

Vision driven by humbleness

Russell Fredric

There are many words you could use to describe the vision and culture of those who work for the NZ Manuka Group. Boastful is not one of them.

When *Business Central* spoke with the group’s chief executive officer, Karl Gradon, who has worked for the business for a year, the first word he used to describe the qualities of founder Phil Caskey was ‘humble’. Phil established New Zealand’s first specialist manuka honey company 20 years ago.

“The amazing thing about this organisation is the humility Phil carried into forming the company and creating partnerships based on a real wish to see all stake-holders thrive,” says Karl.

“He was adamant that land-owners, in particular, would receive much greater return from the money the manuka honey products generated.

“This was a real shift from what had traditionally happened, and it really speaks to the qualities of the man.”

Last year this humble and hard-working company – which in the space of three years, has grown in capacity to now produce two-thirds of the country’s manuka oil from plantations owned by East Cape Iwi – won Export Bay of Plenty’s Page Mcrae excellence in exporting Innovation award.

The award recognised the company’s achievements in innovative strategies and practices. The judges were particularly impressed by its “matrix of innovative science, an ethos of environmental sustainability and smart investment in know-how and people capability”.

Phil was also presented with the Beca export achievement award. Presented each year to an individual in an export business, this is often referred to as the award for the unsung heroes of the business community.

The judges noted “Phil’s vision and determination to establish a business that has a real commitment to benefiting communities everywhere, is a significant achievement in its own right”.

“Our Fair Share programme is an open and transparent scheme that gives a percentage of the income gained from the manuka honey and oil back to the land-owner,” says Phil.

As demand for firstly manuka honey and subsequently manuka-oil products grew, the



Phil McCaskey, who founded New Zealand Manuka Group 20 years ago, has received an award for his vision and determination.

need for beekeepers and land-owners naturally increased, creating the opportunity to form partnerships.

“It’s a win-win when the way you operate builds community, creates employment and gives Ngati Porou people a reason to return home and be part of innovative developments taking place on their whenua,” says Karl.

Research and practice have shown just how potent manuka oil is in killing the bacteria that causes acne, the MRSA super-bug and ring worm.

The company’s flagship brand for its manuka oil is Melora, and Karl says the aim is to continue to lead the market in formulating manuka-based medical devices and applications.



• To page 48

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‘Visitor experience’ planned as a tribute to manuka

• From page 47

One of its latest initiatives is to share the story of manuka with public. It goes back centuries to when the plant’s medicinal properties and its power to heal and protect, were innately understood by the tangata whenua.

“We want to tell this story and tap into the history in a hands-on interactive way,” says Karl.

A new “visitor experience” hub is being established next to the Skyline luge facility in Rotorua.

It’s a \$30-million joint venture between the Rotohokahoka D North 4D Trust and NZ Manuka Group, and is expected to attract more than 180,000 visitors a year. The development will be built on 20 hectares of land owned by the trust.

Trust chairman Paora Tapsell says the trust has been waiting a long time to see the land put to good use.

Phil Caskey came up with the concept about 16 years ago and says securing a partnership with the trust to go ahead and develop the tribute to the history and place of manuka honey is very exciting.

New Zealand Manuka Group has also gained recognition for its record as an employer. It received the Spark Business Bay of Plenty work/life balance employer of the year award at the 2016 Horizon Business Excellence Awards run by the Eastern Bay of Plenty Chamber of Commerce.

“We have always held the vision to be the employer of choice and to have this confirmed through the award process is an achievement we are very proud of,” says Karl.



A new visitor experience hub is being planned in Rotorua. We want to tell this story and tap into the history in a hands-on interactive way.

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A way of managing risk

As responsible employers seeking to manage risks in the workplace, New Zealand Manuka Group brought in The Drug Detection Agency for a full package of policy design, training and education, and testing for its staff. The Drug Detection Agency licensee for Tauranga, Rotorua, and Taupo Errol Brain says he began working with New Zealand Manuka about two years ago, when the company decided to hit the ground running after the new Health and Safety at Work Act came into play. “It talked about managing risk, and drugs and alcohol are identified as a risk in the workplace,” he says. “As a good employer, New Zealand Manuka made the decision to have a policy around it, which we were able to help them design, they wanted to educate all their managers and staff around it, and then they also made the decision to start testing.” Errol says the important part of policy design is making sure it reflects the business and what it is trying to achieve. “New Zealand Manuka was quite unique, as a company that manufactures and exports honey,” he says. “They have offices in Whakatane and a factory and offices in Opotiki, as well as lots of beekeepers travelling in and out.

ability to deal with drugs and alcohol in the workplace.” He says a policy serves to inform business owners, managers, and staff about the company’s stance, as well as laying out the process around testing and what happens if there is a positive result. The Drug Detection Agency spoke with key personnel from New Zealand Manuka and also at some health and safety workshops run by the company, educating staff on minimising risks, the testing process including pre-employment testing, post incident testing, and random testing, and what to do if they suspected someone was under the influence at work. The Drug Detection Agency was established in New Zealand 12 years ago, and now includes offices across New Zealand and Australia. The company invests heavily in research and development to keep up with emerging trends in drugs and new testing methods. Errol has been a licensee for four years. His former workplace was the rugby pitch and as a professional rugby player, he was drug tested 26 times. “I think it’s a really good thing,” he says. “If you look at it as a health and safety issue, making sure you look after your people, that’s why I wanted to be involved.”

“That’s a very different scenario and they needed to make sure they had the