

Obituary: Celebrating the life of Peter Blackler

Kapiti News

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A large crowd of family and friends came together on December 1 to celebrate the life of Peter Thomas Blackler, 80, who passed away on November 24 after a brave battle with cancer.

Peter will be known to many whose lives he touched through MenzShed Kāpiti and all the other community organisations he was part of since he moved to the district in 2006.

He will be missed by those who knew him as a strong and loving family man, a determined and dedicated leader, and an understanding and caring neighbour and friend.

His farewell was led by his children, Michael, Stephanie and Penny, and his seven grandchildren. They told stories of a father and grandfather who was so proud of them all, and who loved supporting their activities and teaching them new skills. They also talked about the time he spent excavating under their family homes in Island Bay and Waikanae to build his workshops and storerooms for his huge collection of clocks, radios and audio gear, vintage machinery, the tractor he rebuilt, and his cars and mopeds, including an old Puch scooter he bought new when he went to Engineering School in 1995.

Peter always had time to celebrate family events and achievements. This was shown in the photos the family shared of trips to Canada and the US, to Australia and around New Zealand, and family picnics in his much-loved Edgewater Park and swims in the Waikanae River.

People walking the river trails may well have seen Peter in Edgewater Park mowing bits the mower men left untidy. He may also have been mowing lawns for people who were unwell or needed other help.

Sir Neville Jordan, Peter's friend from university days in Canterbury, spoke of how he, Peter and other engineering cadets sponsored by Civil Aviation were the "old boys" of their year, having already been in the workforce for several years. They enjoyed their student years and all the fun and challenges that ensued, finding time to mix with a group of student nurses from Christchurch Hospital. Neville did note that after a year or two Peter started to spend more time away from the lads as his friendship with one nurse in particular developed into the lifetime partnership Peter formed with his wife Christine.

After graduating, Peter returned to Wellington and developed his career in technical and in management roles. Perhaps the pinnacle of his working life was developing the regulatory framework that set aviation safety and operating standards and models that continue to be used in New Zealand and worldwide.

After retirement in 2006, Peter and Christine moved to Waikanae, where he set about rebuilding the house they bought and excavating a basement to make space for his many hobbies. He quickly became involved in his neighbourhood and the community, assisting others wherever he could. He was a leader in community safety, through neighbourhood watch and the Community Patrol. Paul Jones, chairman of the Waikanae Community Patrol, noted Peter's contribution over many years and his willingness to step up to cover patrol shifts at short notice and to train newcomers.

Peter now had time to indulge his interest in preserving and restoring vintage machinery through the Wellington Vintage Machinery Club and, typical of the man, he worked tirelessly to rebuild the old dairy factory in Whitemans Valley as a base for the club's activities and a museum to show off their collections.

In 2010 Peter responded to a notice seeking men who were interested in setting up a MenzShed in Kāpiti and he became a foundation member of what is now MenzShed Kāpiti, one of the largest and busiest MenzSheds in New Zealand. As chairman of that group Tony Annandale noted, "Peter, more than any other member contributed his time and energy to making our Shed the wonderful place it is today."

He took on the role of treasurer from the start and only handed on that role in 2023. Peter's contribution to the early development of MenzShed Kāpiti was recognised in 2014 when he was made a life member.

MenzShed works to promote the health and well being of men in the community through fellowship and sharing skills and knowledge. Men come together to work on community and personal projects and the Shed is a happy and productive place. That objective was a principle that Peter lived by, not just at the Kāpiti Shed but in all the other organisations he contributed to.

Peter was also instrumental in setting up MenzShed New Zealand and looked after their finances, too. The chairman also acknowledged Peter's leadership on the national stage, particularly his caring and respectful leadership.

From the early days, Peter had the vision to see what the former Kāpiti Coast District Council works yard in Waikanae Beach with its old and tired buildings could become. He went on to lead the planning and building of the modern workshop complex MenzShed Kāpiti members now enjoy. He was especially proud of the MenzShed Centre, the multi-purpose community room and amenities block that is the social heart of the complex.

It was entirely fitting that when the last part of the building development, a large open-plan workshop, was opened in August of this year, the members of MenzShed Kāpiti

named the building The Peter B Workshop. By that stage Peter was not a well man, but he showed great pleasure when Kāpiti Mayor Janet Holborow opened the building and acknowledged his contribution. And naturally Peter's family were there to share the day with him.

In closing his comments at the funeral, Tony Annandale quoted the proverb "Kua hinga te Totara i te wao nui a Tane" — "The Totara has fallen in the forest of Tane".

- Written by Cliff Daly with contributions by the Blackler family, Tony Annandale, Paul Jones and other MenzShed Kāpiti members.
