

A Citation for Ruth Mansell

Ruth's interest in Petone community issues began in 1972 when she was teaching at Petone Central School. She, another teacher, and a few mothers regularly took the junior children exploring around Petone to visit local parents' workplaces, find out what was going on, and think about how people used to live in the old buildings along the way. Lots of photos were taken and used the next day for the children learning to write and read their own stories. Along the way these children were beginning to understand that they were part of the Petone community.

Some of the special old houses, like the Udy homestead, were being demolished, and Ruth and other local people began campaigning for Petone's history to be recognised and valued and at the same time to inspire new community initiatives. In 1974 they took action to form the Petone Community Project with the YMCA, which employed a community worker to support the strong spirit of Petone people, old and young. Ruth extended the walks for the public to learn about Petone's historic buildings and the Project produced publicity calendars featuring Petone History.

Interest in better planning for Petone gathered momentum with the start of the Petone Planning Action Group in 1977, with Ruth one of the founding members. They were crucial in getting the Petone Borough Council to drop the idea of a ring road which would have demolished about 100 houses to make way for carparks. One of the houses saved was 6 Britannia Street and the Petone Community Project persuaded the Council to allow it to be used as a Community House from 1980. The Petone Community House has played a central role here for 34 years, and Ruth is now on the Board.

In the meantime, Jim and Ruth Mansell were active in better planning in Korokoro too. One morning in 1972 Ruth was watching her boys play soccer at Memorial Park when another mother, Doff Gentry, told her a friendly workman had let slip that the Council was about to start a new tip in Galbraiths Gully, a beautiful area with original native bush in the heart of Korokoro. The soccer mothers decided right then: "We'll have to stop them!" and started the Korokoro Conservation Group, which rustled up huge community support, and took legal action with an injunction against the Council which remained in place for about 20 years, until the Gully was finally declared a scenic reserve.

That was the start of a long series of actions to protect the Korokoro bush and the hilltop landscape and ridgelines, and eventually to work constructively with Councils for consultation and better planning. Korokoro people worked with Petone Planning Action Group on this, taking successful legal action as a last resort.

In 2001, the bush in Galbraiths Gully needed to be rescued from pest plants, so the Korokoro Environmental Group, KEG for short, was begun by local people including the Mansells to make this happen. KEG also got involved in negotiations with Transit over major roading issues, particularly the Dowse to Petone road, hoping to retain safe and convenient access for the community, and the Petone Grenada road – valiantly trying to protect the Korokoro Valley ecosystems and the natural hill landscape – and that's a battle they're still fighting!

It's impossible to record how much Ruth has done for our community. Her knowledge and expertise has always been and still is generously shared, she has encouraged and supported other people to now be involved and take over roles, and she is still contributing in every way she can with her time, energy, knowledge and wisdom.

Ruth you have voluntarily worked, researched and submitted with a lot of drive and commitment. You have saved parts of the past for future generations to enjoy and your work is valued by the community. The Rotary Club of Petone is pleased to award you a Community Paul Harris Award.

President:

8th April 2014