

Tauhara Centre Trust

Annual Report for the Year Ending June 30th, 2010

Introduction

With the passage of the Charities Act in 2005, charitable trusts such as our own were brought into quite a different regulatory environment from that prevailing in 1938 when our forerunner, the Mount Tauhara Estate Trust was formed in Havelock North on November 5th, with Ethelwyn Felkin, Reginald Gardiner and John von Dadelszen as the first Trustees. Never before has so much information about our Trust been so readily available to such a wide audience, through the medium of the internet.

And this is a significant step forward compared with earlier times, when 30-40 people would make the long journey to Taupo to turn up for the AGM each year. These committed enthusiasts were inevitably just a tiny fraction of the many thousands of people who have poured through the Centre's gates since it opened in 1977, and such a small representation of the many who have taken an active interest in the fortunes of the Centre over the years, and who continue to do so.

We wish to acknowledge the many, seen and unseen, who have made Tauhara what it is today, who represent so many different streams of thought, philosophy, spiritual attunement and religious persuasion, who make up the diversity of the extended Tauhara whanau. The current Trustees sincerely thank you for the interest that you take, and in this Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 2010, give you an account of the achievements to date, the ongoing challenges remaining, and the broad direction that we are moving towards in the immediate years ahead.

Overview January 2008 - June 2010

Board Members:

The present make-up of the Trust is relatively new, dating back to December 19th, 2007, when Stephen Grace joined Gina Allan-Evans and Louise Belcher-Breuer on the Board at a time of management changeover. Gina Allan subsequently resigned in January, 2008 after many years in service to the Trust, and since then the Board of two Trustees, working closely with the new Manager, Catherine Grace, has bent to the task of renewing much of the physical infrastructure of the Centre, and the internal systems that underpin its management.

Maintenance:

In 2008 and 2009 and into the first half of 2010, the primary focus has been to initiate a programme of renewal, tackling a great deal of maintenance, including: replacing the roof over the main Centre buildings, and re-cladding associated walls of the Common Room and Hall; refurbishing and re-organising the Library; treating moss that had accumulated over much of the surface of the Centre's tile rooves, and subsequent silicone sealing; replacing the many cracked and broken tiles on the dining room roof, re-pointing all the ridges, replacing rotten rafter ends and cladding of the exposed timber surfaces with painted flashings; adding a new tile roof over the reception office to dining room passageway, that had been plagued by leaks since the early

80's; re-doing the spouting and associated drains of the Centre on the south side of the offices; re-painting the foyer, foyer toilets and Common Room; a top-to-bottom repaint of the main Centre kitchen; completely refurbishing the Sanctuary (re-paint inside and out, new carpet); complete re-furbishment of the chalet (re-paint inside and out, re-carpeting, new kitchen flooring); upgrade and refurbishment of Kereru Lodge (formerly known as the Wwoofer Lodge, now used for guests coming on group or individual retreats);

Grounds and Gardens:

Concurrent with the refurbishment programme described above, the Board has focused on maintenance on the trees and hedges around the Centre. The area immediately below the chalet, which had lost much of its view down into Acacia Bay, was cleared sufficiently to restore the full view, which is now nothing short of magnificent. The hedges on the road frontage and along the western boundary had grown to such an extent that the organic gardens were failing, due to a lack of light, and the hothouse had become so overshadowed that seedlings failed to flourish. In a joint project with the Marshall family, the cypress hedge along the joint western boundary was completely removed, being replaced with a deer fence covered in wind break. In winter 2011, this entire fence-line will be given over to espaliered fruit tree culture, plus additional plantings of feijoas, hazelnuts and kiwifruit, in order to supply fresh, organic produce for use in the Centre kitchens in catering to guests.

The front hedge was also significantly lowered to prevent growth into high-tension powerlines running parallel to the hedge, and to relieve severe shading of the camp ground, which was making it very damp and unwelcoming. Initial fears that the hedge would not recover have proven to be unfounded, with vigorous growth returning and requiring ongoing care. Attempts to get the lines transmission authorities to underground or relocate the high tension lines (the lines cross over towards Tauhara at the western end of the Centre's frontage from the opposite side of the road, parallel our hedge, then move back across the road at the eastern end!) have proven to be fruitless. A new orchard (named *Harriot's Dream* in commemoration of one of the Trust's original founders, Harriot Felkin) was planted in front of Kereru Lodge in 2008, and this has already borne crops of feijoas, assorted fruit trees and hazel nuts.

A great deal of energy has gone into restoring the vigour of Tauhara's organic gardens, including: careful tending of the Centre's 4-bin organic composting system to produce a rich blend of compost that is restoring the humus in the soil of the plant beds (ornamental beds as well as raised vegetable beds); the hothouse has been restored to its full functionality, with the removal of the towering hedge alongside it, enabling it to bring on vegetable seedlings grown from seed, plus produce ongoing supplies of fresh salad greens for the kitchen throughout the year. Biodynamic preparations are being used each year to invigorate the soil. Across the road from Tauhara, land generously offered for use by Tanya Hillerby has enabled us to establish with Tanya a joint Rainbow Gardens project, which produces a steady stream of fresh fruit and vegetables used by Tauhara's kitchen in meals for guests. Surplus is transformed into a rich array of chutneys, pickles and jams.

Office Systems:

Mailing Database:

With the introduction of privacy legislation a few years back, the Centre has had to re-think how it communicates with people interested in what is happening, but keeping its contacts database current. Several old email lists were combined, then an email was sent out in 2009 to ask people if they were still interested in staying connected. A couple of follow-up emails were also sent. A new Access database was created to service this interest, which had been pared down from an initial email database of about 3,800 addresses, to about 800. As is inevitable in such situations, many people thought that intuitively, of course we must know that they are still interested, but not being equipped with such omniscience, Centre staff went about removing non-responders from the new database. This has left a few gaps, which we are attempting to fill with emails to individual people who have had a long association with and interest in Tauhara. A new self-regulating mail service has now been set up on the Centre's website, allowing people to join, modify their interests or leave the mailing database at will, thus honouring that part of our vision statement "Tauhara is a *free association* of people from throughout New Zealand and beyond, who come from all walks of life, all faiths, and who hold many diverse views",

Internet Access:

One of the great ironies of providing a retreat space where people can leave their busy work and private lives behind, is that people arrive at Tauhara still wanting to operate cellphones and have access to the internet "on tap". It depends, of course, on the type of retreat being run, some requiring internet access to carry out their purpose, others, such as the increasing number of silent, meditation retreats, asking participants to put all such distractions to one side for the duration of their time at Tauhara. This has not proven to be an easy challenge to resolve, and the Trust will need to come up with a suitable response in the year ahead. Laptop, notebook and smartphone usage at the Centre has increased so much in recent times that our monthly bandwidth can easily be gobbled up in a week. The free access currently offered is under review, and the Trust may be compelled to go to either a restricted or user pays system if this trend continues.

Newsletter:

Over the past two years or so, the Trust has put a great deal of energy into re-vitalising its quarterly journal, *Tauhara News*. This is now produced to a more predictable timetable, in March (autumn), June (winter), September (spring) and December (summer). A full-colour version is distributed by email to interested people at no charge, with a limited number of printed copies being distributed to folk willing to pay an annual subscription of \$25, and others available in the Centre's foyer for visitors wishing to connect with Tauhara. An effort is being made to reflect in the newsletter the huge diversity of groups, their methods of working and their belief systems. Past issues going back to December, 2007 have been made available through the Trust's website.

Promotion:

In addition to extra effort being put into the Newsletter and the mailing database, the Centre has bought space in publications that have both an internet and printed-copies-in-circulation presence. Two on trial at the moment are the *Corporate Events Guide*, and *The Directory of Residential Camps*. These will be reviewed in due course to check their effectiveness.

Getting the Help We Need and Can Afford:

One of the greatest challenges in running a retreat centre such as Tauhara, is that a minimum number of people is needed to carry out all the tasks associated with accommodating, feeding and supporting all the guests who come to stay, but the Centre operates in a very unpredictable environment. Bookings are remarkably variable in both group size, timing and particular needs (e.g some need minimal catering, others lavish), and from time to time some are cancelled at short notice. This makes staff planning very difficult at times. In addition, much of our help comes from volunteers, mainly international, who come to Tauhara to experience its special atmosphere in return for board and lodgings. Our dependence on them has made us vulnerable at times, as many arrive with no skills, language difficulties, and little life experience. This requires us to be constantly training and re-training volunteer helpers.

The Board has resolved to introduce a change from late 2010. International volunteers will be limited to 4 places, and a greater emphasis will be placed on the employment of local people working on a sole trader basis, as and when work is available. This approach will be reviewed in the last quarter of 2011, to assess its success or otherwise. Already there has been considerable interest in the employment opportunities this will offer. In order to fund this change, the Board will be offering some of its self-contained accommodation on a longer term basis to suitably attuned people in search of personal retreat space, and the income from this will be set aside to cover casual employment.

The Board has also seen demonstrated again and again over the past three years, the wisdom of bringing in outside qualified and experienced trades people to undertake maintenance and repairs, rather than expecting staff to be effective "jacks of all trades". With an aging infrastructure (e.g water mains and electrical reticulation), ongoing maintenance, quite major at times and apparently coming out of nowhere, remains a challenge to our budgeting efforts.

Financial

Annual Results:

The last 30 months have been a period of intense activity for the Trust, and this is reflected in the financial results for the last two financial years. The detail of these can be found on the Charities Commission website www.charities.govt.nz (search the register under Tauhara Centre).

At first sight, the observer may well be disappointed to see that the Trust recorded a deficit of \$82,613 for the year ending June 30th, 2009, and a deficit of \$43,893 for the year ending June 30th, 2010. But what was recorded was a change in our overall financial position only, depreciation being one of our greatest expenses, with the amount in deficit in each case reflecting the movement of funds set aside in Trust investments for the express purpose of funding ongoing maintenance, into the operating budget. In the year to June 30, 2010, a small operating surplus was actually achieved. The Board is working with its accountants to see if there is a better way of recording this movement in such a way as to prevent this distortion. As set out in *Tauhara: an introduction* published in 1989, "Tauhara is a non-profit organisation and prices are set at a level which will maintain the Centre." Indeed, the past two years have seen one of the most active periods of maintenance in the history of the Trust. As the main burden of maintenance on an

aging infrastructure recedes, the Board is budgeting for a surplus in 2010/11 and subsequent years to fund future maintenance requirements.

Accountants:

The Board has just completed its second year of having its year-end accounts prepared by Rachel Lamb and her associate accountants at Business Like (NZ) Ltd. in Manukau, and we have been delighted by their professional and "can do" approach to our needs, coupled with very reasonable fees. Having this professional help and advice at hand is highly valued by our Trust Board.

Banking:

During 2009, the Trust resolved to move all its accounts and investments away from foreign-owned or controlled banks, to Kiwibank, given the rapidly deteriorating international financial crisis, and the fact that Kiwibank had the backing of the NZ Government. This has proven to be a good decision.

Banklink Books:

During the 2009/10 financial year, the Board made the decision to transfer its accounts to Banklink Books, an online banking software package drawing data directly from our Kiwibank accounts. This has proven to be a very good system, allowing staff with little book-keeping experience to code all income and expenditure accurately, and to generate reports of a high standard for Management and Trustees to use in decision-making.

Looking Ahead:

Maintenance:

Although the main burden of maintenance catch-up is behind us, the Board still has a number of projects to undertake. The Hall has some major work to be carried out in the next five years, to correct some slumping of the roof. The interior of the Hall will be re-painted this year over the Christmas break. The Board is keen to extend the deck on Tui Lodge to provide additional break-out, outdoors space for groups using the Meeting Room. Tui Lodge is in need of a re-paint and new spouting. The laundry in Tui Lodge will be converted into an ensuite for the Manager's Flat, thus freeing up two back rooms for group usage, especially in conjunction with small-scale retreats based on Kereru Lodge (former Wwoofers' Lodge). The 1953 Massey-Ferguson tractor which has been used at Tauhara ever since the current site was purchased back in the early 70's, is in urgent need of replacement.

Sustainability Project:

With the cumulating effects of climate change, the Board is keener than ever to reduce its exposure to progressive rises in energy costs, mainly electricity in the case of the Centre. Consultants have been engaged to advise on options for conversion of all water heating to a combination of passive solar panels, solar tubes, and wetback woodburning stoves. If we are able to proceed with this Sustainability Project, financing will possibly be by way of a low interest loan paid over a short term.

The Trust is fortunate in having good supplies of firewood growing on its bank, with over 100 *eucalyptus nitens* being planted back in the early 90's now being progressively felled. People who have visited the Centre over the past two years will have noted the stacks of firewood inside the front hedge, undergoing full drying before being stored in our firewood sheds at the end of this summer. The ongoing plan is to coppice all our firewood trees to provide a steady supply of fuel for our many clean-burning woodstoves. As part of our Sustainability Project, it is intended that the one and two-bedroom cottages, which used to have potbelly stoves with wetbacks providing water heating, will have new woodburning fireplaces restored to provide a low-cost cosy environment in the winters to come.

The Board will also push ahead with progressive storage of rainwater for use on the Centre's extensive gardens. The current supply of potable water supplied by Taupo District Council is currently under stress due to development on the west side of Taupo, so it is incumbent on the Board to anticipate restrictions, especially if the growing effects of climate change continue. There is also some uncertainty posed by the confluence of solar magnetic storms and sunspots in late 2012, which needs to be factored into our strategic planning.

Another of our ongoing intentions is to see the fulfillment of Harriot Felkin's vision of a Centre which uses Biodynamic, organic and Permaculture principles in the way that it cares for its nearly 5 hectares of land. These methods of nurturing the earth and producing fruit and vegetables which, in turn, nourish the people who live on them, have never been more relevant than now. There is the possibility of a strategic partnership in the near future for the Board to take a lead in this way.

Conclusion:

The Board wishes to express its deep appreciation to all the people who have made, and continue to make, Tauhara Centre a place of relevance in the modern world. To its dedicated staff, volunteers, suppliers and maintenance folk, and especially to all the people who continue to hold Tauhara in their hearts, who come and stay at the Centre, or simply those who energetically support the Centre from a distance, glad that such a place exists for the upliftment of humankind, the Board offers its heartfelt thanks. Namaste.