

KEEP ON TRUCKING

FRIDAY, JULY 8, 2022

A Nati take on Wood is Good

Fushia Tibble is a young woman on a mission.

At just 19, this Ng̃ti Porou wahine is making her mark where it matters most — in the hands and minds of those who will pick up the mantle in the future.

As the coordinator for Eastland Wood Council's Wood is Good Programme — Te Pai o te Peka, Fushia heads into schools to educate rangatahi about forestry, safety around logging trucks, climate change, kaitiakitanga (guardianship of the land) and more.

Fushia has taken the programme and adapted it to Te Tairāwhiti, delivering much of it in te reo o Ng̃ti Porou. She has created resources suited to the primary-aged children she talks to and she juggles it all with her third year of studies in biomedical sciences at the University of Auckland.

"I saw this as a great opportunity to connect with my rohe," Fushia says. "It has been done from scratch. When I first looked at the programme I found the resources were dependent on forestry workers and it was unrealistic to pull them away from their work." She took the Fred the Forrester books and other resources around logging truck safety and got to work.

"You could say I made a molehill out of something small. I expanded on the key elements and it has gone from there."

So far the programme has taken Fushia into three schools, which she says is "extraordinarily" fulfilling.

She's careful to build on what the youngsters know — that could be linguistically, around M̃ori concepts or forestry and logging.

"Many of them have aunts, uncles and cousins in forestry and they love to tell me about that."

When the big logging rig rolls into school each student gets a chance to climb into the cab, chat to the truck driver, honk the horn and marvel at the sheer size of the truck as they stand beside it.

Fushia delivers the information in a high-energy and inclusive way, and the kids thrive on it.

ey learn about blind spots, how much weight is on the trucks, how many logs and how easily — or not — it is to stop a fully-loaded truck.

"Kaitiakitanga is everyone's concern and responsibility," she says. "We all have a responsibility to look after the whenua and Te Tairāwhiti is the perfect place to start.

"It is the landing place of Maui and his waka, Ng̃ti Porou is the second largest iwi in New Zealand and M̃ori have ingrained in them the ideas of conservation and caretaking."

Fushia is looking to expand her resources by incorporating te ao M̃ori and all the elements that are important for raising M̃ori rangatahi

(children) and Kiwi kids in Aotearoa.

"I believe that the programme should have a dual approach to reflect Aotearoa's curricula: Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and the New Zealand curriculum. One is not merely a translation of the other and my end goal is for this programme to progress to acknowledge these."

She has already rewritten the resources in te reo and continues to weave through te ao M̃ori concepts (through a M̃ori lens) through books, flash cards and games.

Fushia grew up speaking M̃ori and says much of her inspiration to give back to her community comes from her "amazing" mother Karen McClutchie, who is an educator and former school principal.

"I fell in love with learning and education, thanks to her."

And fittingly, accompanying Fushia to the schools is her younger brother Matuakore, who helps with translations, assists with the delivery and is her designated kaik̃rero.

"is about commitment and enlightening people and I know there is still a lot more to be done, but I am loving the journey."



Fushia Tibble has translated resources into te reo Māori so they are more relevant and useful for Te Tairāwhiti.

Picture by The Black Balloon



Fushia Tibble delivers a high-energy Wood is Good — Te Pai o te Peka programme to children at Waikirikiri School, with a focus on safety around logging trucks.

Picture by The Black Balloon



It's very much a team effort from Weatherell Transport founders and owners Steve and Jane Weatherell.

Driven by passion

Steve and Jane Weatherell have ridden the highs and lows of the transport industry, growing from a small three-truck business to a nationwide company that has its foundation and family values at its heart. It started in 1994 when, as an owner driver, Steve opted to end a contract and go out on his own. He and Jane were living in Tauranga, with Steve doing the daily round trip to Gisborne. He had solid relationships with clients, which made for an easy transition into their successful business model that they set up in Gisborne. In those early days they were clocking up around 600,000km a year. Within two years they had 15 trucks on the road and were a key cog in the booming produce industry in Tairāwhiti. "Gisborne was just getting going really," Steve says. "We were carting maybe 10 to 20 crates of broccoli to Auckland a day. "It was just in its infancy. At that time, all they had was a produce service going north three days a week." Most of their business came from the fresh produce industry, but now that is back to around 70 percent, with the remainder general freight including chilled and frozen goods, much of it for local supermarkets. Gisborne remains the company's headquarters. Weatherell has the only swing lifters in town

able to move containers, so they have 17 trucks dedicated to the Gisborne-Napier and Gisborne-Tauranga export container runs. Meanwhile, there is plenty of broccoli, corn, citrus, apples and more to be moved. The majority of their inter-island trips are for chilled produce heading south, and chilled and frozen goods coming back north. A large number of their customers have been with the company from the start and are hugely supportive. Their fleet includes 90 of their own trucks and 25 owner drivers. "I never would have thought 28 years ago that we would be this big. I envisaged we would end up with maybe half a dozen trucks." And while it is very much driven by passion, the couple has survived through some "shocking" times. "When the Waioeka Gorge closes or the road south closes it destroys us revenue-wise," Steve says. "It is a challenging industry but a good one and we are still growing the business." In recognition of what they cart, they are transitioning to the brand Freshways, which operates under the Weatherell umbrella. The couple has depots in Auckland, Napier, Tauranga, Palmerston North and Christchurch. Auckland was the first satellite base and was set up because it was their



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Steve Weatherell has a real passion for the industry and he figures that is what has kept him in the game for so many years.

main destination from Gisborne. "We needed a delivery service in Auckland and somewhere to pick up to backload the trucks. Things just evolved from there." Napier was a staging post from the early days, and Tauranga a natural step, too, with its growing kiwifruit and avocado industries. The Weatherell crew now cover s10 million kilometres a year and counting. The company continues to grow, adjusting to meet the

curveballs and challenges of 2022. They tackle the nationwide shortage of truck drivers by offering ongoing training and upskilling for their staff and working alongside those who prefer to be owner drivers over employees. Some of their workers have been with them since day one, with many on the payroll for more than a decade. "We are not corporate. We are a family business," Steve says.

It means there is an open-door policy for their employees. "They can pick up the phone and talk to Jane or me. We can make decisions on the day, and get on with life. We have very loyal people in our company." Steve and Jane are equally as loyal to their workers. "I have a real passion for the industry. Honestly, you wouldn't do it if you didn't. It is a tough industry and I guess that is what drives me."



Back where it all began . . . Steve Weatherell photographed in 1995 about to head out on a job.

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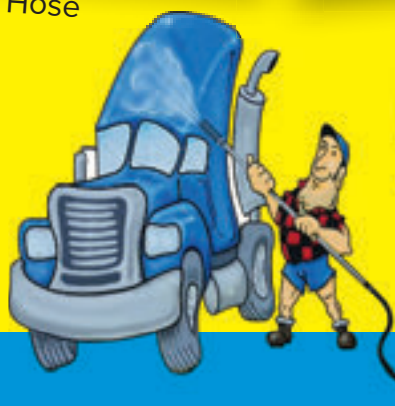
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Justin Martin's job description reads like a Boys' Own novel, listing salvaging yachts, moving giant structures, dropping in pools and recovering vehicles large and small when they are in trouble. He and wife Amy have just celebrated the fifth birthday of their company Gisborne Hiabs. There were a few sleepless nights pondering what they were doing, trying to crunch the numbers and crystal ball gazing to put together a business proposal for the bank, but that's all a distant memory now. In a few short years they have exceeded their business goals and now have four hiabs and one five-axle hiab truck — which is the biggest in New Zealand and can take up to 10 tonnes — a heavy recovery towing unit and a team they shamelessly call the best in the business. "We would be nothing without our fantastic team," Justin says. He knows a thing or two about the importance of teamwork. Justin is a multi-crowned national surf lifesaving IRB champ who medalled at the world champs. "We did a massive salvage in the Waioeka Gorge in torrential rain not that long ago. "We went in there at 3pm and got home as the sun was coming up. "These guys drop everything and get on with the job. They are great." The job was to salvage a truck

and trailer unit with a 30-tonne loaded refrigerated container that had picked up another four to five tonnes of water from the river. "We had to bring in some subbies from Tauranga. You have to with big jobs like that." These are jobs that call for a lot of planning. "It can be a real balancing act and compromise as to what you can actually cart, especially at this time of year," Justin says. Ground conditions and the weather play a big part. Their work takes them around the North Island, including moving pre-cast toilet blocks from the Gisborne Permacrete base to holiday parks and public reserves. The custom-made heavy recovery unit is used for accidents and breakdowns. "There is a misconception out there that logging trucks are tipping over every day of the week but it's just not true. "Much of our work is general breakdown and recovery of other sorts of vehicles." It can be complicated, though, with an ever-evolving health and safety regime that changes with each client. "We have expanded our business where we have seen a gap in the market and that seems to be working, but that doesn't come cheap."

It can cost Justin and Amy \$800,000 to put a unit on the road. Add to that the 130 percent increase they have seen in fuel price over the past year. When their vehicles average two kilometres a litre, the numbers start adding up. "These costs all have to be passed on otherwise we may as well just shut the doors." They're sitting tight at the moment as they, too, are affected by a

shortage in drivers. However, Justin recently set up Gisborne House Removals with good friend Aaron McNaught. "You can buy all the trucks in the world but unless you have the right guys on them, it is a waste of time." Justin is grateful their team are more than up to spec. "No two jobs are ever the same so you have to be able to think fast and adjust accordingly."

Easy does it . . . the top storey of a Grey Street house is popped into place by the Gisborne Hiabs team.



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One of the newest trucks in the Seymours fleet. Photo supplied



Trucking industry all about the people

More than 40 years in the trucking industry have taught Charlie Seymour a thing or two about the job and those who are part of it.

Whether they are carting logs, livestock, produce or freight, it all comes down to people.

Seymours Transport Services has bases all over the North Island — Hastings, Wairoa, Gisborne, Cape Runaway, Opotiki, Mount Maunganui and Rotorua.

They have about 40 employees, some who have been with Charlie for 22 years. Tairāwhiti accounts for around 40 percent of overall business, with 25 percent of that contracted to Ernslaw One.

As a kid Charlie loved big trucks and found his way to Opotiki Transport where he worked his way up the ranks and bought the company with two other partners.

It was a rural carrier and livestock mover, with the East Coast accounting for much of their business, thanks to the freezing works and the many stock sales across the region.

He has fond memories of working along the Coast — from the first cattle fair in Te Araroa, Tikitiki the next day and then all the way to Matawhero.

“We spent a lot of time at the Te Puia and Te Araroa hotels. They were great,” Charlie says.

He misses the people but not the hours or the constant phone calls.

Charlie bought out his partners in Opotiki Transport, along with Goldsmiths in 1985 and the stock division of Watchorns Transport in 1989, before selling the company to Robert Monk Transport in 1996 who on-sold it to Farmers Transport. “You work very hard doing livestock,” Charlie says. “So I decided it was time for a change.”

He bought the Opotiki Hotel and a logging truck. He lasted eight years juggling both but says he met plenty of great people across the bar.

“At the same time, I was carting logs mainly out of Ruatoria and Te Araroa and back to Taupō and Kawerau.”

His three trucks were busy but then came a big growth spurt.

When Ernslaw One bought a struggling company, they turned to Charlie for carting. These days he has 46 trucks in the fleet — 28 are his and the rest are owner/drivers.

“They tend to work pretty hard because it is their truck,” he says.

Charlie’s daughter Carla worked with him for 11 years before taking up a job in health and safety with Timberlands in Rotorua.

“I was sad to see her move out of the company and I don’t have anyone to take things over, but at the same time I am not sure I want her to have all the stress that comes with the job.”

The last few years have been tough on

smaller operators, with some handing in their keys and hi-vis vests.

Charlie has seen plenty in the industry — the difficult times with the downturn in log prices, storage issues in Gisborne, driver shortages and now the cost of fuel.

“It’s hurting a lot of the transport operators and staff,” he says. “Staff shortages are tough and I am not sure what the answer is. We have always trained young people coming through but you can’t get them anymore. It is costly for them to get licences and by the time you do all that, they tend to up and leave.”

He has high praise for the work being done by Tairāwhiti Road Transport and Dave Pardoe, who work hard to bring new drivers into the industry and get them licensed. Charlie is an employer who gives a much-needed second chance.

“We wouldn’t be where we are today without a lot of breaks and luck, and you have to pass a bit of that on,” he says. “I believe everyone is due a break — some you look at and wonder why you did it, but mostly they go from strength to strength.”

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A blast from the past . . . way back in the early days of Charlie Seymour's trucking journey. Photo supplied



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Mainfreight Gisborne branch manager Heath Woollett and his partner Wietske de Groot happily moved from Dunedin to Gisborne for their new positions.



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Continuing to

Heath Woollett and Wietske de Groot didn't hesitate to up sticks and head north when the opportunity arose to relocate from Dunedin to Gisborne to take up positions at Mainfreight.

The South Islanders have been with the company for 11 and 12 years respectively and had already moved once, from Christchurch to Dunedin.

"To be given an opportunity to come to Gisborne and continue to grow the local branch and mould freight into a well-established produce sector was just the challenge we needed," Heath says. He had never visited the region before they made the big move.

"We were aware of the Ngāti Porou East Coast rugby team and just how passionate their supporters are, but that was about it. "We have always been rugby fans, with our son representing at age level. Having grown up on the west coast of the South Island, who doesn't love grassroots rugby?" The move north wasn't without its challenges, given they shifted in August last year when the country was under an Alert Level 4 lockdown.

Heath is the branch manager and Wietske supports the administration side of the operation.

"There have been some fantastic changes within Mainfreight Gisborne, with constant revision and adjustment as we grow," Heath says.

"As a company, Mainfreight is very team oriented and focused, with each branch the

same as the next.

"Whether you are in Gisborne or Paris, our 306 branches help each other to deliver the best possible experience to customers across the globe."

There are plenty of exciting things happening at the base, with plans afoot to extend the undercover area, which will allow additional operational processes that Heath says are vital to the quality of customer's freight.

"Our team has grown to match the increased volumes, but we are always on the lookout for good people to add to the business.

"Produce really does have its peaks and troughs and being new to this area we are still learning so much. But that continual growth within the Mainfreight network allows us the opportunity to grow the fleet, team and in time, the premises."

Covid continues to challenge most businesses, but the team ethos at Mainfreight means plenty of support for all. "We have all been very vigilant around self-monitoring our health and those we come into contact with. The team has really stepped up."

It is a very diverse fleet at Mainfreight Gisborne, including a new purpose-built 18-pallet chiller unit to service local produce. There is also a constant drive to upskill employees.

"Our goal is to give people the opportunity to become owner drivers within our business. We are always looking for new ways of attracting new people to the team."





It's all about team at Mainfreight Gisborne. From left are Heath Woollett, Wietske de Groot, Sally Taylor, Haare Martin, Mark Ngaronoa, Pete Archibold, Huri Kahaki, James Kotuhi, Kim Adams, Jackee Huhu, Andrea Mill, Lopeti Kaloni and Neville Forster.



Mark Ngaronoa makes easy work of moving freight around the Gisborne Mainfreight yard.

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John McInnes and his crew at McInnes Driver Training are committed to helping as many people as they can get licensed and on the road.



Keeping up with demand

McInnes Driver Training may be all about vehicles and licences, but in reality founder John McInnes says it is about people. John can't expand his business fast enough to keep up with demand. As well as a critical shortage of truck drivers, there are big lag times for those trying to sit or upgrade regular licences.

"We're probably close to 100 truck drivers short across the board in Tairāwhiti," John says.

He's doing a sweep across the industries — from logging and transport to horticulture and agriculture.

"It has a big roll-on effect and puts a lot of pressure on the community.

"People don't realise how much stuff is moved in and out of the region, and it is all by truck

these days."

Truck driving can be lucrative for those who are good at their jobs.

"It is a very professional industry, with companies offering not only good wages but also incentives to keep staff healthy. Personal wellbeing is important and there is often ongoing training and upskilling. The biggest focus, though, is bringing our drivers home safely each night."

McInnes has satellite offices in Napier and Wairoa, with both having full-time staff and mirroring the vast range of services on offer in Gisborne.

"Having Cheryl (Te Amo) on the ground in Wairoa gives options for the community," John says.

"There was a real need there."

McInnes Driver Training offers everything from car and truck licences — classes 2 to 5 — to machinery training, dangerous goods tickets, vehicle recovery, ATVs, side by side, forklift and chainsaw training.

As tough as Covid-19 has been, it has led to a big growth spurt for the business, which now has 14 employees.

"We have filled the niche for training and that is not just with trucks, but also the likes of tractors, harvesters and more."

John says annually they put around 250 people through their paces. Some will be starting from scratch while others will be upgrading.

For him, it is more than just a job. John and his team get a real buzz out of helping others succeed.

"I like to make sure they get the right education and training — that is the crunch.

"Good training means they have a better chance of staying alive," John says.

"I enjoy seeing people succeed."

They also work closely with Tairāwhiti Road Transport to help people into the trucking industry.

The efforts of Tairāwhiti Road Transport could be life-changing for some.

"Licensing can be tough at times but we do try to make it easy.

"You hear some amazing stories from those we teach.

"We have had guys come in with a learner licence and they have gone off with a class 5 and are now driving huge rigs. That is a pretty good feeling for trainers."





The local industry calls for training across all sorts of vehicles ... McInnes Driver Training staff Jo Leeper and Blair Gilroy run through the operations of a forklift.



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Kat leading the charge

Kat Kaiwai figures it is in her blood to be running a civil infrastructure business in some of the nation's toughest terrain. She is the company principal for Tairāwhiti Contractors, a Ruatorea-based operation that prides itself in hiring greenhorns. It's a tough job. Her 23-strong team are the ones out on the roads when others are tucked up by the fire. They work alongside other companies during weather events — clearing, fixing and more. And the single mother of three thrives on it. Kat has been in the industry for more than 12 years and is in her fourth year with Tairāwhiti Contractors. "Everybody I hire is green," she says. "I noticed that others seemed to poach from other companies, taking from one to fulfil their own needs. If everyone does that, then one day we will have nobody. I wanted to train people who live here so they could work." It's a two-way street and has taken a couple of years to see the fruits of her investment. Kat started her journey in civil infrastructure in administration with one of the big companies and after three years indoors, she decided she wanted to see what it was like out in the field. She hasn't looked back. Kat was working in Gisborne but with her daughter in school on the Coast, she opted to find work closer to home. "There wasn't anything going so I had to make a job." Much of the strength in Tairāwhiti Contractors comes from strong local knowledge, coupled with a good dose of resilience. "The terrain up here is definitely one of the toughest, but we know the roads and the land," she says. Kat is the great granddaughter of Sir Āpirana Ngata, the granddaughter of Mate Kaiwai and daughter of Dunn Kaiwai. She figures she gets her determination and toughness from her ancestors. "They all worked hard and put back into the community. I think that is just what is normal. I like creating opportunities for our people that weren't there for previous generations." She encourages others to do the same. "The opportunities and options in civil infrastructure are endless. I love it." Kat is also an Ultimit ambassador under Connexis, which looks to encourage more women into infrastructure. She is an assessor for them in Tairāwhiti.

Driven to succeed . . . Kat Kaiwai encourages all women to take a look at civil infrastructure as a career.
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