

PALMYTM PROUD

ISSUE 23





Brent Harris,
Peaks (In Praise of Hands), 2019.
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery
Te Puna o Waiwhetū, purchased 2019.

Palmy Proud is produced twice a year and is a brag book of the best of Palmerston North.

All our previous issues are available online at pncc.govt.nz/palmyproud

Let's get social

Keep up-to-date on what is happening in Palmy through our digital channels.

@PNCityCouncil
pncc.govt.nz/palmyproud
palmyproud@pncc.govt.nz

Make sure you sign up to our newsletter to be the first to know what's happening in Palmy.

pncc.govt.nz/palmy matters

Cover:

Haru Japanese Restaurant

Back cover:

John Clarke ("Fred Dagg")

Content proudly created and curated by Palmerston North City Council with contributions from Carly Thomas.



This publication uses vegetable based inks, and FSC® certified papers produced from responsible sources.



Kia ora tātou,

As the cooler months settle in, there's a different kind of energy across Palmerston North – a chance to slow down, explore, and see our city through a new lens.

Whether it's a crisp walk along our river pathways or a quiet moment in one of our green spaces, this is a season that invites us to reconnect with the place we call home.

This edition of Palmy Proud captures that spirit well. You'll find stories that reflect the creativity and character of our city – from the rich art collections and exhibitions at Te Manawa, to the people and passion behind our local businesses and hospitality scene.

There's also a strong thread of innovation and confidence, with continued investment and growth showing that Palmerston North remains a city on the move.

For those who like to get out and explore, you might be surprised to learn just how connected we are to something as significant as Te Araroa, with the halfway point of this remarkable trail running right through our city.

And if you're looking to venture a little further, The Country Road reminds us that some of the best experiences come when we take our time and follow where the road leads.

What ties all of this together is people – our artists, our business owners, our volunteers, and our storytellers. It's that sense of whanaungatanga and shared pride that continues to make Palmerston North a place where people belong and thrive.

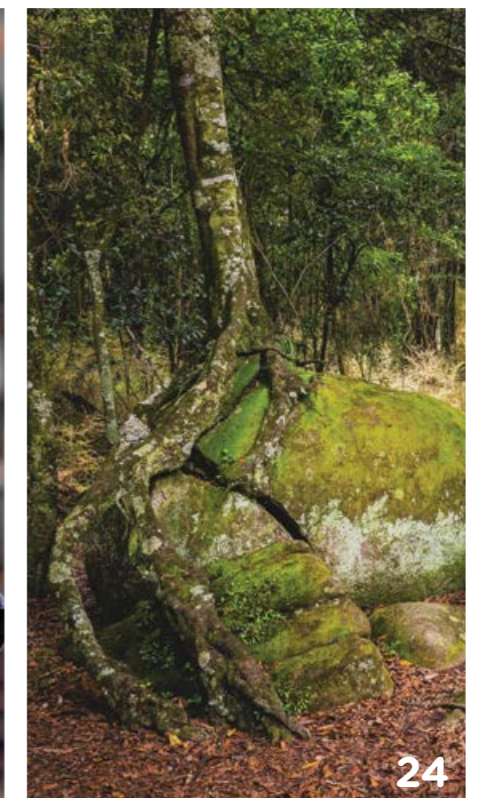
I hope you enjoy this edition and take the time to experience what's on offer – indoors and out.

Ngā mihi nui,

Mayor Grant Smith JP
 Palmerston North City

Halfway, but just getting started	6	Rebel against the rush	24
On board with Dead Fish	12	Flying doctor at your service	28
Dagg by name, dag by nature	16	Art in waiting	32
Open for business	20	Ticket to Tokyo: No passport required	36

Inside this issue





Halfway, but just getting started

Why Palmerston North is more than just a halfway stop on Te Araroa.

The thought of walking 3,000 kilometres, the length of Aotearoa, along Te Araroa is enough to stop most people in their tracks.

For some, it sparks excitement. For others, it sounds slightly unhinged.

But here's the twist: If you live in Palmerston North, there's a very good chance you've already walked part of it without even knowing.

From the leafy paths of Victoria Esplanade to the gentle curves of the river shared pathways, Te Araroa quietly threads through the city before heading south into the rugged Tararua Ranges. It blends urban ease with backcountry challenge, and right in the middle sits a milestone that means everything to those walking the full trail.

At 1,529km in, Palmerston North is, quite literally, the halfway point.

A milestone in the middle

This past summer season saw around 1,700 people register to walk Te Araroa. About 70 percent come from overseas, with the remaining 30 percent from New Zealand. Most walk southbound, starting at Cape Reinga and heading towards Bluff.

By the time they reach Palmerston North, they've already walked more than 1,500 kilometres.

The halfway point is not fixed. It shifts slightly each year as the trail evolves, but wherever it lands, it becomes a moment of celebration.

"It's a big hoo-ha," laughs Brian Way, a former council parks staffer, now long-time volunteer and chair of the Te Araroa Manawatū Trust. "People really mark it. It's a huge psychological milestone."

Brian has been involved with the trail for years, first through his work with Palmerston North City Council, then as a trail host with his partner, Paula, and now as part of a core volunteer group of around 20 people who help maintain and improve the local section.

“It’s a good chance to get out, contribute back to the community, meet people, be in the bush,” he says. “And you meet some incredible walkers along the way.”

The people who make the trail

If the trail itself is the backbone of Te Araroa, then people are its beating heart.

Just ask Kim Mats.

The 33-year-old from Seattle arrived in New Zealand in December, drawn by stories from other hikers who said the trail had changed their lives. She had just completed the Pacific Crest Trail in the United States and decided, instead of heading back to work, to keep walking.

“It’s been wonderful. I’ve never been into birds much before but now I’m what is known as a birder. I’m just obsessed at seeing all the different birds you have here, and the community is incredible. Whether it’s other hikers or local Kiwis, everyone is so lovely.”

That community is especially strong in Palmerston North.

After completing sections like the Whanganui River, a side trip and Taranaki, Kim skipped the walk from Whanganui and headed straight to Palmy.

“I hitched here because I wanted to meet Anthony and Fiona.”

A hut, a welcome, and a purpose

Anthony and Fiona’s kitchen has become part of Te Araroa folklore.

At their home in Hokowhitu, they run Whiowhio Hut, a shelter that has hosted hundreds of hikers over the years. What began informally has grown into a well-known stop on the trail, shared through word of mouth and hiking apps.

“We’ve walked the length of New Zealand too – we did it in three sections. Then we decided to start offering other hikers a place to stay.”

Each night over the summer months the hut sleeps a handful of people, with others sometimes pitching tents in the yard. Hikers use the couple’s kitchen, take showers, charge devices and spend time resting before continuing south.

“They’re usually pretty tired,” Anthony says. “It’s a good place for them to reset.”

For many, that reset comes at exactly the right time. Palmerston North sits just before one of the most physically and mentally demanding parts of the trail.

“The Taranakis are serious,” Kim says. “It was the hardest tramping I’ve ever done. Mud, steep climbs, not always knowing what you’re stepping into. But also one of my favourite sections.”

Being able to talk with people who know that terrain makes a difference.

“They’ve done it themselves,” Kim says of Anthony and Fiona. “You can ask questions, get advice. That helped a lot before going in.”

Alongside hosting, Anthony also plays a key behind-the-scenes role in the trail nationally, compiling the registration packs that go out to hikers and sending them across New Zealand before they even set foot on the trail.





That support doesn't stop there either. The koha left by hikers at Whiowhio Hut is reinvested into conservation work, including trapping in the Ruahine Ranges to help protect native species, including whio.

It is a small, local example of how the trail gives back to the landscapes it passes by.

From city streets to wild places

One of the defining features of the Palmerston North section is its contrast.

Walkers arrive in the city via long stretches of country road and open farmland, often mentally tougher than the mountains themselves, before stepping into a city that offers everything they need.

Food. Gear. A warm bed. A café.

Then, just as quickly, they leave it behind.

South of the city, the trail climbs again, trading footpaths for forest and open farmland for dense bush.

"It's a good split," Brian says. "You've got the urban side, places to restock and grab a meal, and then you're straight back into the backcountry."

That variety is part of what makes this section so special, especially for locals.

"You don't have to walk 3,000 kilometres," he says. "You can do short sections. A day walk, an overnight. It's all right here."

In fact, many people already are.

While long-distance hikers pass through with large packs and trekking poles, much of the local use comes from everyday walkers on council tracks, from He Ara Kotahi to the city's green corridors and Summerhill gullies. There are walks close to the city that are ideal for families and first-timers. The Esplanade, river paths, Bledisloe Park and Back Track are easy to access and can be taken at a relaxed pace.

"If you've walked along these, then you've done part of Te Araroa," Brian says.

Places you remember

Beyond the city, the trail becomes something people carry with them.

"There are some really special spots in this section," Brian says. "Moturimu Whare, 30km walk south of the city, is one of them. It's not your regular DOC hut, it's more of a shelter, but is still most certainly a key destination. It's a place people talk about. They remember staying there."

Further along, huts become part of the rhythm of the trail. Places to dry gear, share stories and reset before the next stretch.

For southbound hikers, this is where the experience shifts. Less road, more bush, more time off grid.

And for those looking for something more demanding, the Tararua Ranges provide exactly that. Steep, rugged and changeable, they are best suited to well-prepared trampers.

Building something lasting

Behind the scenes, a huge amount of work goes into keeping the trail in good shape.

Over the past year alone, local volunteers have contributed more than 750 hours maintaining tracks, clearing fallen trees, mowing sections, and improving signage.

One of the biggest recent projects has been the installation of "track rafts" – wooden platforms designed to stabilise muddy sections and prevent walkers from widening tracks and damaging surrounding vegetation. Built by people who care.

Over the past two seasons, volunteers have built around 150 track rafts each year and worked to install them through some of the wettest sections of the trail.

Jeff Baldwin came to volunteer with the local Te Araroa Trust after retiring, looking for something that felt worthwhile.

"I'd retired and was looking for something to keep me busy," he says. "I've always enjoyed tramping, so this felt like a natural fit."

Now leading the track work for Te Araroa Manawatū Trust, Jeff helps coordinate a small but committed group of volunteers who look after the section from Bulls through to Levin. It's work that also keeps him on the trail itself, walking the route a couple of times each season to check everything is in good condition.

"It's a real mix," he says. "A lot of our volunteers are retired or semi-retired and have the time and skills to help out. Others have walked the trail themselves and want to give something back."

"The idea is to keep people on the track and stop the bush getting damaged," Jeff says. "Once they're in place, you can see the difference pretty quickly."

There's still a couple of years of track raft installation to go.

But for Jeff, that's part of the point.

"It's about creating something that people can enjoy, but also looking after it properly so it's still there for the next lot of walkers."

Why you should give it a go

For those watching from the sidelines, Te Araroa can feel like something reserved for the ultra-fit or ultra-adventurous.

But the people closest to the trail say that's missing the point.

"I think doing the whole thing is scary," Kim says. "But you don't have to. You can hike parts of it – it's literally in your backyard. Even just a day is a treasure."

That sentiment is echoed by those who maintain the trail.

"Just get out there. Just do it," Brian says.

With summer on the horizon, there's no better time to start planning, or even start some weekend strolls.

You don't need months off work, expensive gear, or a grand plan. Just a decent pair of shoes, a bit of curiosity, and a willingness to see your own backyard a little differently.

Because here in Palmerston North, Te Araroa isn't just a trail you pass through.

It's one you can step onto – anytime. 🐾



Learn more

The Palmerston North section makes up only a small portion of the wider Manawatū area looked after by the local Te Araroa Manawatū Trust.

You can learn more about the whole trail at teararoa.org.nz

Get involved: teararoa.org.nz/te-araroa-manawatu-trust/

Follow the local trust on Facebook: Te Araroa Manawatu

or Instagram: @teararoamanawatu



On board with Dead Fish

Skate culture is celebrated on Palmy's George Street.

From the street, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Dead Fish is a small art gallery. Skate decks double as canvases and a curated collection of skating culture memorabilia fills the space. Step inside and it's clear that this is a shop influenced by a lifetime immersed in creativity and skateboarding.

At the centre of it all is Steve Birrell – better known as Dead Fish. Steve opened Dead Fish in late 2025 alongside Tim Davis, a longtime skateboarder who previously co-owned Square Skate in central Palmerston North.

The two go back years, having first met in an unlikely setting on Mt Ruapehu. Steve was working as a maintenance man at Turoa Ski Field. One day, while hitchhiking up the mountain, he was picked up by Tim and a group of skateboarders connected to Ocean and Ice, another Palmy skate shop.

"They picked me up and gave me a ride," Steve says. "So, I took them backcountry and showed them all around the mountain. We've been good friends ever since."

Steve's connection to skateboarding goes back decades. Born in Palmerston North, he spent time in Gisborne, where he first got into surfing. When his family moved back to Palmy, he was gifted a skateboard and never looked back.

It was during his school years that he picked up the nickname Dead Fish – a name that's stuck ever since.

"I was skating everywhere to make up for the fact that there were no waves. I was effectively land surfing, so they called me Dead Fish and it stuck."

Making an impact

Steve's influence on the New Zealand skate scene runs deep. In 1990, he opened New Zealand's first indoor skate park, Skate Terrain, after a rainy walk home with a broken board sparked the idea.

"I just wanted to put ramps in a building and open it up so that everyone could have some fun."

While his influence on the park was short-lived, his impact on skate culture wasn't. Over the years, he's organised competitions, hosted international skaters, and contributed creatively through design and art.

A signwriter by trade, Steve's creative work stretches beyond skateboards. He's produced artwork for surf brands, skateboard magazines, band posters, and record covers, while also building a reputation for custom pinstriping on hot rods and motorbikes.

Animation creation

"I've also done a fair bit of animation work," Steve says. "I actually got my first animation job after my son and I made a claymation of a frog getting run over. The eyes were ping pong balls and we used an air rifle to make them move."

That rough idea ended up going further than expected. Years later, when Colenso were creating an ad for Toyota featuring possums, they reached out to use the concept.

"That's why one of the possums is called Steve," he says. "They got the idea from me."

Back in the mid-1980s, he also created an animation for Crazy Joe Ice Blocks – a project he still considers a favourite.

"I had a VHS of it, but the player chewed it up," he laughs. "If anyone's got a copy out there, get in touch."

His work even extended to projects like the Marley Ducks, adding another layer to a creative career that has quietly touched New Zealand pop culture.

That creative legacy is woven throughout Dead Fish.

The shop isn't just a place to buy boards – it's a reflection of Steve's life. Collectable decks and memorabilia line the walls, many from his personal collection, with more waiting in the wings.

"I've got another 100 plus skateboards and collectables at home. As things disappear, I'll start bringing more in. I'm leaving the better stuff to last."



Classes and connections

It's also a space for sharing knowledge. Steve runs art classes in pinstriping and signwriting – giving people a chance to try something new without the usual barriers.

"It's expensive to get into it ... so I like helping people give it a go and see if they're interested."

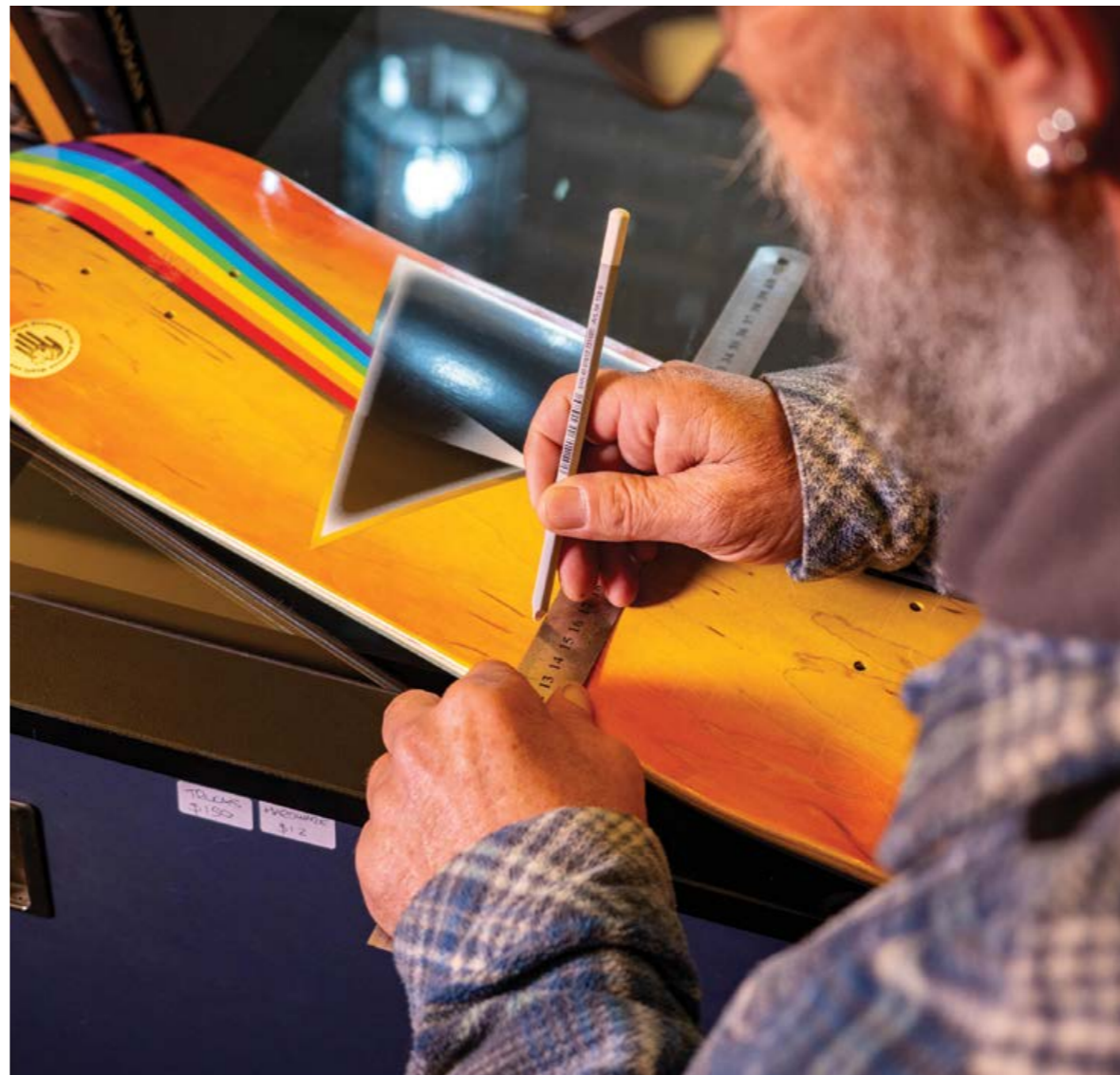
Dead Fish is deliberately offline. Steve wants to encourage people to come in, have a chat, and experience all the shop has to offer.

Snow services

Looking ahead, Dead Fish will evolve through the winter months, offering snowboard and ski tuning services – something that's currently hard to find in Palmy.

At its heart, Dead Fish is more than a shop. It's a space shaped by decades of creativity – where art and skateboarding cultures come together in a way that feels uniquely Palmy.

And whether you're there to buy a board, check out the artwork, have a chat, or learn a new skill, chances are you'll find Steve at his desk at the front of the shop – still creating and doing what he loves. ♡





Dagg by name, dag by nature

The legend of Fred Dagg has its feet firmly in the soils of Palmerston North.

The late John Clarke created his iconic alter ego Fred Dagg as a wry portrayal of rural New Zealand – and no doubt, John's Palmerston North upbringing was an influence.

Born in the late '40s and brought up in a character bungalow in Hokowhitu, John's childhood was one of bike-riding and "be home by dinner time" freedom. He once spoke of how the character of Fred Dagg, "grew up alongside me". His daughter Lorin Clarke says, "Dad was Fred Dagg, but he was always himself".

"Whatever character Dad was being you could always see him in his eyes. He always had that direct connection with his audience. The audience was what was important to Dad, he came from the audience. And he was so good at finding the silly."

John went to College Street Normal School and he spent a lot of time at the Municipal Baths, which were opposite St Andrews Church. Having first learnt to swim in the Rangitikei River at Bulls, John became part of the Manawatū Junior Swimming Squad. He wasn't much into training and said, "being part of this was more interesting than the results".

"I also went to the YMCA gym every Saturday morning and became part of the Manawatū Junior Gym Team. I could walk on my hands the length of the YMCA hall and could do somersaults and flick-flacks on the floor or from the vaulting horse. I also had a tracksuit and felt very cool indeed."

John's parents, Ted and Neve, had a leaning towards the arts. Theirs was a household where poetry was read aloud, music was played and the written word was explored. Neve wrote both fiction and non-fiction, dabbled in theatre and introduced a young John to the likes of Barry Crump. Of Crump's radio readings, John once said, "fiction which caught the rhythm and tone of the New Zealand voice".





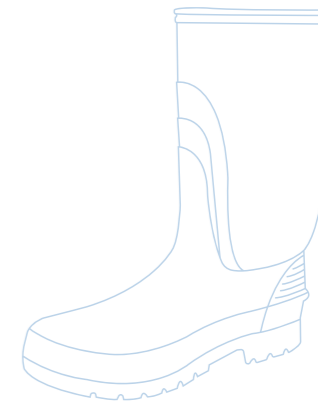
This YMCA camp photograph is labelled “Fred Dagg” by John Clarke himself, as he thought it was the first photo in which you could see the beginnings of Fred Dagg, the character. As his daughter Lorin Clarke says, he is “relaxed, overconfident, a bit of a smirk”.



Above and below: Moviegoers dressed in “appropriate attire” at the Palmerston North premiere.



When he was 12, John farewelled Palmerston North for Wellington when his father was transferred to McKenzies department store’s head office. John was ensconced in boarding school and later went to Victoria University where he dipped his toes into law, commerce and arts. Although John failed to gain a degree, he proudly framed his final university marks outlining his failed attempts, a nod to the wonderful, creative time he had which saw him develop as a person rather than an academic.



Finding the silly

John was interested in people, satire and laughing at oneself. Working in a shearing gang was, on one hand, monotonously boring, but also a place where Lorin says her dad gathered banter and language. “Dad loved language and he would listen to people talk and he would pick out the creative ways that people would say a boring thing. One of the things I am trying to celebrate here [the documentary] is finding the silly.”

Those days in the woolshed were a solid part of the evolution of Fred Dagg in the early ’70s. The laconic, familiar farmer dressed in his black singlet, ripped shorts, floppy hat and black gumboots. Alongside the Trevs, his seven sons, the character of Fred Dagg gave New Zealanders a chance to laugh at themselves. Many other characters followed but Fred Dagg captured some kind of magic that has lasted through the decades.

Dagg the doco ...

Lorin says Fred Dagg wasn’t just a humorous character but “a reflection of New Zealanders and our identity” and recognising this she set out to make a feature-length documentary on her father’s life. It is a love letter of sorts from Lorin, his family and those who knew him. John was the family’s mischievous video archiver and Lorin says there was a treasure trove of footage available to her.

“I also had recorded conversations between me and my dad and he had written stuff down. We actually had too much footage and so it was a really creative process bringing together all the elements.

I learnt a lot, I mean I have worked in radio, theatre, the printed word and audio production, but I hadn’t done this before – but from day one I thought ‘yes I have!’. It’s storytelling and that was a good thing to remember.”

Not Only Fred Dagg But Also John Clarke is now out in the world and in cinemas, having had its premiere at Palmerston North’s Event Cinemas. “It’s the mixture of heartfelt and almost completely silly which is so lovely. There is a sense of bringing it home to Palmerston North, which was a place of freedom for Dad. The brilliant collective goodwill that has brought this together and the grass roots(ism) – it’s been stupendous.”

A written gift

When Lorin took to the stage at the documentary’s premiere, she was emotional. “Dad would have loved this. Dad died suddenly, unexpectedly. He was fine and then he wasn’t. We had always said to him you have to write this all down, but we didn’t think he’d done it. But we found one document on his laptop called ‘For Lorin and Lucia’ – about 70 pages long – his whole life written down. So, to me, that was pretty good first-hand evidence of his story. It felt like a prescient little gift.”

Lorin says the documentary really showed where her dad came from, “and where he got to in the end”. A sepia-toned childhood spent near the fast-flowing Manawātū River, bike-riding without a helmet, grazed knees and a sunburnt nose. A typical Kiwi upbringing that wrapped around a life of many characters that ultimately added up to one man – John Clarke aka the legendary Fred Dagg. ♡

Open for business

Palmerston North's central North Island position and resilient economy underpins consistent growth.

Palmerston North's business growth is a story of grit and momentum, despite the challenges facing the wider economy.

While the city isn't immune to the pressures that have seen businesses scale back or close across the country, the picture here is steadier – investment is still flowing, cranes are still up, and confidence is holding firm.

It's not boom-and-bust growth, but consistent, grounded progress. The clearest signal? Palmy's non-residential building consents. In the year to March 2026, the value of these consents hit a record \$195 million, up 55.7% year-on-year – while nationally, values inched up just 1.2%. This confidence to invest in Palmerston North is not a one-off. It is a sustained pattern of elevated investment over a number of years.

Although external challenges may see investors act with more caution in the short term, the continued growth in non-residential construction shows strong and sustained confidence in Palmerston North's future economic growth and prosperity.

Location, location, location

The figures show Palmy is attracting strong business interest. A big contributor to this is its location.

Sitting at the crossroads of key state highways, it's one of the few places in New Zealand where road, rail, and air freight connect so closely, with strong links to major ports.

That advantage is being leveraged, with projects like KiwiRail's Regional Freight Hub, the Manawatū Regional Freight Ring Road, and ongoing industrial land development helping position Palmy as a growing hub for logistics, manufacturing, and innovation.

Palmerston North City Council economist Stacey Andrews says the consistency of investment speaks volumes.

"The five-star Tryp by Wyndham Hotel being built in the city centre is one of the most visible examples of investment in Palmerston North.

"More broadly, elevated investment across the city, including in industrial areas where existing businesses are expanding, points to confidence in the city's future. This investment is helping to support local jobs, career pathways and stronger long-term earning opportunities."

The city's appeal extends beyond business, she says. "The city offers a great lifestyle. You can get across the city in 15 minutes, housing is more affordable, and there are great schools, parks, and community spaces. It's a lifestyle that's hard to beat."



Growth curve

Palmerston North non-residential building consent values (year to March 2026)

Total

\$195 million, up **55.7% year-on-year**

The headliners

- Accommodation \$13.0 million, up **127%**
- Health facilities \$32.8 million, **5 times higher than the previous year**
- Commercial buildings \$69.9 million, up **177%**
- Industrial construction \$11.4 million, up **140%**

Record momentum

Non-residential consent values hit \$195 million in the city over the year to March 2026. This breaks the recent high of \$186.75 million in non-residential new builds in 2023, showing these are not random spikes, but real momentum.

At the centre of it all

For companies making big calls about where to invest, Palmerston North is increasingly hard to ignore. For Sarah Pender of ADA NZ, the decision was simple.

“The opening of our new headquarters and logistics facility in Palmerston North was a natural choice. It allows us to operate within Te Utanganui, the Central New Zealand Distribution Hub, with its central location helping us deliver efficiently across the whole country.”

ADA NZ’s large purpose-built facility brings design, development and warehousing together under one roof, supporting major national contracts, including the supply of apparel and equipment to 12,000 New Zealand Defence Force personnel and more than 10,000 police staff nationwide.

“We’ve been really encouraged by the city’s approach, which supports our goal of developing an advanced distribution hub that can serve clients across the country,” she says.

Delivering now and into the future

Businesses in Palmerston North aren’t just growing, they’re levelling up, and doing it smartly.

Woolworths’ Primary Connect Palmerston North Regional Distribution Centre is about the size of four rugby fields. Built in 2021, it supplies 55 supermarkets across the North Island and is already delivering strong results in efficiency and sustainability.

For operations manager Scott Bennett, the decision to expand their local operation came down to one thing. “Location,” he says. “Being based in the Manawātū means we can achieve same-day deliveries across the lower North Island and run a just-in-time operation.”

The recent development is not just more efficient, it’s forward-thinking.

Designed for long-term sustainability, the site includes energy-efficient systems, strong insulation, rainwater harvesting, and 28 EV charging stations.

The building is also positioned to make the most of natural light and airflow, helping reduce energy use and improve working conditions. Energy modelling shows the site is achieving around a 60% reduction in energy use compared to a standard building.

“We’ve grown our team significantly and focused on creating a workplace where people want to be,” Bennett says. “It’s light and bright, with great airflow and you can feel the difference, he says. “We’re proud to be setting the benchmark for large format sustainability from right here in Palmy.”

A game-changer for freight

And Palmy’s momentum isn’t slowing down. Freightways’ new \$13 million freight and logistics centre at Palmerston North Airport is set to be a game-changer for deliveries across central New Zealand.

Due for completion in late 2026, the facility will include two huge warehouses and a six-lane breezeway with direct access

from the airport’s runway area. It will bring NZ Couriers, Post Haste, and Parceline Express operations together in one high-efficiency hub.

“Palmerston North has long been a strategic hub for Freightways,” says Dan Pitts, Lower North Island Regional Manager for NZ Couriers.

“We’ve had a long connection with its businesses and its people, so it was a natural decision to continue investing here.”


“Alongside our Auckland and Christchurch air hubs, our Palmerston North site will be a key link in enabling reliable next-

day delivery across New Zealand and strengthening connections between regional centres and major cities. As our volumes grow, this purpose-built facility helps future-proof our operations and reflects our confidence in the region’s long-term growth.”

The Palmy advantage

While Palmerston North isn’t immune to economic headwinds, the city is still seeing a positive direction of growth.

With a strong pipeline of projects and sustained investment, Palmy is moving forward, holding confidence and keeping the local economy active.

There’s no single reason behind the steady progress, rather a solid formula – the central location, diversity of business sectors, space to grow, and a lifestyle that works. In a tough environment, that combination counts. Palmy isn’t just holding steady, it’s keeping its foot on the pedal. 





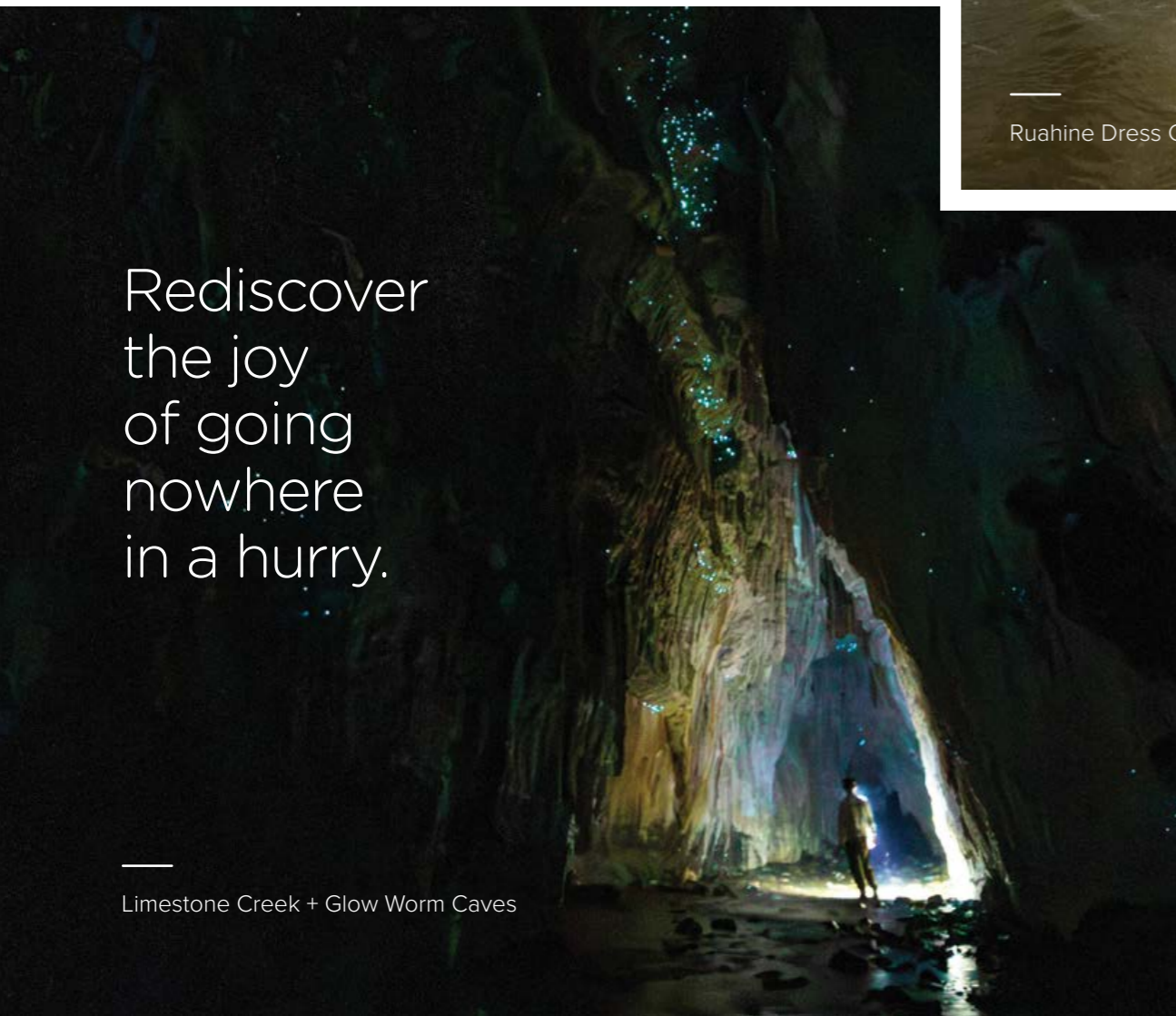
Rebel
against
the rush



Awastone



Ruahine Dress Circle



Rediscover
the joy
of going
nowhere
in a hurry.

Limestone Creek + Glow Worm Caves



Last Church in Āpiti

The Country Road through Manawatū is your invitation to slow down, breathe deep and find something real.

In a world where much of our day-to-day is automated or AI-assisted, where information comes from all directions and our attention is almost always divided. Where we streamline, “get results quick”, and lights still blink behind our eyelids when our heads finally hit the pillow...

Manawatū invites you to change pace and take a detour along The Country Road. This network of scenic touring routes offers a way to journey at a different pace, through the heart of the Manawatū region, where every bend brings a promise of discovery. Find open space and real adventure – a place to connect with real people and an unfiltered whenua.

Let the humble road trip become a powerful act of rebellion. It’s a chance to reclaim our time, to swap the predictable hum of the highway for the simple, unscripted beauty of the backroads. To swap the busy and dopamine-saturated for the impractical yet intensely satisfying. Brew coffee on a stove-top, read a paperback on a quiet balcony, and forget where you put your phone ...

This is the very soul of a road trip, isn't it? The freedom to follow your nose, and to discover taonga that only exists when you allow yourself to find it.

Perhaps you’ll come across the mossy trail that leads you to Limestone Creek Reserve. Let your eyes adjust to the dark caves where glowworms softly twinkle. Maybe the warm glow of Āpiti Tavern & Eatery calls out to be your second stop, with melt-in-your-mouth slow-cooked meats and a vibe so relaxed, you’ll instantly feel like a local.

At the Ruahine Dress Circle, the water of a restful swimming spot loops gracefully through a naturally formed amphitheatre. Ready for more? Lace up your hiking boots for the unforgettable Rangiwahia Hut Track. If you prefer to explore on wheels, the Manawatū Cycle Route offers some of the most memorable cycling in Aotearoa.

Turning in for the night? Park up at Tōtara Reserve and fall asleep to the soft call of a shy ruru. Rest comes easy at gorgeous stays like Falcons View, tucked into the foothills of the Ruahine Ranges, or The Last Church in Āpiti, a retreat that hums with character. Or let Rathmoy Estate welcome you with sweeping spaces and tranquility on the awa, offering equal parts luxury and inspiration.

Along The Country Road, you’ll find growers, makers, shopkeepers and hosts who all have a passion for the place, and it’s these people who bring the landscape to life.

So, the next time you’re planning a trip, resist the urge to find the quickest route. Pull out The Country Road map – which can be found at most information centres in the lower North Island – and look for those inviting roads that branch off State Highway 1. Take a chance on the slow satisfying rhythm of The Country Road, where experiences linger under your fingernails, fill your lungs and feed your soul.

Go on.
Take the detour.

ManawatuNZ.co.nz/TheCountryRoad

Flying doctor at your service

This doctor, pilot and community leader has built a life driven by connection, resilience and an unwavering sense of purpose.

On the edge of Palmerston North Airport stands a striking hangar filled with books, memorabilia and a Goldfinger aircraft. It is also a place of memory, purpose and deep personal meaning – a space where the many parts of Dr Dave Baldwin's life come together.

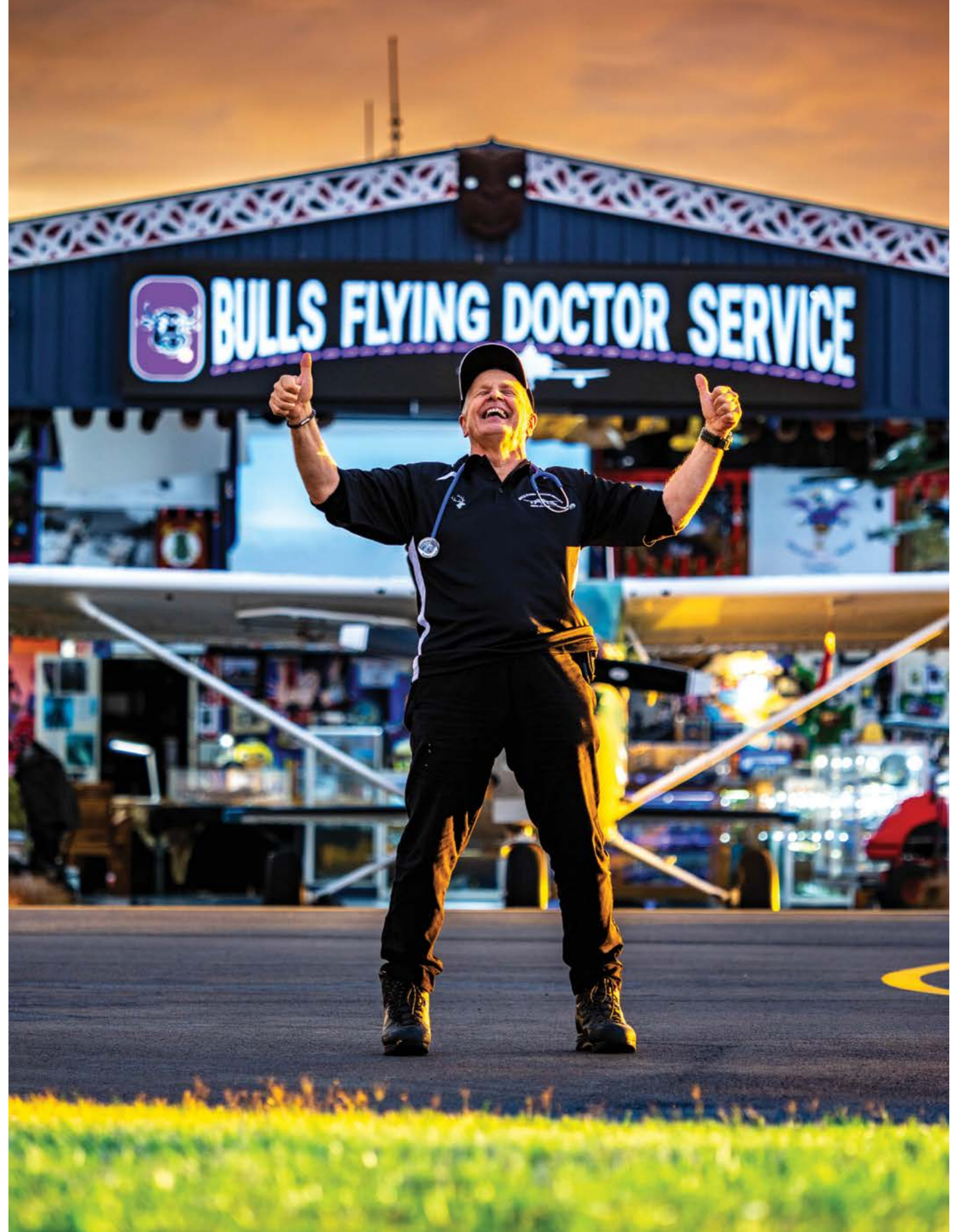
Ask Dave what he does, and he answers simply: he has three jobs. He works at Bulls Medical Centre, flies as a Flying Doctor, and serves as World President of the International Healthy Bastard Club. They are different roles, but spring from the same place: a life shaped by service, movement and connection ... and Palmerston North is where it all began.

Dave first attended Victoria University, but left before finishing his studies.

At the time, he did not think much of it. He found work, and got on with things.

His mother, however, saw it differently. She cried all the time, and at first, he could not understand why. He came from a humble background, where University had never seemed like a real possibility. For his mother, it was a chance she had never had, and she did not want him to let it go.

In the end, they made a deal. He would go back and finish his degree if she stopped crying. That agreement brought him to Massey University to study Bio-Chemistry before later continuing into medicine. It was a decision that changed his life. He met his wife Sandy on a night out at the Fitz....(apparently Sandy "stalked him"), and proposed after just three days.





Forty-eight years later, Sandy remains, as he puts it, “the best thing in my life.”

The “quiet” life

Dave settled in Bulls and built a medical practice around people. He thought he would have a quiet general practice and spend his spare time deer hunting. “That was the plan”. It did not last long. The hours quickly grew into 100-hour weeks, with weekends on call, sleeping on the floor and delivering babies. It was hard work, but he never saw it as anything other than a service to the community.

Over time, work led him into another role. Dave already had training in aviation medicine – and he had a plane: “Why not do what the Australians do and set up a flying doctor service?”

The Bulls Flying Doctor Service took flight. Dave now travels around the country, seeing pilots in their own hangars and airfields, assessing whether they are fit to fly. And if someone in the community needs help while he is there, he helps them too.

“That’s the best part of it,” he says. “People, mountains, medicine all in one.” For Dave, the mountains are not just scenery. They are a place of renewal. “The mountains ... that’s my temple. You can’t tell people how good it is. I feel it every time I am there.”

Lead Healthy Bastard

Alongside the medical centre and flying doctor work is the International Healthy Bastard Club, a project started after seeing too many people leave their health too late. The aim is simple: Connect with people who do not always respond to traditional health messages and deliver advice in a way that sticks. Eat properly. Keep moving. Surround yourself with good people. Have some kind of spiritual grounding. It is practical advice, delivered with Dave’s usual straight talk and humour.

The hangar brings all of this together. It is a consulting room, a meeting space and a place where speeches are made to students, Lions groups and cancer survivors. But for Dave, it is also something more personal. After the death of his son, he chose not to hide that loss. Instead, he made space for it. His son is present here, in the objects, the stories and the atmosphere of the place.

That has become part of the hangar’s meaning. It is a place of remembrance, but also of life. People who have lost someone come here and feel that connection. Grief is not erased here. It is lived with.

Palmerston North was Dave’s start, his family, his memories and his spiritual home. “I am not going anywhere.”

And in this hangar, all the threads of his his life—work, love, loss, and purpose—are held together in one place. ♡



To find out more about this interesting character, make sure you check out “**Doctor Dave - The Uncensored Healthy Bastards Story**” on YouTube.

Art in waiting

Hidden inside Te Manawa, a vast art collection hums with colour and history. Paintings spanning a century rest side by side, forming a living archive shaped by creativity and community.

A diverse visual conversation about mediums, perspectives, passion and purpose hangs on tall mobile racks in the collection store at Te Manawa Art Gallery.

Alongside paintings in the museum's art collection, cared for in a climate-controlled treasure room, Te Manawa Arts Society's collection tells its own story. It's a story that begins in 1959, with a group of dedicated art enthusiasts making their first steps towards creating a contemporary New Zealand collection.

Te Manawa Lead Collections Manager Talei Langley shows us a selection of paintings from the society's collection, which now holds about 1,200 pieces of art. It's an eclectic mix that speaks to the many generations the works span.

The luminescent orange tones of Mervyn Williams, *Born of Fire*, 1961, reach down to the earthy tones of Toss Woollaston's *Pah Hill, Riwaka*, 1969.

So different in style, but both holding the common thread of colour. From 1924, there is H Linley Richardson's *Writing the Invitation*, a homely scene contrasting with the society's latest acquisition, a Tom Armstrong painting, *Genesis – Studio*, 2024, which is playful and bright.

Together, these paintings reflect the collection's vast range, a kind of social commentary in their own right.

Te Manawa Arts Society Chairperson Shelley Turner says the society is really proud "to have such an extensive, diverse collection that does reflect New Zealand society". Quality art and artists connected to the Manawatū are represented in the collection, making the works available for locals and visitors to the region to enjoy and benefit from.



Tom Armstrong,
Genesis – Studio, 2024.
Collection of Te Manawa Arts Society Incorporated.
Courtesy of Te Manawa Museums trust.



Paul Dibble, Pacific Monarch, 1992. Collection of Te Manawa Arts Society Incorporated. Courtesy of Te Manawa Museums trust.

Together, these paintings reflect the collection's vast range, a kind of social commentary in their own right.

Home and abroad

Collection pieces do step out into the world and into the public gaze. Society member Jemma Cheer explains that the works, spanning many artforms, "get requested as loans with other galleries and so they do get to go travelling".

One of the most travelled works in the collection is Robyn Kahukiwa's Hinetitama, from 1980. Talei calls the painting "a superstar".

"She lives here at Te Manawa, but she has been overseas to Paris and Sharjah, and she's about to go to Sydney. She has been requested so often."

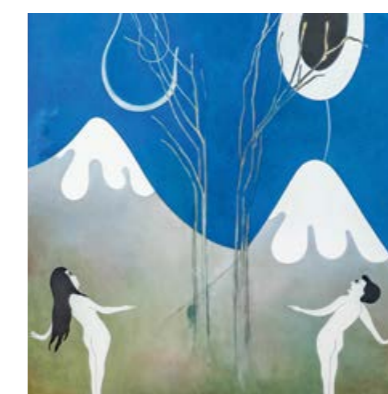
A current exhibition at Te Manawa Art Gallery, Brent Harris' Home and Back Again is an apt reflection of how the society's work helps get art into the public domain. The artist spent his first 22 years in Palmerston North and visited the gallery often, being inspired by particular pieces. For this exhibition, his paintings sit beside those of artists that help represent "the experiences that gave him courage to find beauty within discomfort". And many of those paintings are held in the art collection, including those by Gordon Walters, Colin McCahon and Tony Fomison.

Shelley says the exhibition is a reflection of the relationship the society has with Te Manawa. "It is a conversation and a connection, and we work together."

Sharing society

Anyone can become a member of the Te Manawa Arts Society. "We all share a passion for art, but we are from all walks of life," Shelly says. Membership means invites to all the gallery openings and special events, such as Show and Tell, where members bring a piece of art from their personal collections to share and talk about. "What resonates with you and why it's special. People have really enjoyed this event." Getting behind the scenes looks at art in collectors' homes is also a perk.

The society has a long history and, just like art, what it looks like has changed over the years. The 60s and 70s saw some significant acquisitions and a massive fundraising push for a new building. Artist sit-ins and potluck dinners at the gallery reflected those times. Now the society has a social media presence and is exploring how to share the collection in new ways. "We want there to be something for everyone," Jemma says. ♡



To find out how to become a member or get involved in the Te Manawa Arts Society, go to:

tmas.org.nz/membership

Follow the local trust on Facebook: TeManawaArtSociety or Instagram: @temanawaartsociety

Ticket to Tokyo: No passport required

Haru



Haru Japanese Restaurant's authentic Japanese dishes will have you coming back for more.

Forget the 12-hour flight. Cancel the jet lag. Loosen your belt half a notch in advance. Because tucked right in Palmy's city centre is a dining experience so good, it might just ruin all other Japanese food for you.

Welcome to Haru Japanese Restaurant where the food is fresh and authentic, the platters are impressively oversized (we're talking 60cm wide), and your self-control is ... well, optional.

Step in off the street and you're instantly transported. The lighting is soft and the atmosphere is buzzing, even on a Monday night. Before you can even take it all in, a cheerful "Irasshaimase!" greets you (that's "welcome" in Japanese).

Then comes the menu. You'll pretend you haven't spent the whole day at work with it open on your computer screen. So you turn to your table and say, "Should we just get a bit of everything?" (Correct answer: yes.)

The platters deliver exactly that – everything. Sashimi, sushi, mixed tempura, karaage chicken, skewers, edamame, agedashi tofu, takoyaki ... it just keeps going. Each bite somehow better than the last.

But talk to anyone who's been to Haru and they'll say "get the donuts!" Eight mochi donuts, soft yet crunchy, served with chocolate sauce and whipped cream, are next level. You won't find anything quite like them anywhere else.

After you've finished your meal, you'll be full, yes. But not overboard. Not greasy. Just perfectly satisfied, like you've done something very right with your evening.

Whether it's a girls' night fuelled by sake and a sizzling plate, a date night where you definitely said you'd share (and then didn't), or a family dinner where everyone leaves happy, Haru nails the vibe every time.





The name “Haru” means spring in Japanese. A season of warmth, comfort, and happiness.

Owners Ian and Grace chose it deliberately. “We want every customer to feel warmly welcomed from the moment they walk in,” Grace says.

Ian’s journey started young, dreaming of becoming a chef and working his way through culinary training into a lifelong career in kitchens. Together, he and Grace have created a place where people return again and again, not just for the food, but for how it makes them feel.

Their goal is to offer high-quality food, at a reasonable price, something they know isn’t always easy to find.

And judging by the full tables, happy regulars, and the occasional “we’ll just order one more thing” that turns into three ... they’ve absolutely nailed it. ☺



Haru
19 Broadway Ave,
Palmerston North Central.



@sammlenmedia



@clement_visuals



@pnknightsnz



@keeg_and_ken



@rachyoungcreativephotography



@untamedfpv



@temedia.nz



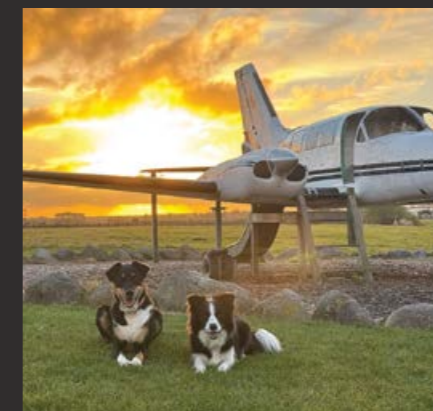
@galatic_kiwi



@jestingorge_de



@kevinbillsphotography



@g_i_georgia

We will select and showcase some of the best photos from social media in our next issue of Palmy Proud.

To be considered, use

#PALMY PROUD

