before Christmas - treat yourself. I think it could help you understand that 2012 is going to be a difficult year. In the meantime I urge you to ... Launch your lifeboats.

The year's best

Movies

This is a movie town. Over the years I've always told you what I think have been the best movies of the year. Usually I'll try to focus on New Zealand movies but this has been a bleak year for our film industries. Nevertheless, our Henderson studios have been full and will continue that way well into 2010.

This is what I've enjoyed watching in 2009:

1. *Up*. By far the year's most innovative and exciting movie. A must for the Oscar round.
2. *Red Cliff*. An epic Chinese masterpiece from John Woo. Shown in an edited version. Full version can be obtained from the Mayoral Lounge. It's five hours. Be warned.
3. *The Cove*. Excellent documentary of dolphin slaughter.
4. *Disgrace*. A well told translation of the Booker Prize-winning novel by J.M Coetzee. Stunning lead performance by John Malkovich.
5. *The Vintner's Luck*. A flawed but moving tale. Must see.
6. *Lost in Wonderland*. An amazing and beautifully told story of the former Police Association secretary, cross dresser and mayor, Rod Moodie.
7. *The Hangover*. Best comedy of 2009.
8. *Woodstock*: Wonderful reissue of the glorious, three hour film on the 1969 mud and music festival that defined a decade.
9. *The Strength of Water*. Brilliantly grafted Northland tale.
10. *District 9*. A South African sleeper produced by Peter Jackson with an unknown cast. Great effects and fantastic international appeal. In for an Oscar.



Books

As a writer I love to read. Here is my best list of 2009

Dick Frizzell	Dick Frizzell (Random House)
Marti Friedlander	Leanard Bell (Auckland University Press)
Puketutu and its people	Bassett / Goldsmith (David Ling Publishers)
WEST	Waitakere City Council (Random House)
Wolf Hall	Hilary Mantel (Forth Estate)
Spirit of the West	Ted Scott / Bob Harvey (Heritage Publishers)
Crediting Waves	Aaron Topp (Random House)
West of Jesus	Steven Kotter (USA)
Encircled lands Te Urewera	Judith Binney (Bridget Williams Books)
Roadhouse Days	Dave and Drew Harre (Little Island Press)

Music

Album: Soldiers

Artist: Great North

In a crowded music industry, where anyone with a guitar or a set of drums can make a CD, it's hard to spot a new sound. Well, Great North is just that.

Lyrics make the difference – always have. It's the songs that matter. I may be a biased, as the voice and brains behind the band Hayden Donnell works in my office, but this is an extraordinary powerful CD. Black River is an outstanding track in a stunning line up. Go buy soon for you and your best friend. Ten stars.

Album: The Warrior in Me

Artist: Lori Crandall

Born in cowboy country but a Westie, Lori now is a woman on a mission. What a voice and what a message.

At a time when New Zealand is being told "It's not OK" Lori tells about the hell and heartbreak of violence and its destructive path. She sings with a pure rich poignancy. Track 2, Horror In Your Eyes, is astounding - the back up sound rich. Lori is a natural treasure. A singing hero of a massive battle against domestic violence. Every home should have one.

You can see her live at our excellent Waitakere Sounds music series over summer.

Album: Sister Moon

Artist: Luke Hurley

Hurley is one of New Zealand's finest artists. His question on the Erebus tragedy is a milestone in New Zealand music. Sister Moon is a brilliant return to his pure essence. Only Love and Nothing in Return are simply brilliant.

A street and concert performer as well as a city busker Hurley is a man who understands the way we work and who we are. Great cover art by Russian artist Elena.



Restaurants

Top Waitakere Restaurant of 2009

Bunga Raya Restaurant
3062 Great North Rd, New Lynn, Waitakere
09-827 8666

Amazing menu. Glorious food and service.

Runner Up

Chapati Indian Restaurant
56 Lincoln Rd, Henderson, Waitakere
09-836 0218

The taste of India. A treat of the great sub continent on Lincoln Road. Rave reviews – well deserved.

Two Small Gems

Nada's Lunch Bar and Bakery: Swanson
Croatian cooking / breads / cakes – delicious and a secret that must be told. Enjoy.

Dim Sum King: Westfield West City Mall
Small and local. I love the taste and friendly people. Stop off and enjoy Asian home cooking at its best in a mall.

Thoughts from Tau

National MP and Westie, Tau Henare, recently wrote some excellent thoughts the role of culture in society. His message reminds us that we must not forget the importance of culture in inspiring, uniting and enriching us. It stirs us to new innovation while grounding us in the lessons of past generations. It makes us distinct while reminding us we are all woven into the same historical tapestry. Tau's article is below.

Culture - all the good stuff

"With all the talk of recession and how to get out of it, I remember only too well the last one. The 80s downturn for us in Otara was like a bold-face gate crasher who arrived early, wrecked the place and wouldn't leave. Sixth form certificate wasn't enough to get me a job. 30 years of service on the railways wasn't enough to protect my father from redundancy. Yet as bad as things may have appeared to others, it was still one of the most upbeat times of my youth. I owe this to the rise of Maori culture. A culture largely forgotten by many of my father's generation as they settled into the gentle pace of urban life. But its timely revival in rough times had given my own generation enthusiasm mixed with hope.

When cultural renaissance and recession collide it throws up some pretty odd stuff. For us it was new, it was exciting and we could change the world with our reckless blend of race, feminist, and class politics all thrown together to form one simple rant "we've all been done over by the rich white man and we want justice". Yet it didn't take long to realize that we got it all wrong. That race was not about culture.



“Maori culture was around long before the theory of race was hatched in the laboratories of Europe” my old uncle said, and that far from being simply a racial category, Maori, like all cultures are in fact a set of ideals. It was only about the good stuff, and if we commit a crime or do bad things, we are operating outside the prescribed limits of our culture. We act as individuals. To say Maori crime then, is as stupid as saying Christian crime, or English crime or Welsh crime. For no society sets out to promote rules that are evil or bad.

Those words have never left me and while I might revert sometimes to the easy rhetoric of race politics, I mostly remember how culture comforted me and distracted me, the exhilaration of rowing a waka down the Waikato River with a hundred others, the voluntary work at the local Marae, hitching to hui across the country and picking up the language along the way, meeting relations for the first time, changing our names.

So if culture is only about the good stuff then why aren't we grabbing it with both hands?

The role of culture comes into its own during hard times. Essentially, it's because it distracts us from the hopelessness of our situation while compelling us to become more creative, inventive and imaginative. Together with visionary leadership, we have the very fundamental to freeing ourselves from recession.

The combination of visionary leadership and culture can be seen in an earlier era. During the Great Depression, Sir Apirana Ngata understood that this was central to Maori economic recovery. He believed that communities had to become self-reliant, socially cohesive and bound together by a peaceful culture with arts at its axis. Consequently, the renaissance was born resulting in a resurgence of Marae building, carving, weaving, kapahaka and everything else in between. The dairy farms he promoted as a foray into self-employment was back-breaking work with sometimes meagre returns yet there was no burning resentment, no chip on the shoulder, no dole when things got a bit rough. Their motivation was feed by something that cannot be found in any economic model. Fittingly his image graces the 50 dollar note as a reminder that economic recovery and cultural regeneration are mutually inclusive. Hence the blueprint was set as a remedy for future downturns.

Maori faced similar problems in the 80s. And through the chaos of urbanisation, a 23% unemployment rate and a youthful population, two guardians of an earlier era Sir James Henare and John Rangihau emerged with a new twist to the old remedy. The revitalisation of Maori language was their focus forged from the old education system and remodelled to create a new philosophy, for out of early childhood centres, Te Kohanga Reo was formed; out of schools, Te Kura Kaupapa; out of universities, Wananga; and from there came a record number of Maori tertiary graduates.

All that was old is new again. The current situation spurs us on to explore new pathways and the coalition between the Maori and National parties provides a unique political platform for that to occur, not only because it is the mean between two extremes, but because it offers a forum to develop policy with the power to unify a nation facing uncertainty using the old remedies from the past.

Whereas in the past cultural revival has been exclusively for Maori by Maori, this time I sense a maturity and a willingness to share the same vision. That vision has a Maori heart whose presence, detectable only by nuances, pervades everything we do as a nation. The haka before a rugby game is a familiar example and so too the singing of the national anthem in Maori, proficient pronunciation, the hongis, body moko are all now common features of our nation's cultural pulse.



To build on that requires world views to merge.

For instance in relation to recent policy statements, where some see just a cycleway, I see an opportunity for cash poor, land rich Maori communities to enter the tourism industry by unlocking some of the most scenic and historically fascinating geography in the country.

Where some see an army boot camp, I see shades of the old Maori Battalion whose noble mantra of service and sacrifice for ones country should be an inspiration to a troubled generation. Where some see the nine-day working fortnight as simply a day off, I see an opportunity for workers to learn Maori.

As someone that has traversed the full spectrum of political thought, and indeed started a party based on this very concept of culture, I have come to the conclusion that it has no natural political home but that culture should be woven into the fabric of all ideologies, because its true worth, particularly in times of crisis and uncertainty, is that it encourages the energy, enterprise and intellect in people to aspire to a greater cause or as my old uncle would say "all the good stuff"

Congratulations

Our athletes have collected an impressive medal haul at the Special Olympics National Games in Palmerston North.

The team of 30 competed in athletics, basketball, swimming and tenpin bowling, winning 16 gold, 13 silver and 8 bronze medals. Many made personal and team milestones.

I'd like to congratulate all our Waitakere athletes. They were inspiring ambassadors for this city, competing with dignity, passion and pride. I'm proud to have them carrying the flag for Waitakere.

They couldn't have done it without support. Our Alcohol Project Leader for Safe Waitakere, Kylie Hill gives hours and hours of her own time to help these Special Olympians reach their potential. Her assistance at the National Games was invaluable. Thanks Kylie. Your generosity and selflessness is what being a Westie is all about.

Goodbye to a good doctor

A great pillar of the Waitakere community has gone.

Ritchie Gilmour died on November 12, age 88. His life was devoted to healing sickness and mending relationships.

Dr Gilmour established his medical practice in Henderson in 1955. The work he did as local GP earned him a Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1978 as well as a place in the Order of the British Empire and the Royal College of General Practitioners. Later in life he was made an honorary member of U3A.

His passion for medicine stemmed from his father Bert Gilmour, who served as a medic in World War 1 and a GP in Lyttelton. Ritchie followed in his footsteps, serving in the medical corps at Funafuti in the Solomon Islands during World War 2. He credited his experience treating servicemen as giving him more compassion in his work as a doctor.



But Dr Gilmour also played major roles in the Homebirth Association, Relationship Services, Citizens Advice Bureau, Workers Educational Association, West Auckland Hospice Trust and the Walsh Trust.

He and his late wife Myra lent a helping hand to many people with strained or broken relationships. Their own equal partnership based on mutual understanding, equality and honesty provided a model for success. They were both advocates of lifelong learning.

Dr Gilmour will be remembered for his fierce and joyful love of life and humanity, his powerful compulsion and mission to serve, to heal, to counsel and share his wisdom.

Passing parade

Our community lost some of its leaders in 2009. This is a small list of those people that left us poorer with their death. It is with sadness we acknowledge our city's icons:

Hariata Arapo Ewe (Aunty Sally), beloved matriarch of Te Kawerau a Maki, age 90.

Gwen Nash, tireless community worker for community houses, councillor and embroiderer to the stars.

Ritchie Gilmour, doctor, star watcher, founder of many organisations including the Walsh Trust. Deeply missed by the West.

Norm Laing, Huia identity, Laing family descendent, historian, teacher and builder of the Huia Museum. He was a world expert on the wreck of the Orpheus.

Prof Roger Green, renowned Pacific archaeologist, anthropologist and historian.

Laurie Matthews, former Fire Chief of Glen Eden, local identity and great community worker.

Richard Quinn, collector of Crown Lynn artefacts and saviour of Lime Burners Bay pottery and historical kilns.

Te Kimihanga (Jimmy) Brown, Kaumatua of Waitakere, great champion for Maori in the West.

Barrie ("Tank") Herring, Waitemata Rugby Club stalwart, well-known Auckland Rugby administrator, a true man's man and Westie icon.

Martha Andrews-Hodgson-Reihana, longtime resident of Waitakere, longstanding member of WestCity Church, kaumātua o Waipareira roopu.

Aisling Symes, a treasure lost by Waitakere and New Zealand, age 2.