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OPOTIKI NEWS

No. 73 Tuesday, September 20, 2016

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The dentists at the beach!

Landowners paid \$140k for manuka

SVEN CARLSSON

A 20-year vision paid off for NZ Manuka Group founder Phil Caskey when a family of East Coast landowners he worked with started crying.

The tears came after Mr Caskey presented them with a \$147,000 cheque, his first payment for one year's use of 1500 acres of Tikitiki manuka shrub land.

"The guy they worked with before paid them \$7000 annually," he said. "There were tears in the room."

Almost 30 years ago, Mr Caskey started using honey mixed in with deer by-products, before settling on manuka honey "because it was cheap".

He started with deer in the early 80s, capturing the animals live in the Fox Glacier area, but eventually sold his deer interests in 1995.

The 20 years that followed were a mixture of profound discoveries, illness and "financial ruin" through a failed tourism business venture on Stewart Island, followed by a resurgence and the building of what is now a 150-person strong company.

Having set up a company dedicated to manuka honey in 1996, Mr Caskey and his wife Sharan soon became aware of the work conducted by Waikato University professor Peter Molan.

"He had discovered the properties of manuka honey, but he struggled to get the world to accept it," Mr Caskey said.

Meanwhile, residents on the East Coast were cutting down manuka bush as fast as they could, in an effort to make room for land use that would pay.

"We organised hui, asking them to stop, but they said they needed income," Mr Caskey said.

"We then developed fair-share policies for the land use, as a protection for the production of high-quality honey that we envisaged."

Next, the Caskeys and professor Molan tried to figure out a way of raising awareness of the manuka honey's healing properties.

"In those days there was no social media and we realised that tourism was our best bet," Mr Caskey said. "We start-

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> OPOTIKI student Hannah Dodds has won the Eastern Bay primary schools' public speaking competition.

Photo Sven Carlsson OB1754-01

Hannah claims Eastern Bay speech-making crown

SVEN CARLSSON

AFTER winning the Opotiki district competition in June, Hannah Dodds has now claimed the Eastern Bay primary school speech-making crown.

St Joseph's Catholic School principal Raewyn

Clark said she was really pleased that Hannah

had gone on to win in the year 7 and 8 competition, held in Whakatane last Wednesday.

With her speech titled "Were the good old days really that good?" Hannah won against competitors

from across the Eastern Bay.

Hannah said she wanted to take her speech-making skills further when she started college next year.

"I will start at the Epsom Girls Grammar School in Auckland in February," she said.



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Vision pays off with \$140k difference

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ed telling the story in Australia and the UK."

The strategy was successful and after research at Waikato University showed that the manuka honey could be used to combat flesh-eating disease, the number of listeners began to skyrocket.

"We travelled the world promoting wound care products," Mr Caskey said.

"At a conference in Las Vegas, Peter Molan was the keynote speaker and our stand was the busiest."

Mr Caskey spent half a year in the UK, marketing wound care products, and after undergoing rigorous auditing processes, the manuka-honey-based invention was classed as a "medical device".

However, Mr Caskey became seriously ill in 2002, in the midst of a strong market growth period, and the eight years of health problems were to coincide with the financial troubles down south, and the Caskeys sold their interests to Comvita.

In 2010, a new iteration of the vision began to present itself.

"I spoke to Wira Gardiner about the

East Coast and NZ Manuka," Mr Caskey said.

"However, after some time our visions began to diverge and I found a new partner in Brisbane."

Currently in the process of planting four million plants at a 300 hectare property at Te Kaha, the New Zealand Manuka Group now employs 150 staff in five different locations.

Chief executive Karl Graddon said the Opotiki Factory Road premises were being upgraded and expanded.

Also producing medical and health products from seaweed and kanuka, the company was investing in research to continually improve the products and find new uses for the base materials.

"We have a strong science team in Opotiki," he said.

"Our Opotiki expansion includes the building of a new laboratory."

Mr Caskey said employment opportunities created by the NZ Manuka Group were "not limited to beekeeping".

Jobs created in the communities included chemical process work, marketing and sales, science, administrative and logistical work, as well as executive positions.

"We try to fulfil all jobs locally," he said.

This helps develop the land and it feeds back into the community.
For many people, this has created an opportunity for them to return home.

PHIL CASKEY



> **PRODUCTION manager and Opotiki man Evan Gebert has been with the company for close to four years, and chief executive Karl Graddon says the company hires local staff when it can.**

OB1753-04

"Opotiki jobs go to Opotiki residents in the first instance."

Mr Caskey said his company had created more choice for land use in the East Coast area.

"We could not have done this without the people, Eddie Matchitt for instance, and the communities supporting us," he said.

A fair-share system would see 35 per cent of the profit going back to the land owner.

"This helps develop the land and it feeds back into the community," Mr Caskey said.

"For many people, this has created an opportunity for them to return home."

What was originally considered a bottom-of-the-barrel honey has transformed into a high-demand medical product, and while it may assist a 10-year-old boy with serious burn injuries in the UK or anywhere else, it does not create problems locally.

"Bees don't leave footprints," Mr Caskey said.

Landtalk



Want to learn more about nutrient management on your farm?

For some years now, farmers, dairy farmers in particular have been diligently fencing their streams and often planting the fenced off banks. Stream crossings are generally better managed and often replaced with bridges. Managing dairy shed effluent disposal has also improved considerably over the last decade. All this work has had a positive effect on the quality of water in many of our streams with sediment and bacteria levels dropping. But as recent events elsewhere in the country have shown, there are less visible ways that nutrients and bacterial contaminants get into our streams and groundwater. These pathways are a little more difficult to fix.

The Bay of Plenty Regional Council is committed to helping farmers develop solutions for their farms and to front foot some of the challenges which just keep coming. To this end, we are hosting free nutrient management seminars. Well known independent farm consultant, Alison Dewes, will provide some insight into nutrient management plans, pathways of nutrient loss and possible solutions that could even save you money.

Dairy farmers will benefit most from this seminar, but drystock farmers will find it useful too.

Awakeni Events Centre: Wednesday 28th September, 9.30 – 12.30.

Galatea War Memorial Hall: Monday 3rd October, 9.30 – 12.30.

It's free! And we'll provide you with a generous morning tea. Please RSVP to Mieke Kapa at mieke.kapa@boprc.govt.nz or on 0800 884 881, ext 9534. If you'd like to find out more, give her a call.

You can see more of what Alison has to offer at www.tipuwhenua.com.

Written by Tim Senior, Bay of Plenty Regional Council land management officer Opotiki, 0800 884 881 ext 6010, tim.senior@boprc.govt.nz

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OB1753-03

> **NZ Manuka Group chief executive Karl Graddon and founder Phil Caskey say the company is in an expansion phase, strongly supported by its fair-share policies.**

Photos Sven Carlsson OB1753-01



> **SCIENTIST Gayani Gamage is one of the staff members working on product refinement and expansion.**