

PiriHira Tukapua – Making it all work!



PiriHira Tukapua, returning Horowhenua District Councillor

Another local body election is winding up with most of the successful candidates now confirmed. PiriHira Tukapua has returned for a third consecutive term to the Horowhenua Council in the Levin Ward. PiriHira received 1902 votes to secure one of five vacancies.

Piri Hira Tukapua of Ngāti Turanga and Muaūpoko descent, is a trained secondary school teacher and business owner. She established Taitoko Design and Print in 2006 and has achieved national and international acclaim for her work.

A year ago, Veronica Harrod of the Kapiti Independent News reported PiriHira saying she was “90 percent sure she won’t be standing as a candidate in 2019”. I was intrigued to ask what made Piri Hira change her mind to stand for election again?

PiriHira agreed to talk with me while waiting for a flight to Australia where she was planning to attend a family event. When asked about her change of mind, she replied that she “felt that with the right environment for Council to work collaboratively there were still some things I want to see completed.”

This despite a number of achievements in her time with the Council including resolving the Tokomaru drinking water issue; addressing the 20-year problem of discolouration of Foxton drinking water; standing against fluoridation of water; working to solve stormwater issues of Lake Horowhenua; advocating for a wide range of youth matters inc. saving Project CYN 2017; reducing speed on beaches (100km to 30km) to protect environment and people and supporting the establishment of TeAwahou NieuweStroom.

Talking with PiriHira it is clear that she is driven to make a difference in the community. With support she wants to see a couple of community projects completed before this term is finished.

One of those projects is to see a splash-pad for Horowhenua whānau built. The closest splash-pad is Otaki's Haruatai pools, outside the Horowhenua district. The second project is to investigate and look at alternatives to landfills. PiriHira has also been a strong advocate of accountability for elected members, entrepreneurship and monitoring the Council's debt levels.

Her contributions have been recognised by the new Council with an appointment to the Chair of the Community Grants and Funding Committee.

A member of Te Ropu Pakihi, the Kapiti & Horowhenua Māori business network for over 12 years now, it was good to hear that her business is thriving. Her designs are recognised locally and more have been created for the new expressway between Ōtaki to Levin and on the improvements to State Highway 3 in Taranaki.

This raised the question of how she balances all her commitments; those with Council, her business, her community, church and whānau as well as her two local marae including Kawiu Marae and Paranui Marae where she is the Chair.

PiriHira is very clear, she schedules and prioritises everything! First is her Council commitments, second her Committee and Board meetings, then her Marae and finally her business. When asked about time for herself, she informs me she leaves the district occasionally and was on her way to a cousin's 21st in Australia.

PiriHira offered some thoughts on how we encourage Maori to risk public scrutiny and stand for election including the necessary self-promotion which goes hand in hand with campaigning. Part of her preparations have seen her engaged at a governance level with the Horowhenua Learning Centre, Raukawa Whānau Ora, Foxton Medical Centre and Lake Domain Board. Council Committees: Finance Audit & Risk, Hearings, Community Grants & Funding, Education, Youth Network (Chair) and the Road Safety Group.

Those who know her will agree that PiriHira is naturally reserved, preferring her work to speak for her. But she believes "if you want to achieve your goal of being an elected representative, either in local government or central then you need to work hard."

PiriHira overcame her natural shyness by learning to speak in public, building relationships throughout the community and taking opportunities to sit on boards when invited. She also felt that "it is important to understand your own strengths and weaknesses, ensuring you do the hard work, prove you are trustworthy and live a values-based life."

We wish Piri Hira well in her work over the next three years and look forward to supporting her efforts.

Anthea Napier

19 October 2019