



## WISDOM OF YEARS A STRENGTH IN MENTORING BOYS

PRESS RELEASE

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STARTS

Kapiti local Pete Hobbs, 72, is testament to the more recent wave of thinking that suggests one should put the concept of retirement on the backburner and keep on keeping busy.



Pete works full time as a painter-decorator and spends a few hours each week mentoring 9 year-old Sean Burkhalter. He says signing up to be Big Buddy to the young Kapiti boy is one of the most worthwhile things he's ever done.

Pete is one of more than 800 men who mentor, or who have mentored, fatherless boys in the North Island [Big Buddy](#) programme. There are currently over 80 mentors operating in the Wellington region.

"He's a great little lad. Occasionally I regret is that I can't be more active with him – my knees are going a bit! But I'm certainly there to watch his touch

rugby in the week after school and to take him to the BMX track when we go out at the weekends."

Mid-week, Pete usually gets out the Kapiti News to see what's on. Regardless, when he picks Sean up at the weekends he starts by asking him what he'd like to do. If he's not quite sure, that's when he'll get out the paper and show him what he's found.

"The other week there was a classic car show, but whatever it is we do first, we always put Sean's bike in the back of the car so that we can finish up at the BMX track...and we always finish that with an ice cream."

To be fair, embracing the life-long 'Use it or lose it' philosophy is probably not just down to Pete's approach to his 72 years. It's more a philosophy of contributing to life, to other's lives, and in many ways mentoring boys started a long time ago.

When Pete's own children were young adults in Rotorua, his son's best friend and next-door neighbour died in a motorbike accident, leaving a young wife and baby boy. Pete explains that he and his beloved late wife, Judy, took the child on as if he were their own grandson. That boy is 20 years' old today and has spent almost every school holidays with Pete and Judy in the Kapiti region.

Pete agrees that caring for others serves to deepen one's empathy still further. When he finally does retire, he is looking to join up with Age Concern to visit those in hospital who

have no family visitors. But for now, he feels mentoring boys whose fathers are absent from their lives is a perfect way to give back.

“Sean brings me so much pleasure. He’s a real lively boy. I have to say, I had a moment where I was close to tears the other day. It was Saturday – the day before Father’s Day. We hadn’t been out for more than an hour and Sean wanted me to take him home. When we got there he wanted me to come in and sit down because he had a present for me.

“He had got me several things including a mug with a Tui on it- which he knows I love - and there was a card. It said: *2018, September 1, To Pete, Happy Big Buddy Day from your Small Buddy Sean.* His mum said it was his idea. It meant such a lot to me.”

Mum Simone says she couldn’t be happier with the match that Big Buddy Wellington Coordinator Dave Burcher made. She is especially grateful that Sean has this one-to-one time each week because as well as having lost a father, he has no grandparents either. A great deal of Simone’s attention is also spoken for because of her other son’s disability, so knowing that Sean has someone giving him undivided attention is especially comforting.

“I’ve definitely seen positive changes in Sean since he’s been seeing Pete. He comes home and tells me all about what they talked about – which is mostly men’s stuff! He’s become interested in things he wasn’t interested in before which is healthy for him. There are some ‘boy’ things that he just doesn’t engage with me on.”

When asked what value having a Big Buddy of typical retirement age brings, Simone says that it is almost certainly “knowledge.” Empathy is a close second.

“Pete seems to have so much knowledge on cars and planes...and it seems he can answer any question Sean has on New Zealand. I did initially consider that Pete was an older Big Buddy when Sean met him a year ago, but the thing is, Sean’s dad would have been retiring this year. He was a very active man and had grown up children already when we had Sean and his brother. So, spending time with an ‘older’ dad is what Sean would have experienced anyway.”

Regardless of age and life experience, Pete says that for anyone who is keen to mentor but still hovering on the fence, it’s about taking the plunge and making that application.

“What I would say to men that are undecided about whether to get involved or not, is ‘give it a try, you’ll be surprised at how much you get out of it yourself.’ It’s just about seeing these kids being happy, doing normal stuff at the weekend – really simple.”

ENDS

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