

Business Extra

Jobs cheer as packhouse saved

By Mike Dinsdale

A Kerikeri company is to reopen a Whangarei fruit packhouse that closed earlier this year with the loss of 25 jobs, due in part to the Psa virus affecting kiwifruit.

LD Packers Ltd, owned and managed by Kerikeri couple Alan and Helen Thompson's family investment company, has taken over the former Apata kiwifruit and avocado packhouse in South End Rd, Whangarei, after it was closed in January.

At the time, Apata said the Psa vine disease had reduced kiwifruit production and, while avocados were also packed at the facility, Apata's Northland manager Graeme Burnett said there were not enough of them to warrant keeping the packhouse operating.

But Mr Thompson said his company had bought the packhouse with the intention of keeping it a Northland operation, and he hoped local kiwifruit and avocado growers would support it.

He said LD Packers Whangarei would start packing kiwifruit in April and the company had retained key staff members from the previous business.

The company already runs LD Packers in Kerikeri, which packs Zespri kiwifruit and citrus.

"Hopefully, we can get the seasonal workers to come back too," Mr Thompson said.



ACT OF FAITH: Alan and Helen Thompson, seen here in their Kerikeri Rd packhouse, are reopening a Whangarei packing facility which shut down in January. PHOTO/PETER DE GRAAF

He said the opportunity to expand the business into Whangarei came about due to the restructuring of large Bay of Plenty-based post-harvest companies, which are now competing

for volume throughout Northland.

Mr Thompson said the industry was competitive but he was sure the company could give growers what they needed to get

them to support the venture.

"We are a Northland-based company and want to employ local people there. We're very keen to do a wholly Northland thing and the key is to get local

"Hopefully, we can get the seasonal workers to come back too."

Alan Thompson

growers' support," he said. "We saw this as an opportunity to expand into Whangarei and, hopefully, local growers will see some merit in that."

The Thompsons have been heavily involved in the horticultural industry in Northland for the past 30 years, including the origination and development of Kerifresh Ltd in Kerikeri, which was sold in 2008.

Since then they have continued growing 23 hectares of kiwifruit in Kerikeri and have developed LD Packers, which packs Zespri kiwifruit and citrus.

Mr Thompson said LD Packers would offer a wholly Northland owned and operated business model.

"Although the presence of Psa in New Zealand has clouded the future for kiwifruit, LD Packers Ltd is looking forward to offering this service for the foreseeable future with the support of local growers."

Centre gears up for patter of extremely tiny feet

Whangarei has given birth to a new childcare centre specialising in the care of littlies under 2.

Baby Steps in Deveron St opened its doors this week, with local MP Phil Heatley — who lives across the road — officiating at a function last Friday.

The centre is owned by Michael and Carolyn Davis. It will be managed by Carolyn, who has spent 13 years in early childhood management and teaching roles in Whangarei and Auckland.

She said the centre delivered on her dream of providing a nurturing "home away from home" for children under 2.



BIG DAY: Carolyn Davis, Baby Steps co-owner, and Phil Heatley, Whangarei MP (a neighbour of the new childcare facility for tots under 2) at the centre's opening. PHOTOS/BIG FISH CREATIVE



TIME TO VISIT: Guests take the opportunity to mingle in Baby Steps' play area, before the centre opened for children this week.

New tourism campaign

The general manager of Northland Inc Tourism, Brian Roberts, says the organisation is about to launch a region-wide campaign aimed at boosting the number one Auckland market.

Mr Roberts applauded the recent Fullers GreatSights Bay of Islands initiative 'Freedom Fridays' which promotes the Bay of Islands and hoped other commercial operators would get on board. Fullers GreatSights Bay of Islands general manager Charles Parker said that while it was the company's own campaign, it was collaborating with other tourism businesses to entice the large Auckland market northwards.

"We're thrilled with the response from our fellow businesses," Mr Parker said.

company's pre-campaign research was that many Aucklanders considered the Bay of Islands a luxury destination, he said. In recent years, the cost of accommodation and excursions had dropped but the message had not got through to the biggest market for whom a weekend in a location rich in culture, history and scenery was accessible, he said. Mr Parker, whose company runs sightseeing operations throughout the Far North, said the Bay of Islands was a brand in its own right. "We're here, we understand our success is largely dependent on the success of the Bay of Islands," he said.

"We're hoping it (Freedom Fridays) will get legs. We'll push it for a month and wait and see where it goes from there."

Mike, the mighty kauri

Wild Haggis co-owner Deb Mair was moved to put pen to paper on losing a business mentor and friend in Michael Springford, who passed away on February 10

**A mighty kauri tree has fallen
Michael J Springford, known as Mike
Has passed over with many tears shed
He was a mighty kauri
Where many hid beneath his branches,
Protected, sheltered and loved
The largest tree but not the tallest made of smooth bark,
which dominated the forest canopy.
Mike was smooth, charming and a giant amongst men.
The kauri branches grow and reach out from the trunk,
Just as Mike's arms had, helping those less fortunate.
The kauri has a habit of forming small clumps or patches
scattered through mixed forests.
Mike drew people inwards, towards him and created a
community like the kauri.
The kauri tree has a solid foundation, to prevent it
blowing over in storms and cyclones.**

**Like Mike, steadfast, loyal and unwavering. Like a beacon to many — a ray of hope!
The kauri allows other plants to grow on it as did Mike,
He nurtured and encouraged others
He took a waif, a stray, under his branch and helped them find their way.
Kauri trees rely on wind for pollination.
Mike was charming, a gifted talker who energised others to do well.
He used his own wind, his talk, and his drive to foster a community spirit like no other
He was a mighty kauri.**



Michael Springford