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# Free flights for the needy

Lance Weller loves to fly. And he knows how difficult, not to say expensive, it can be for those living far from major centres to keep medical appointments when their health needs exceed what can be provided for them locally.

Now, from his home in Tutukaka, he has put the two together to create Angel Flight NZ, a charity which will fly patients from their local airport to wherever it is they need to go, at no cost to the patient whatsoever.

Lance is still building Angel Flight, and will welcome more volunteer pilots with open arms, but has no doubt that it will make a huge difference in many people's lives.

And it doesn't end there. The offer includes the service of Earth Angels, who will meet flights at their destination and deliver the patient to the hospital/specialist, then take them back to the airport for the flight home.

There are some criteria. For a start Angel Flight will not transport patients in any kind of emergency (it has no plans to compete with services already operating in that field), and patients must be finally needy/disadvantaged, effectively meaning they have no alternative but to travel by road.

"Everyone knows how long it takes to drive from Kaitiā to Auckland, for example," Lance said when he made a test flight to Kaitiā earlier this month, "and it doesn't take much imagination to appreciate how uncomfortable that must be for people who aren't well to begin with."

"Our motto is 'Improving lives one flight at a time,' and being able to fly, at no cost, really will make a huge difference for some people."

Passengers would also be accepted for compassionate reasons, ranging from special requests from the terminally ill to transporting a family member who has been unable to travel with an emergency helicopter or fixed-wing plane.

Patients and their travelling companions will need to be referred, and certified, by a health professional, and will need to weigh no more than 95kg.



**ANGEL FLIGHT:** Lance Weller, making lives better one flight at a time.

Angel Flight NZ has now officially taken off, at this stage flying from Kaitiā, Kerikeri and Whangarei to North Shore airfield, landing fees there, and elsewhere, have been waived, and will expand to other parts of the country as volunteer pilots become available.

Prospective Angel Flight pilots, who must have 250 hours' PIC, current BFR and medical certification, and be willing

to give five to 10 hours of their and their aircrafts' time a year, are welcome to contact Lance on (09) 434-3271, (027) 893-4587, or lance@angelflightnz.co.nz

Meanwhile the idea behind Angel Flight isn't a new one — it's been operating in Australia for some time, where Lance, who lived on the other side of the Tasman for 43 years before coming home, served as a volunteer pilot.

At last count 12,351 flights had been logged in Australia since 2003, and he was disappointed to see that the idea hadn't taken flight in New Zealand, so he set about changing that.

Anyone who would like to see what's being done in Australia can do so by going to www.angelflight.org.au

And prospective passengers who might suffer fear of flying need have no

concerns about taking to the air with Lance at the controls of his fully computerised Cirrus SR20.

He and a co-pilot flew the plane from Brisbane to Whangarei, via Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and Kerikeri (where they cleared Customs).

The plane even has its own parachute, in case it ever comes down over water.

# No free ferry home in flood

A Far North ratepayer is unhappy about having to pay to use the Hokianga car ferry when she was forced off State Highway 1 by flooding last week.

Heeding the weather warnings, Maryanne Bedgood left her work at Mangamuka early on Monday, taking SH1 south towards her home at Motukiore, in the South Hokianga.

However, police told her to head to Kohukohu instead and catch the ferry to Ravenshoe, because floodwaters had closed SH1 at Rangiahua.

She duly joined a queue of cars waiting at the ferry landing, and when she eventually got on board she was surprised to be charged the full \$22 fare.

"Giving that we were diverted due to flooding, we were surprised the council

hadn't organised free transport over. We are ratepayers and we were forced to divert, we had no option," she said.

Mrs Bedgood questioned what allows the council made for flooding, given that the Far North was prone to heavy rain and the ferry was sometimes the only transport available. While she had a five-trip concession ticket, she wondered how many Far North residents ended up paying the full fare.

Far North District Council spokesman Richard Edmondson said the council was pleased Mrs Bedgood was able to get home thanks to the Hokianga ferry, but was surprised she objected to paying when the ferry could have saved her from an uncomfortable night in her car, paying more to stay at a motel, or taking

a longer journey home.

The ferry cost the council \$900,000 a year to operate, and it was reasonable that users helped meet those costs, even in weather events the council had no responsibility for creating.

"As it is, annual revenue from ferry users is less than half of these costs, so the council is not in a position to be offering free rides," Mr Edmondson said.

However, as a Far North resident, Mrs Bedgood was entitled to a lower fare. If that had been refused council management would make enquiries. (Discounted concession tickets for five or 10 rides have been available for some time, but the council has started offering a \$7 one-way vehicle crossing to Far North residents).

# Catch the hospital shuttle in Kaikohe

Those living in and around Kaikohe can now get to Whangarei Hospital, and home again, aboard the Kaitiā hospital bus, with a free shuttle service every week day.

The Northland DHB is funding the service, run by Mid North Shuttles, whose six-seater vehicle leaves from Broadway Health in Kaikohe every morning to meet the bus at Pakaraka.

"We wanted to make it easier for patients, parents/caregivers and supporters to get to their appointments at Whangarei Hospital," DHB chief executive Dr Nick Chamberlain said, adding

that patients had viewed avoiding the one-hour drive to Whangarei as very helpful.

Patients must book their seats in advance, and will need to show their appointment letter or card to the driver to get aboard free of charge. Parents/caregivers who accompany young patients, and the supporters of elderly patients or those with disabilities, will also ride free.

To book contact the NTA co-ordinator at Whangarei Hospital on (09) 430-4101 extension 7405 or 8716, and have your appointment date and time ready.

## IN BRIEF

### No big prize

Kerikeri's Turner Centre has failed to emulate the Bay of Islands Vintage Railway Trust's feat of winning the supreme TrustPower National Community Award, decided in Methven over the weekend. The volunteer-run centre, widely recognised as the best north of Auckland, won the regional title last year, qualifying it compete against 24 other regional winners for the supreme accolade. Mayor Wayne Brown, his wife Toni, staff members Shirley Ayers and Erica Richards were in Methven to support the bid, the award being shared by the Denniston Heritage Trust (Buller district) and Trev's BBQ (Ashburton), ahead of Homes of Hope (Tauranga).

### Space at the library

Kaitiā's library, now well settled into Te Ahu, has space available for club meetings during weekday hours (8.30am - 5pm), John Haines saying staff would be happy to provide a "cosy nook" for such gatherings. "This might appeal to lots of people — book clubs, embroidery groups and the like," he said. Contact can be made on 408-9455.

### Eczema risk high

The facial eczema risk remained high (80,000) at Pukepoto last week according to TopVets monitoring. Moderate spore levels (55,000 and 30,000) were recorded at Waiharua and on the east coast, slight (15,000) at Houhora and low (5,000) at Awani. The veterinary practice warns that its monitoring results should only be taken as a guide, spore counts varying from farm to farm, while levels of 100,000 and more are considered dangerous.

### Hiko to Wellington

An 'Aotearoa Not For Sale' hiko will leave Cape Reinga on Monday April 23, arriving in Wellington on May 5. Te Tai Tokerau MP Hone Harawira said last week that the Mana Party would be involved but the hiko would be a non-political display of opposition to government policy on privatisation, and would be open to all.

### Messages for Sharmian

The email address published on Thursday for messages of support for Davina Reed and her daughter Sharmian (Cancer strikes close to home) was incorrect. The address is admin@fnpac.org.nz

### AOS not needed #1 . . .

Police responded last week to reports of arguing and children screaming at an address in Kaitiā, but managed to handle the situation without the AOS or other specialist back-up. What they found was a bunch of children who had a game of hide and seek in full swing.

### . . . And #2

A similarly innocent explanation was found after members of the public reported screams and grunts coming from Kaitiā College. Police discovered a group of girls who were spending the night there, and had decided to take cold showers at 2.15am. "That explained the screams," a spokesman said, "but we're not sure about the grunts."

### Drive-by shooting

Police are investigating the firing of a slug gun, apparently from a vehicle, at Mangonui on Thursday afternoon. The pellet reportedly passed through an open door and into a house, while the occupant was watching television.

# Now you see it . . .

## HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW:

They were looking a trifle dubious last week, but the crew at Oilways Hydraulics in Kaitiā were adamant that they would be fronting up on Friday to have their locks removed in support of Shave for a Cure. Shane McCormack (left), Zac Olsen, Bo Lee, Ian, Bryce and Josh Puckey have their fingers crossed, however, that their friends and customers will make it worthwhile. Pledges/donations will be very gratefully accepted at the workshop in Whangatane Drive, or phone 408-4995.

PICTURE / PETRINA HODGSON.



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