

Angels spread wings

By MELISSA KINEALY

ANGELS will start landing in Papakura this week and earth-bound volunteers are needed to be a part of their mission.

Retired businessman and pilot Lance Weller has single-handedly set up a charity that flies patients from remote regions to far-away hospitals for non-urgent medical appointments.

Angel Flight New Zealand now has a presence at Ardmore Airport and is expecting to welcome its first patient, a paraplegic from Kaitaia, tomorrow.

Mr Weller was a volunteer pilot for the Australian Angel Flight which has flown more than 5000 missions. But when he moved back to New Zealand after 43 years he was disappointed to find the charity wasn't operating here.

"I saw how wonderful it was to help people in strife. "The last mission I did was a two-year-old boy with a brain tumour and his father. They lived about five hours' drive from Brisbane but because of the boy's condition they took two days to drive there.

"I just think about the difference that flight made to that family."

Mr Weller set up home in Tutukaka after picking Whangarei district off a map because of its warm weather, airport and proximity to Auckland.

The Ardmore service is an extension of the operation he



Changing lives: Pilot Phil Pacey from Drury is a volunteer angel ready and waiting to help.



Southbound: Angel Flight founder Lance Weller will bring the first patient to Ardmore tomorrow.

began in Northland, carrying patients from areas such as Kaitaia, Kerikeri and Whangarei to North Shore airfield.

Medical services are so centralised nowadays that people are having to travel further to see a specialist, he says.

They could easily spend a day travelling there and

back just for a 40-minute appointment and often it means families have to take time off work without pay.

Helping to ferry patients to Ardmore and appointments at Middlemore Hospital and Manukau Super-Clinic is pilot Phil Pacey from Drury.

The truck dealer has been flying privately since 1980

and decided to get involved after meeting Mr Weller through Rotary and hearing about his plans.

"It shows that general aviation can make a difference to people's lives in a small way," Mr Pacey says.

"If you take a trip to Hastings by plane it's a one-hour 20-minute plane trip versus a lengthy car ride - this

makes a huge difference.

"A trip in a car can make you crooker."

He'll be flying his Cessna 206, a single engine six-seater aircraft, whenever patients need him.

Mr Weller says more volunteer angels like Mr Pacey are needed to transport patients to and from rural areas. And volunteer earth

angels are needed to use their cars to drive patients to and from Ardmore to their medical appointments.

"Having the smiling face of earth angels waiting at the airport helps create a seamless service."

Angel Flight NZ carries patients aged from two years to 82 years who have been referred by doctor. It relies entirely on donations to provide its free service. Visit angelflightnz.co.nz for more information and eligibility details.

our e-edition has more

Go to papakura.courier.co.nz and click on Latest Edition to see a video on how Angel Flight Australia helps make a difference.

Photo: SHANE WENZLICK

Chance to help Kiwis toss the coin at match

It's the opportunity of a lifetime.

Suburban Newspapers, publisher of the *Papakura Courier*, is searching for two young readers to help make rugby league history at

Eden Park on April 20.

That's when the Kiwis face off against the Kangaroos in the much anticipated Anzac Test.

Our lucky pair will join Aussie captain Cameron

Smith and Kiwis league legend Benji Marshall before the match to toss the coin and see who kicks off.

"This is a chance to have your photo taken with the captains and a behind-the-

scenes tour of the tunnel," *Papakura Courier* editor Judith Tucker says.

Email your name, address and daytime contact details to online.admin@snl.co.nz by 5pm on April

13 and you'll go into the draw to win.

Don't forget to type Coin Toss Competition in the subject line.

Entries to the competition are only open to readers

aged 15 years or under.

New Zealand last hosted the Anzac Test back in 1998 when the Kiwis, helped by a couple of Kevin Iro tries, won 22-16 at North Harbour Stadium.

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