

# CORRIDOR

## She Didn't Plan To Stay This Long

Nicky Horsbrough's journey from reluctant real estate newcomer to award-winning agent driven by community impact.

### High Performance Is Built, Not Hoped For

Why performance comes from structure, not just effort and how the programme aims to build it.

### A Stop at Shed 16 and a Glimpse Into Kaukapakapa's Flax Legacy

A stop at Shed 16 uncovers Kaukapakapa's flax-harvesting history, and harakeke's surprising modern comeback.

### The Name on the Sail

Mark's story behind BackingYou, and why he believes in backing people over ads.

### The Job Starts Long Before the Paint Comes Out

Painter Ritchie Hoko on thirty years in the trade, and why preparation always beats the paint job itself.





North West Country  
Business Association

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Front Cover Image Credit: Andy Styn  
(<https://unsplash.com/>)



## Editor's Note

**W**elcome to our first issue of Corridor, our dedicated quarterly magazine for North West Country, and the start of an amazing resource for the whole community.

Corridor represents so many things for us; it is the backbone of our linked communities through State Highway 16, and it is the rivers that traverse our beautiful rural areas linking us to the Kaipara Harbour. Not only does Corridor refer to our physical connections, but it also covers our strong spirit and the bonds that tie us together as a proud community.

You are going to read some great stories about local heroes, inspirational innovations, funny anecdotes, as well as learn about our rich and diverse history.

One story that goes to my heart is the re-emergence of harakeke (flax) fibre as a high-tech commodity. Businesses are using the muka for sustainable alternatives to fibreglass, as high-energy capacitors that perform better than standard batteries, as well as a range of textiles and brushes. If you visit one of our best local establishments, Shed 16 in Kaukapakapa, you will see that the area had an extensive harakeke population and many flax mills (although we certainly couldn't commend the immigrants of the time for following sustainable business practices).

This all makes me ponder how different our landscapes would be now if we retained our native environments and produced fibre products with a long-term view of the world.

While Corridor is sponsored by North West Country Business Association, we are making sure that the whole community benefits from the publication. Check out upcoming events as well as discounts being offered by our local businesses to all of the community.

Happy reading!

Danielle Hancock  
North West Country Business Association  
General Manager



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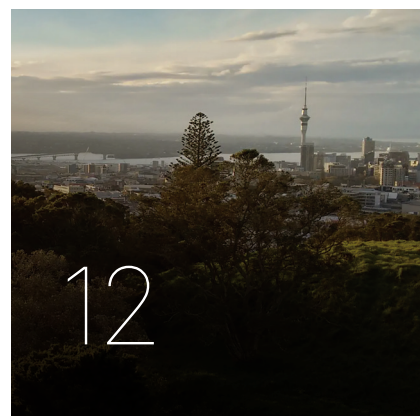
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## Chair's Column

**A** few weeks ago, I sat in a room with a group of local business owners. No slides, no bull, just honest conversation. One owner said, "We've got the work, we just don't have the structure." Another said, "I'm busy all day, but I don't feel like I'm getting ahead."

That is the gap we are here to help close.

Last quarter I spoke about vision, emergency support, and building the North West as a destination. This quarter is about capability. Because resilience is not just how you respond when things go wrong. It is how productive your business is when things are going right.

That is why we are launching our High Performance Programme, in partnership with The Better SMB.

Applications have closed for our first cohort, which begins in July. The programme runs for nine months and is limited to 15 businesses. It is designed to lift performance, not just activity.

The goal is simple. Stronger, higher performing businesses create stronger jobs, stronger families, and a stronger region.





# Shelly Beach Community Committee

**T**he Shelly Beach Community is quietly developing into a vibrant small township, home to many diverse families, young and old. On any day of the week, families and friends enjoy the beautiful beach surroundings and the warm and friendly community vibe. Just ask the many boaties and fishers who use the fabulous wharf, the children playing on the magnificent foreshore playground, and the inquisitive tourists who make their way down Shelly Beach Road to see the brilliance of Kaipara Harbour. There is more to Shelly Beach than you know!

A small band of volunteers is working behind the scenes to support and empower the local residents of Shelly Beach to solve some of their shared problems, foster greater social connection, and improve community wellbeing. The Shelly Beach Community Committee was originally established in 2024 in response to local residents' concerns regarding the illegal camping on the foreshore and the closure of the Shelly Beach Café: two issues that continue to plague the community regardless of the endless work behind the scenes.

Although a smaller community in the Rodney Local Board area, the Shelly Beach Community is embracing the opportunity to receive equitable outcomes for residents. The Committee has identified that their small rural community must receive tailored support, not big, urban-scaled model solutions that do not work in their smaller context. For instance, the persistent illegal camping in Shelly Beach has created ongoing safety,

environmental, and community wellbeing impacts. Ideally, a dedicated seasonal compliance presence from 7pm–7am and consistent signage would align with the Local Board Plan's goals for safe public spaces, climate-resilient environments, and equitable service delivery for rural communities.

As this would be a community-led initiative, having a local Shelly Beach resident trained and employed to undertake this community role would provide significant advantages. A local compliance officer would have the knowledge of patterns, hotspots, and behaviours that external wardens do not possess. They could immediately respond and reduce delays that currently allow illegal camping to escalate. A local employee would be directly invested in the wellbeing of the area.

The return of the Shelly Beach Café Building to the community is a huge concern for the local Shelly Beach residents. Ratepayers invested over \$300,000 into the Shelly Beach café building, yet it remains locked and inaccessible. The return of the building to community stewardship under a formal agreement would be the best solution, delivering an equitable outcome for locals. Shelly Beach has no community hub, and a dedicated facility would mean members of the Shelly Beach Community could organise and deliver the types of community-led initiatives they aspire to for the growth and wellbeing of residents.

Find out more about the Shelly Beach Café's journey by turning to page 22.



# A Stop at Shed 16 and a Glimpse Into Kaukapakapa's Flax Legacy

**O**n a recent wander through Kaukapakapa, we decided, almost on a whim, to pull in at a local watering hole, Shed 16. What we found was far more than just a place to eat. This beautifully restored country pub welcomed us with hearty food, good drinks, and the sort of warm, genuine service that makes you want to stay awhile. But it was the walls, lined with stories of the district's past, that truly captured our attention.

Among them was a striking photograph of workers standing proudly beside a towering stack of harvested harakeke. One familiar local name appeared alongside the image: William Henley of Henley House (positioned second from the right). Thanks to contributions from A. Jordan and Te Awaroa Museum, the image offered a vivid window into a chapter of Kaukapakapa's history that is easy to overlook today.

Harakeke, or New Zealand flax, has long been regarded by local iwi as a taonga species, valued not only for its fibre, but also for its medicinal properties. Traditionally, it was used for everything from weaving to treating ailments such as infections and parasites. However, with the arrival of European settlers during the height of international sea travel,

harakeke took on a new economic significance. Its strong muka fibres became highly sought after for rope-making, feeding a growing global demand.

In those early days, harvesting flax served a dual purpose. It generated income while helping settlers clear land for agriculture. Sustainability was not a consideration at the time, and as farming expanded, the once-abundant harakeke fields gradually disappeared from the landscape.

Standing there in Shed 16, it was hard not to imagine what the area must have looked like at its peak: vast swathes of flax stretching across the land, and teams of workers cutting, stacking, and preparing it for market.

Yet, in a twist that feels both timely and hopeful, harakeke is making a remarkable comeback.

Today, this traditional plant is at the centre of cutting-edge innovation. Companies such as Christchurch-based KiwiFibre are developing advanced composite materials from harakeke, offering sustainable alternatives to carbon fibre and fibreglass.



These materials are already being explored for use in products like surfboards, vehicle components, and sporting equipment, bringing together strength, flexibility, and a significantly lower environmental footprint.

At the same time, researchers are pushing the boundaries even further. In laboratories across New Zealand, scientists are investigating how harakeke fibres can be transformed into nano-engineered carbon materials for use in supercapacitors, which are high-performance energy storage devices. It is remarkable to think that a plant once harvested by hand in Kaukapakapa paddocks could now play a role in the future of clean energy technology.

Leaving Shed 16, one lingering thought remained: what might Kaukapakapa look like today had those flax fields endured? The past suggests an industry, the present points to innovation, and perhaps, just perhaps, the future holds an opportunity to reconnect the two.





This image shows the results of a flax harvest, with local man William Henley (of Henley House), second from right. Thanks to A. Jordan and Te Awaroa Museum for the imagery and information.

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**LOCAL PROPERTY EXPERTS**

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# Harcourts

The Difference





# Get Ahead With an MTF Finance Business Loan and Achieve Your Goals!

**T**he economic backbone of our great country is small-to-medium businesses, working in and for our mighty communities of all sizes. Whether you're a tradie looking to start out on your own, or an established local business needing some new assets fast, MTF Finance lending specialists can help you get ahead with the right tools, technology, vehicles, and more.

We caught up with Gerrie Cashmore, from MTF Finance Kumeu and a member of the Kumeu TNG business group, about business loans and the difference they can make.

## Making Change Happen

A secured or unsecured business loan can finance new equipment, vehicles, tools, office equipment, and machinery. So, if you're dreaming of it, then a business loan can help you get the ball rolling. That's the message from Gerrie, having seen the change that business loans have made to her community.

Whether you're a sole trader wanting to start a business or well-established and ready to grow, a business loan can help you reach your goals.

## So What Kind of Assets Can Be Put On a Loan?

A lot. Gerrie's team has financed such diverse assets as walk-in fridges, arborist equipment, signwriting equipment, computers and office equipment, lots of diggers and excavation equipment, food trailers, vehicles, and more.

"We had one client who wanted to start a food truck business as a side gig at the weekend, we helped with the purchase and fit out of the trailer, and the client is now running this business full time. It's also really rewarding when we can be part of that journey to success."

## So Who Can Get a Business Loan?

We talk with a huge variety of people and like to say "yes" to as many of them as possible.

"The ability to get a loan often largely comes down to an individual or business's statement of position and some due diligence at our end, plus we take time to understand the client's knowledge of the industry and their plan going forward."

"Even someone who has a job and wants to start a side gig, or has recently become redundant but has a skillset that they're going to apply, we're happy to look at the case and see what we can organise. We like to look at the person who's applying, not just the balance sheet."

## How Does an MTF Finance Loan Compare With a Bank?

Lending rates will be competitive no matter whether you're looking for a loan via your bank or a specialist lender. But Gerrie's quick to point out that rates only make up part of the lending picture.

"We're a cell phone call away, You can pick up the phone or walk into our office and talk with the person who's going to be the one to approve your loan and work with you long-term. We're part of our communities, and that means that we're really invested in seeing our locals grow their businesses, because it helps lift up everyone."

Plus, most MTF Finance loans are approved on the same day that we get the information. Which makes a huge difference when you are trying to buy an asset or have important deadlines to meet. It's a little thing, but it makes a huge difference."





July 26th  
Salsa & Bachata Dance Course



July 28th  
Creative Matters After-School Art



August 9th  
Tough Guy and Gal Challenge

# Events Calendar

## JULY

**25**  
**R18 Hilarious Comedy Hypnosis Show – Adult Fun Guaranteed!**

Kumeū Community Hall  
7pm – 8.30pm

**26**  
**Salsa & Bachata Pure Beginners & Improvers Level One 6 Week Course**

The Dance Shed  
11am – 1.30pm

**28**  
**Creative Matters After-School Art - Term 3**

Huapai District School  
3pm – 5pm

## AUGUST

**09**  
**Adult Tough Guy and Gal Challenge PLUS Tough Gal Teams**

Kumeū Showgrounds  
8am – 1pm

**09**  
**Auckland Family Tough Guy and Gal Challenge**

Kumeū Showgrounds  
10am – 2pm

**16**  
**Kumeū Kids Market**

Kumeū Community Hall  
10am – 1pm





Business:  
**Harcourts The Difference**

Location:  
**Helensville /  
Northwest Auckland**

Contact:  
[nicky.horsbrough@harcourts.co.nz](mailto:nicky.horsbrough@harcourts.co.nz)

What they do:  
Residential and lifestyle property sales, along with professional property management services, across Helensville, Kaukapakapa, Parakai, South Head, Waimauku, and the surrounding areas.

Business Feature \_\_\_\_\_

# She Didn't Plan To Stay This Long

Nicky Horsbrough walked into real estate to cure boredom. Eighteen years later, Helensville is better for it.



**L**ong before the awards and industry recognition, Nicky Horsbrough was a stay-at-home mum looking for something manageable.

She wasn't searching for a calling when she stepped into real estate in 2008. Just something low pressure.

Eight months later, she still hadn't made her first sale.

"I thought, this is not low pressure," she laughs. "But I'm not a quitter."

She didn't quit. She stayed. And the timing, right in the middle of the global financial crash, turned out to be the best education she could have had.

Today, Nicky owns Harcourts The Difference in Helensville. She's the top-performing agent in her office and has transacted more than \$145 million worth of property across the northwest.

Yet ask Nicky what she's proudest of, and none of those numbers come up.

"It was always about the impact," she says, without thinking twice. "Not just closing a deal, what difference are you actually making in someone's life?"

It takes about thirty seconds of talking to Nicky to realise she means it. She tells a story about a woman she helped navigate both selling and buying. The woman wasn't sure what she could afford or where she wanted to land. Nicky didn't push her. She gave honest advice and let her make the call.

"I'm not here to tell people what to do," she says. "I'm here to give them the information and let them decide. That's how you build trust."

That same instinct is what led her to the board table at North West Country, even though she'd never call it a plan. Someone needed to organise a local business event, she put her hand up, and one thing led to another. That's more or less how Nicky operates.

She's clear about what drew her in and what keeps her there.

"I'm not interested in sitting around a table talking about things," she says. "I want to actually do something."

That mindset shapes how she leads. Nicky asks the uncomfortable questions, challenges decisions that don't make sense, and redirects energy toward what will actually matter.

Earlier this year, this willingness to act produced something tangible. Harcourts The Difference secured a \$5,000 grant from the Harcourts Foundation to fund a generator for the Emergency Business Hub. It's practical infrastructure that could matter a great deal when things go wrong in a rural community. The idea came through the business association. Nicky helped make it happen.

It's the kind of work that rarely makes headlines, but quietly makes Helensville a stronger place to live.

A few weeks later, she found herself at Eden Park accepting the Harcourts Foundation Inspiration Award for the Northern Region, an honour that came as a surprise.

"It's not why we do it," she says. "But it means a lot when the work gets noticed."

The award recognises community contribution rather than sales. That distinction matters to Nicky. The money behind it comes from a portion of every sale her team makes, a model where doing good business and giving back aren't two separate things.

If Nicky could go back and tell her 2008 self anything, it would be to be braver earlier. She missed opportunities because she played it safe. Growth, she now knows, lives outside the comfort zone.

"Fear costs you things," she says. "I wish I'd understood that sooner."

In the end, Nicky hopes her story leaves people with one simple reminder:

"That one person can make a difference. You don't have to be running a big company or winning awards. Just be kind. Step up. Be the best part of someone's day."

It sounds simple. Coming from Nicky, it sounds like something she actually lives by.





# High Performance Is Built, Not Hoped For

By Andrew Howard

**T**here is a myth in small business that performance is about effort. Work harder, stay later, push through. It works for a while. Then it doesn't.

High performance is not about effort alone. It is about productivity, structure, discipline, and clarity that turn effort into output.

Most businesses do not struggle because there is no demand. They struggle because the business underneath the work is not built to convert effort into results. Pricing is inconsistent. Systems are patchy. Cash flow is reactive. Decision making is late.

So we start there.

This programme is practical and designed to run alongside your business over nine months. The focus is real performance gains, not short bursts of activity.

Participants will work through a structured framework with weekly discipline, real numbers, and real conversations.



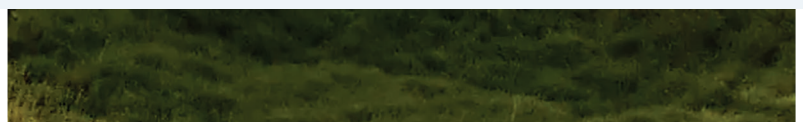
## There Are Four Areas We Will Concentrate On.

**Clarity.** What are you actually trying to build? Not just revenue, but a business that produces consistent output with less wasted effort. That means understanding margins, costs, and drivers of profit.

**Control.** Systems and processes that allow the business to run consistently. Not hero-based performance. Repeatable performance that improves efficiency.

**Capacity.** Building a team and structure that increases output without increasing owner workload. This is where performance is either won or lost.

**Consistency.** Small actions, done every week. Pipeline activity, financial visibility, team cadence. Not bursts of effort, but rhythm.





The patterns we see locally are consistent. Most businesses carry too much complexity. Too many products, too many exceptions, too many workarounds. All of which reduce performance.

Most do not have clear, weekly visibility on their numbers. Most solve problems late, not early.

And almost all are capable of more than they are currently achieving with the same inputs. That is the opportunity.

Our partnership with The Better SMB is deliberate. They bring proven frameworks and tools. We bring local context and accountability. Together, it works.

This is not about creating perfect businesses. It is about unlocking performance. More predictable, more profitable, and less dependent on the owner carrying the load alone.

There is also a wider play. As businesses lift performance, the impact flows beyond their own four walls. More value per hour worked flows through to wages, investment, and growth. That is how you lift a region. Not through one big idea, but through many businesses becoming higher performing, consistently.

It also connects directly to our broader work. A higher performing business is more resilient when disruption hits. It has the discipline and systems to respond faster.

## Insights for North West Country

**Collaborating with The Better SMB and enabling group members to get access to the online platform, PerformIQ, enables businesses to understand the metrics of their business. As more members join, North West Country will be able to view anonymised and aggregated data about our region. This gives us a starting baseline so we know how we are performing as a whole. Then the work starts, and we are a key part of that. As we see trends, we can adjust our support to members to where you need it most. This makes us agile and a higher performing organisation. Through this effort we hope to lift performance in our region 35% by 2035.**

And a region full of well run businesses creates a better experience for visitors. Better service, better consistency, better reputation. This is all connected.

The June cohort is limited to 15 businesses by design. That is not about exclusivity. It is about ensuring focus, accountability, and peer value. With enough demand, we will open another cohort by the end of 2026. We are looking for owners who are open to challenge, prepared to do the work, and willing to commit over the full nine months.

This is not a passive programme. It requires time, honesty, and follow through.

But for the right businesses, it will create real change. If you are reading this and thinking, "That sounds like us," then it probably is. Most owners are closer than they think. They need structure, support, and pressure in the right places.

The lucky members of the first cohort will be taken through their 12 month work programme with additional support from The Better SMB. We have negotiated that cohort members will all be interviewed throughout the journey and recorded for their High Performance Podcast. Once the training is complete, each cohort member will also be included in case studies and their stories told to a national audience.

That is where the shift happens.



## NORTHWEST WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS, JOINING IS SIMPLE

for more info visit: [northwestcountry.co.nz/join-us](https://northwestcountry.co.nz/join-us)

|  <h3>FULL MEMBER</h3> <p>FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES OPERATING IN OUR COMMERCIAL AREA</p> |  <h3>ASSOCIATE MEMBER</h3> <p>FOR BUSINESSES LOCATED OUTSIDE OUR TARGETED RATE AREA</p> |  <h3>PARTNER MEMBER</h3> <p>FOR BUSINESSES OUTSIDE THE AREA, SHARING THE NWC LOGO.</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>\$ Free*</b> for in-zone businesses</p>                                                                                                                         | <p><b>\$ 400 +GST</b> per year</p>                                                                                                                                         | <p><b>\$ 200 +GST</b> per year</p>                                                                                                                                          |

### + MEMBER BENEFITS +

- New member shout out in our monthly newsletter
- Welcome post on our social media channels
- Your key social posts shared by North West Country
- Website directory listing with links to your channels
- Access to the NW Business Awards (plus 3 months of marketing for entrants)
- Post events on our What's On events page
- Access to member's information & news portals
- Exclusive tools and support for your business
- Able to sponsor North West Country events
- Plus much more

\*Covered in your commercial property rates.





# The Name on the Sail

Mark Adcock has spent more than thirty years in the promotional merchandise industry, creating memorable moments that help businesses leave a lasting impression.

**A**sksed what it's like to be both a business owner and a community sponsor, Mark's answer is simple.

"I close my eyes and imagine I'm opening a package. Whatever's inside isn't what matters most. It's the feeling of discovering something unexpected. That's what captures the moment. Makes it emotional. Makes it memorable."

Mark owns Smashing Promotions in Waimauku, a promotional merchandise business he's been building since 1994. Early on, he used to visit new clients with a personalised glass, sandblasted with their name. "Ten years later, that glass is still sitting on their desk. I've become part of their day."

Before creating anything for a client, Mark asks one simple question:

How would you feel if someone gave this to you?

Perhaps that's the question Mark has been answering all along.

Empathy, he says, has always been the difference. Too many promotional products are designed to advertise a business, rather than mean something to the person receiving them.

That same approach eventually became BackingYou. Not as a business plan, but as a response to something deeply personal.

It started with his child being bullied. Targeted. The family had to move schools. Sitting with that experience, Mark found himself asking a difficult question: if this was hard for a family with resources, what was it like for those without?

One of the first answers came while he was sitting in a café, reading about a shortage of swan plants. The monarch butterfly population was under threat. He rang the Monarch Society on a Friday, bought a million swan plant seeds, and turned them into a fundraiser for Youthline.

The metaphor behind the campaign was simple but powerful. Just as a caterpillar struggles through its cocoon before emerging as a butterfly, young people, too, often have to push through difficult seasons before reaching the other side.

The campaign crashed his website and landed him on Seven Sharp.

Around the same time, he helped fund a school play. A thousand dollars, a friend's script, a small cast, and one message delivered to students around the country: be a witness, not a bystander. Sometimes, all it takes is one word or one small act to change someone's day.

It was the beginning of something bigger. Mark had discovered that when business and community come together around a meaningful story, people don't just pay attention; they get involved.

The idea continues to evolve.



Tom Hall, from Muriwai, has qualified to represent New Zealand at the Optimist Sailing World Championships in Morocco. During a conversation with Tom's dad, a mate of Mark's, the topic turned to the \$20,000 the family suddenly needed to raise to get him there.

Mark met Tom. Quiet and reserved, but determined. He didn't take long to decide.

"Don't wait for perfection. Perfection never comes. It's not about getting everything right. It's about doing something that might make a difference for someone else."

Tom's sail now carries the names of fifty New Zealanders who backed him. Mark is one of them.

"People don't recount ads," Mark says. "They recount stories. A story travels with your name attached in a positive way long after the campaign ends."

If there's one thing Mark hopes people take away from his story, it's this:

"If you've got the ability to help someone, do it. You never know where that one act of belief might lead."

BackingYou might have started as an idea, but after listening to Mark, it feels more like a way of seeing the world.

Business:

Smashing Promotions / BackingYou

Location:

Waimauku, Northwest Auckland

Contact:

mark@smashingpromotions.nz

09 412 6235 (ext 1)

What they do:

Promotional branding and merchandise; community-backed sponsorship of young Northwest talent through BackingYou.com



Sir Bob Harvey did a radio voice over for Hopeseeds.nz advertisement on 95Bfm with Mikey Havoc





# Unlocking North West Country: Building a Destination Together

**N**orth West Country is quietly becoming one of Auckland's most exciting emerging destinations. Over recent months, a dedicated Destination Management Plan (DMP) process has brought local tourism operators together to shape a shared future for the area.

This work has been proudly supported by Tātaki Auckland Unlimited, helping guide North West Country toward a clear and compelling direction. Through four workshops and engagement with more than 82 local operators, the process has done more than draft a plan. It has built relationships, sparked collaboration, and laid the foundations for a connected destination.

North West Country has always had the ingredients. It is a place defined by black-sand beaches, native forests, rivers, farmlands, and the vast Kaipara Harbour (a landscape that feels distinctly separate from the city, despite being just a short drive away). Visitors come here for space, fresh air, and the feeling of slowing down.

But until now, these experiences have largely existed as individual offerings rather than a unified destination. The DMP process is changing that.

Much like how State Highway 16 connects the towns and communities across the region, this work has connected people. Operators who once worked independently are now building relationships, sharing ideas, and beginning





Image Source: Bernd Dittrich (<https://unsplash.com/>)

to see themselves as part of something bigger. This sense of “kotahitanga”, which means “rising together”, is central to the plan and reflects a growing commitment to collaboration and shared success.

Through the workshops, a clear identity for the destination is beginning to emerge.

North West Country is being described as “Auckland’s place to breathe”: A rural and coastal escape where visitors can slow down, experience authentic stories, and connect with nature and community.

It is also a place of genuine character. Local businesses are often family-run, experiences are grounded in real life rather than performance, and the community itself is part of the attraction. This authenticity is one of the destination’s greatest strengths, and something the DMP aims to protect as tourism grows.

The process has highlighted both opportunity and challenge.

North West Country already attracts significant visitor numbers, particularly to natural icons like Muriwai and Woodhill Forest, yet many visitors stay only a few hours. The DMP will help address this by

creating a more connected experience, encouraging visitors to explore further, stay longer, and support local businesses.

Importantly, the plan is focused on sustainable growth. It recognises that tourism must benefit the community, protect the environment, and respect the cultural values of the area.

This reflects a strong commitment to kaitiakitanga: caring for the land and ensuring that what makes North West Country special is not lost over time.

Looking ahead, the next steps are ambitious and exciting. A name for the destination will be confirmed, an interactive visitor website will be developed, and a new brand will be launched in October 2026. Together, these initiatives will help raise the profile of the region and attract the investment needed to grow the tourism sector.

The Destination Management Plan is more than a strategy. It is a turning point. By bringing people together, defining a shared identity, and creating a clear path forward, North West Country is unlocking its potential. Not just as a place to visit, but as a place that works together to create something truly special.



# Meet Smith and Partners' Commercial Team

**S**mith and Partners' Commercial team is one of several specialist teams within the full-service West Auckland law firm. The team supports businesses across Auckland and beyond with practical advice spanning business transactions, governance, contracts, commercial property, intellectual property, compliance and succession planning.

Led by Bret Gower, the team combines broad legal expertise with a strong understanding of the realities of owning, managing, and growing a business.



## Bret Gower

Bret's own experience as a business owner gives him valuable insight into the pressures, priorities, and decisions his clients face.

He advises on commercial transactions, governance, succession strategy, and long-term business planning.

Known for combining legal rigour with commercial clarity, Bret focuses on giving clients practical guidance that supports both their immediate needs and wider goals.

## Peter Smith

Founder and Consultant  
Peter Smith brings more than 55 years of commercial law experience to the team. He has a particular ability to identify risk, simplify complex agreements, and guide clients towards practical, durable solutions.

Peter's mediation experience is also a valuable asset, helping clients resolve disagreements efficiently and constructively. His open-door approach and commitment to mentoring continue to shape the team's collaborative culture.



## Chantal Laidler

Chantal advises on business sales and purchases, shareholder agreements, terms and conditions, and ongoing commercial compliance.

As the team's settlements expert, she takes a comprehensive approach to transactions, ensuring the details are carefully managed and clients understand the full picture at every stage.



## Tam Irvine

Tam specialises in commercial disputes, contract negotiation, and construction-related matters. His work includes complex contracts, property-related conflicts, and disputes involving multiple parties.

He takes a pragmatic approach, helping clients assess risk, explore options, and resolve issues early wherever possible.





## Bethany Sweeney

Bethany advises on leases, tenders, shareholder agreements, terms and conditions, and a wide range of commercial contracts.

Her background in employment law, marketing, and human resources gives her a strong understanding of the practical considerations behind business decisions, particularly for clients who are establishing or scaling their operations.



## Kelly Carter

Kelly is an experienced Legal Executive and Personal Assistant who provides high-level support across the Commercial team's work.

She works closely with both lawyers and clients, coordinating meetings, transactions, and settlements while proactively managing the team's day-to-day priorities.



## Jude Dragh

Jude works across commercial property, leasing, business transactions, and regulatory compliance. She also has strong experience in intellectual property matters.

Her work includes managing trade mark applications and helping clients enforce or defend copyright and trade mark rights through practical, outcome-focused negotiation.



Many Smith and Partners' clients have worked with the firm for decades. As their businesses grow, evolve, or transition to new ownership, the Commercial team provides commercially sound advice backed by the wider expertise of the firm's other specialist legal teams.

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# The Job Starts Long Before the Paint Comes Out

Ritchie Hoko has spent nearly 30 years in the trade. Five of them painting the northwest. He's still got the overalls to prove it.

**B**y 9am on a Tuesday, Ritchie Hoko has already set up scaffolding in Kumeu, patched stucco damage in West Auckland left behind by a guttering crew, and mentally flagged a third job waiting out at Piha. The interview is the only thing slowing him down.

"If I wasn't in this interview, I'd be out at Piha right now," he says, laughing. "Checking on the final day of a job over there as well."

Ritchie runs Rix Painting, a subcontracting operation that now employs between four and seven staff at any given time. He got his start in the trade back in the early 90s, stripping lead-based paint off Ponsonby villas with nothing but a linbide scraper and a blowtorch. No masks. No gloves. Just hard yakka and a quick eye.

It wasn't exactly a planned career move. A neighbour in West Auckland needed someone for prep work, Ritchie said yes, and a head contractor showed up a few days later and just pointed at him.

"You haven't painted before in your life, have you?" Ritchie says, doing his best impression. "He came back the next day and showed me what to do. And it was all forward from there."

Forward, as it turned out, meant almost thirty years.

Five of them as a subcontractor in northwest Auckland. His crews turn up on exteriors from Henderson out to Helensville, repainting weatherboards, finishing new builds, and sorting out the damage left behind by other trades.

He also paints for the community, literally. When Waitoki Hall needed work, Rix Painting showed up. And Alto Paint donated all the materials to make it happen. "Community organisations don't have a lot of money," Ritchie says. "Often relying on volunteers and funding. So we try to help where we can."

When it comes to the work itself, he's equally direct. Ask Ritchie what most homeowners get wrong and he doesn't hesitate. He walked into a quote recently, pressed his thumbnail against a door frame, and the paint came straight off. Someone had gone acrylic over enamel without sanding or priming first.





"The basics of painting? Preparation, preparation, and preparation," he says. "Lots of sanding, lots of filling, lots of gapping. All before you get to painting. We could spend weeks on a house prepping and then a weekend painting, and it's all done. The painting's the easy part."

The projects that end up costing clients the most are usually the DIY plastering attempts, patched walls done without the right prep, roller marks left on ceilings, and the wrong paint type in the wrong place. Fixing that work costs more than getting it done right the first time.

"We always advise people not to do that sort of thing because of what it costs them. It's really about trying to look after our clients."

That same clarity shapes how Ritchie thinks about where he's headed. At 62, he's shifting off the tools and into a more managerial role, something he wishes he'd done years earlier. For most of his career he ran lean as a sole trader. Good income, steady work, but at the end of the day just keeping himself employed.

"I would say to myself: grow. Grow a business where you can step back. I could have done what I'm doing now a lot earlier."

He's got an 18-year-old on the crew right now who's been painting alongside his parents since he was a kid. Ritchie reckons he's got a great career ahead of him. If he sticks at it and thinks bigger than a job, he just might.

After about thirty years, Ritchie knows the paint is only ever the finishing touch. The real work always starts long before the brush comes out.

Business:  
**Rix Painting**

Location:  
**West Auckland / Northwest Auckland**

Contact:  
**[ritchie@rixpainting.net](mailto:ritchie@rixpainting.net)**

What they do:  
**Residential and commercial painting and prep work across northwest Auckland.**







# Can South Head Bring Back the Jetty?

**A**t the edge of the Kaipara Harbour, where South Head gives way to mudflats, wind, and enormous sky, the Jetty Café at Shelly Beach has long been the kind of place rural communities cling to; part meeting point, part watering hole, part excuse to linger by the water.

Not so for the last two years however, as the iconic café building has closed after its lease expired, and Auckland Council took the opportunity to upgrade the facility. Since August 2024 the building has been available to lease, but this seaside community has not had any takers.

The Jetty Café used to be a licensed café and takeaway sitting beside the wharf, boat ramp, holiday-park grounds, and public amenities. Always a central hub for the community, and the best ice cream scoopers in South Head, this helps explain why the café's silence has been felt so sharply.

When the Jetty was humming, it was never only about coffee. Fishermen used to gather before heading out, day-trippers and holidaymakers stopped for a break, and Kaipara Cruise excursions brought visitors and jobs through the foreshore. Community fundraiser promotions from Shelly Beach added another layer: live music, food, volunteers, and community-backed events, with the café acting as a natural anchor point. In a small settlement, a venue like that becomes local infrastructure as much as hospitality.

In March 2024, the Rodney Local Board discussed supporting the development of a "community led alternative service delivery model" for Shelly Beach.

In other words, the future of the Jetty Café is no longer being talked about simply as a private business problem. It is being discussed as part of a bigger conversation about local assets, local control and community benefit.

In 2025 a petition calling to "Open Our Café in Summer 2025" was broadcast without success. The case for reopening is easy to grasp however there is a significant lack of offers. A functioning café would bring life back to the coastal settlement, add to boating and visitor activity, and restore one of the few informal gathering spaces in the area.

But affection alone will not reopen the doors. The challenge now is whether the Shelly Beach community has the energy to create a workable management model, creating a sustainable operation that offers a community-focused venue that can offer food, refreshments, community events, and act as an emergency hub.

That is quite a commitment for the community as the commercial lease sits at \$35,000 per annum. It now sits with the local residents to pull together a business case that shows how that can work.

What's the alternative? The Rodney Local Board could petition Auckland Council to transfer ownership of the building to them, allowing the local board to lease the facility out at a peppercorn rate.

The question is, can the community wait for the slow burdensome wheels of government to turn to enable to ownership structure, or will this café be closed for another season?



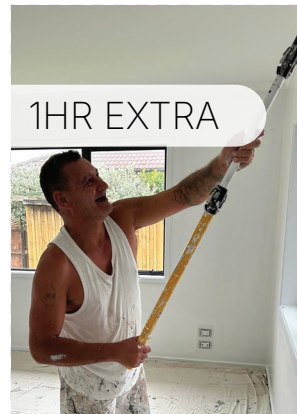
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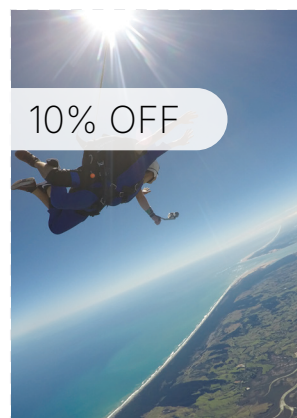
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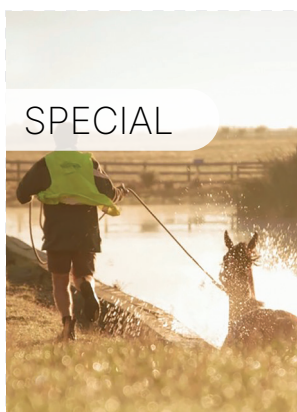
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