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Arts and civics, Whakatāne - style



Contributed

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I've always thought that art, sport and recreation have a place in our civics and that local government should be doing all it can to promote these things in our communities.

Local government is, after all, about the way we all organise our lives locally.

When you look at art, sport and recreation in our town, it's hard to ignore just how far above our weight we punch.

We are about as small as it gets, 33,000, and yet when you think about it, what we contribute to Aotearoa artistically, culturally and in sport, we are like a big city.

From the camera club to Aotearoa's most successful Olympian ever, this town excels and excels at excelling.

And it's nothing new.

Our musicians are amongst the very best in the country and they are the product of a previous generation of talented musicians who schooled a level of greatness into their students that has now passed on to the youngsters of today.

The generation that gave us people Tait Kora, Dave Hiakita, Ian Hunia, Robert Gillies and many, many others, resulted in talents that are now centre stage globally, with a sound all of our own, that is instantly recognizable as the sound of the Eastern Bay of Plenty. All around this town, in garages and bedrooms, our kids are learning the chops and writing their own songs so they can be the next L.A.B.

And I have absolutely no doubt they will.

In fact, today a 12-year-old musician, Rowan Evans, is releasing his debut single, *Synthetic Horizons*, with mentoring by other musicians who came through this "school", and it will be a hit.

When I first came here as a visitor, I couldn't help but notice the pride of the people of this town in its beauty, its beaches, it's people and most particularly, it's sportspeople.

Everyone in the world knows Benji Marshall is from here. We own him. Dame Lisa Carrington is our queen. Adored and respected by a whole new generation of would-be gold medal winners on our awa every morning. We have orchestras, brass bands,

choirs, poets, dancers, kapa haka and other performing artists of every description who are among the best in the land.

Art and recreation have a place in our civics and it's the job of the council to support this.

Critics will argue that we don't need it, and it doesn't give anything back.

But it's a fallacy to say that.

In Coastlands/Piripai over the last couple of months Coastlands local Kay Montgomery has been transforming the Horizon Energy owned transformer boxes into art with the help of local artists and the Whakatane – Ohope Community Board.

Kay was motivated to do something about what she termed 'the boring, green boxes' that she drove past on her daily commute.

She approached Horizon Energy who were immediately supportive and made an application the Whakatāne – Ōhope Community Board which has a discretionary fund allocated to spend on community events, sports, community groups etc.



Kay also got sponsorship from Resene Paints and Horizon Energy.

With funding approved she then went about contacting homeowners who had boxes on or near their properties and engaged with the local community via the Coastlands Facebook page.

The community responded with a call to have the art reflect three themes – coastal, environment and community.

Kay's engagement and connection with the community was well received and she

then put the call out to local artists to decorate the boxes with their art.

The impact on the Coastlands/Piripai community was immediate.

Before long we saw artists creating some amazing works of art and witnessed the creative process from the ground up.

Most of us had never before seen the work that goes into a piece of art and many took advantage of the process to stop and engage in conversation with the artists while they worked.

The insights this offered only added to the community engagement and connection.

With almost all 20 of the boxes completed Kay decided to hold a community celebration on Saturday, April 5.

She got local food trucks and musicians along to cater and entertain and the turnout was massive.

Engaged and connected as a community through art hundreds of residents turned out eager to recognise the joy and happiness the art project had brought into the community.

Everyone went home happy and feeling great.

All because of one person, and art, made an impact.

As we go about our lives it's easy to ignore simple things like art and how art and civics can intersect in various ways, fostering civic engagement and promoting a deeper understanding of community and values through creative expression and critical thinking.

Art provides a platform for individuals to express their opinions, perspectives, and experiences related to civic issues, whether through painting, sculpture, music, or other forms of artistic expression.

Art can be integrated into civic projects, such as murals, sculptures, or public art installations, that reflect community values and history.

Whakatāne is enriched by its artistic community in many ways and not all of them can be shown on a finance committee spreadsheet.

But if you measure our artistic community's value to Whakatāne on wellbeing, joy, happiness and smiles, it's impact is immense.

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The Beacon has been delivering news to the Eastern Bay since 1939 and is the leading source of community news in the region. The paper was founded by Leicester Spring and is still owned by the Spring family. Leicester's son John Spring is the managing director.