



Max Thomson

The importance of empowering local residents in a community and then enabling them to have input into decisions that will ultimately affect their community, is very close to Max's heart. *When people have real opportunities to make their neighbourhoods better places to live, it becomes a powerful way of building a healthy, connected community.* This has been the premise of Max's community work in Campbells Bay.

Max has had involvement with various local groups: the Residents and Ratepayers Association which became the Campbells Bay Community Association, the Campbells Bay Community Emergency Response Group, the Centennial Park Bush Society Inc., Neighbourly Campbells Bay, the East Coast Bays Methodist parish through the local All Hallows Methodist Church in Campbells Bay, and the Flaxroots Community Planning Project. His active leadership has helped nourish a sense of inclusive community. Max acknowledges that there is always a percentage of local residents who don't feel an obligation to contribute at a decision-making level, or to building relationships in the place where they live outside their own social and family circles, but thinks that is OK. They have their communities elsewhere, via where they work or where they travel. Then *there are those who do feel a strong sense of community, and who want to make connections with others in it.*

The eldest child of four, Max was born in 1942, and grew up in St Heliers, where he attended St Heliers School and Glendowie

School. He remembers the St Heliers of his childhood as being semi-rural. *Mum used to keep an air gun in order to scare the cows away if they started eating the garden vegetables.* In 1953, Max started as a foundation pupil of Saint Kentigern College and in 1959 he became dux and head prefect.

His father returned from the Second World War in 1946 to his former employment with L. D. Nathan & Co. Ltd where he was involved with the import side of the business. *I remember that, even though we [New Zealand] had been at war with Japan, Dad went to Japan after the war and developed trade relationships with them, which continued through the rest of his life.*

Scouting has been a big part of Max's life, first in Cubs at the age of eight, then Scouts, Senior Scouts, then becoming a Rover Scout. It was the community aspect of Scouting that Max loved, along with the opportunity to take part in tramping, camping, and learning about the outdoors. He spent a lot of time tramping in the Waitakere Ranges, and at the Scout Camp at Motu Moana



Max Thomson, the eldest, (on the right), with his brothers and sisters, 1956



Max Thomson's introduction to the Queen, 1967, St George's Day at Windsor Castle

in Green Bay. He also played a leadership role in the movement, becoming a Scout leader when he was living in Wellington, and continuing when he moved to Rotorua in 1970. He took a troop to the Scout Jamboree in Auckland in 1972.

Max graduated with a Master of Engineering from the University of Auckland in 1966. He was then working for the New Zealand Post Office. In 1965, after receiving an overseas fellowship from Associated Electrical Industries and supported by his employer, he worked in the United Kingdom for two and a half years. Max continued his association with Scouting while in London, and on St George's Day in 1967 he represented New Zealand at a parade at Windsor Castle where he was introduced to

Queen Elizabeth. He had first met his Australian wife-to-be, Julie, when returning by ship from the Seventh World Rover Scout Moot in Melbourne in 1962, and they met up again in London, in 1967 where they got engaged. Their wedding took place in Sydney in 1968 and the couple came back to New Zealand to live.

Max's career with the Post Office took him to Wellington for a couple of years before he was transferred to Rotorua to work in the Bay of Plenty district office, first as an engineer, then a supervising engineer, and then divisional engineer in charge of equipment for the Bay of Plenty. His work took him all around the area as he designed exchanges, and then supervised the installation and maintenance of telephone exchanges, and radio, and Post Office



Max's 50th Birthday, at Telecom, 1992



Max's Telecom farewell, 1995

transmission equipment. It was a time of great change in telecommunications, and Max and his team converted many manual telephone exchanges to automatic.

Max and Julie were settled in Rotorua from 1970 to 1990, during which time their two sons were born. They then moved to Campbells Bay, where they still live today. Both Max and Julie wanted to live on the North Shore to be close to Max's parents, even though they knew no one in the area. They joined All Hallows Methodist Church and became active members of the East Coast Bays parish.

The Post Office had been broken up into different businesses, and Telecom, which Max was working for, was in the process of being privatised and restructured. Max lost his district role but applied for and got a position as manager of operations for Telecom International. Looking back he feels this was probably the most satisfying time of his career. After another restructure that job, too, disappeared, so Max chose to retire from Telecom in 1995. For a while he worked for Bruce Goodfellow's company, Sulkem Co. Ltd, and then set up his own consulting company, Thomson Services Ltd, which is still in existence.

Max's major involvement in community work began after he retired. The Campbells Bay Residents and Ratepayers Association was formed in 1998, but Max

first joined and became involved in 2007 after attending an annual general meeting. The Association committee needed new members, so Max joined and was elected chairman at his first meeting. The Association rebranded as the Campbells Bay Community Association (CBCA) in November 2010. *There was a bit of a feeling about residents and ratepayers associations being 'grizzle groups', so the association wanted to get away from that.* They also wanted to incorporate organisations like the church, the Centennial Park Bush Society and the tennis and golf clubs, rather than it just being residents and ratepayers.

With the change of name and a shift in focus, Max and his committee hoped to signal a wider kaupapa rather than simply standing up for the rights of the residents and ratepayers with North Shore City Council. The Association developed a vision for their community, which included retaining and enhancing the two unique assets that are key to the community's character: Centennial Park and Campbells Bay Beach. The vision worked towards an increasingly public-spirited community that is diverse, age friendly, and mutually supportive. It stated that 'our quality of life is reflected in the four well-beings: *environmental*, the main reason people like living in Campbells Bay; *social*, and *cultural*, reflected in the



Our vision is that we cover the whole of the area with neighbourhood support groups, but we're a long way from that.

provision of appropriate facilities; and *economic*, seen in safety and in good public transport.’

Max thinks the vision is unique among community/residents and ratepayers associations on the North Shore, and is a reflection of the group’s membership and the capability mentoring received from North Shore Community and Social Services, now Auckland North Community and Development (ANCAD). One outcome of this association with NSCSS was involvement in the Flaxroots Village Planning Project, which NSCSS initiated in 2009.

Flaxroots was established as a network of communities sharing information, resources, issues and initiatives. It was designed to be a common space with a united approach for bringing local leaders together to inform each other and their respective communities, yet retain the autonomy and diverse identities of each community. The Project’s mandate was to promote community-led planning and to support communities in Auckland North in submitting their priorities as a sub-region of Auckland to the new Auckland Council’s Unitary Plan, through the Council’s community consultation process.

Flaxroots enabled residents to be part of improving the social, environmental and cultural well-being of their community. Its vision was that communities would ‘take charge of developing a vision for their neighbourhoods, translating it into community action plans which would summarise locally identified priorities, goals, and aspirations.’ In effect, its task was stimulating local democracy and leadership at the flaxroots of community development.

Flaxroots was an attempt at being community organisation-driven, rather than NSCSS-driven, but still very supportive of each other. Some quite active people have been involved, trying to influence [with the help of NSCSS], how local boards might work with the community after amalgamation. Many communities had

felt that they would lose their influence because the new Auckland Council was so large.

Max became the Campbell’s Bay Community Association representative on Flaxroots. With the help of NSCSS, Flaxroots applied for funding and was able to employ Joel Umali in 2010, followed by Dr Dean Manly in 2012, as the Project’s coordinators. As a result, the initiative spread across Auckland North and beyond: to Paremoremo, Waiheke Island, Campbells Bay, Milford, Castor Bay, Devonport, Birkenhead, Coatesville, Helensville, and Pukekohe.

Although there is now no funding for Flaxroots and no person employed, the connections remain. Max feels that while the linkages are not as strong now, personal networking still works well and he mentioned that Mike Cohen of the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board has been a very strong supporter.

The Campbells Bay Community Association has worked hard to maintain strong relationships with its local board, Hibiscus and Bays, by getting to know all the members, inviting them to local activities, and by holding meet-the-candidate meetings at election time. The association also makes submissions to the Board, and shares information with Board members about local community developments and issues of concern. By getting to know the councillors and Local Board members and presenting at meetings, CBCA committee members have been able to interact with individuals, which couldn’t have been done if there was not a good relationship with them.

Two main areas of concern have been the Auckland Unitary Plan, which has signalled greater intensification of housing in Auckland, as well as the possible development of a local town centre. The Community Association feared this might lead

There was a bit of a feeling
about residents and ratepayers
associations being ‘grizzle groups’.

to multi-storey commercial and/or industrial buildings in Campbells Bay.

Another issue is public transport. The Association, in consultation with the community, developed a plan which advocated for a 'feeder bus service' from the bay to the Northern Busway transport stations at Sunnynook and Constellation Drive. The submission process is ongoing, and Max appreciates the opportunities offered by Auckland Council to have the Campbells Bay community's views heard on both these issues.

Max is also treasurer of the Centennial Park Bush Society, and involved with its Campbells Bay Urban Sanctuary (CBUS) Project, that encourages private owners to be mindful of the local flora and fauna. He is heartened by the number of different bird species which can now be heard in Centennial Park. One of the things that the CBCA generally has tried to do is to provide linkage and networking between the various groups and associations in the bay. As an example there have been three members on the Bush Society committee who were also on the Campbells Bay Community Association committee.

The Community Association has close links with other groups in Campbells Bay, such as the tennis club, golf club and local churches. *One of the things we encourage as the community association is the development of neighbourhood support groups. Our vision is that we cover the whole of the area with neighbourhood support groups, but we're a long way from that.*

Not all the projects are large ones. One of Max's most successful, from an action viewpoint, was when he was chatting to the local dairy owner, who said that the lack of a light outside the shop was a real problem at night and made her nervous. He spoke to the Council engineer, who came to inspect the site and agreed

immediately to install a light. Just like that. That's how Max thinks things should work.

Another initiative was a community social evening to encourage neighbourhood support groups, and give people new to the area a chance to meet their neighbours and get to know what happens locally, such as the work of the Community Association and the award-winning Campbells Bay School walking school bus. The relationship with the school is a close one and the Association tries to involve students in community activities, especially at Centennial Park where there are monthly working bees. Others in the community, encouraged by Dr Richard Hursthouse, chair of the Centennial Park Bush Society, also come to the working bees.

For a lot of people that would be the most helpful community activity they are involved in, because it's something they do, rather than just sit and talk about what needs to be done.

Then there are the annual Neighbours Day Aotearoa activities that take place in March each year, driven by neighbourhood support groups, and encouraged by the Community Association. There is often a street barbeque on Neighbours Day and sometimes another before Christmas. Max is actively involved in his own neighbourhood support group.

Max says that what he loves about living in Campbells Bay is, *the quiet nature of it, having the bush behind us, the sound of birds singing, and easy access to the beach.*

There are those who do feel
a strong sense of community,
and who want to make
connections with others in it.

