

# Air angel prepares for take-off

By staff reporters

An angel will make its first mercy dash from Northland to Auckland next week, with a groundbreaking new service that started in Whangarei about to take flight.

Angel Flight NZ, a charity that will fly patients from their local airport to wherever it is they need to go, at no cost to the patient, has set up in New Zealand after Northlander Lance Weller returned home after 43 years in Australia, including working as a pilot for Angel Flight there.

Mr 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, and next Thursday the service will take its first passenger — a Far North paraplegic and amputee who has to go to two appointments in different parts of Auckland that day.

Mr Weller's own plane is not suitable to transport the Far North man so Quantum Aviation, out of Whangarei Airport, has donated a plane and pilot for the day, picking the man up, taking him to Ardmore Airport, where an Earth Angel will pick him up and take him to the appointments before he flies back to Kaitiaki.

"Normally he would have had to have set aside two to three days [for the appointments]. His condition means he has to lie down in the back of a car and that's not a nice journey to make on our winding roads. We can do it in a day and with far less stress and



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

trouble for him and his family."

Mr Weller is still building the organisation up, but already has six other pilots and planes on board, and will welcome more volunteer pilots with open arms. He has no doubt it will make a

huge difference in 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 and patients must be finally needy/disadvantaged, meaning they have no alternative but to travel by road.

"Everyone knows how long it takes to drive from Kaitiaki to Auckland, for example," Lance said when he made a test flight to Kaitiaki "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.

At this stage the service will be flying from Kaitiaki, 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 aircraft's time a year, are welcome to contact Lance on (09) 434-3271, (027) 893-4587, or lance@angelflightnz.co.nz.

# Strike at homes depends on talks

By Imran Ali

A planned strike by about 100 rest-home workers in Northland could be averted if mediation talks set for today are successful.

The workers are employed by Potter Home, Lester Heights, Rimu Park in Whangarei and Baycare in Paihia and belong to the New Zealand Nurses' Union and Service and Food Workers' Union.

About 800 union members at 11 of 20 Radius Residential Care homes throughout New Zealand plan to stop work for two hours on Friday and for a similar duration on April 5.

Union organiser John Miller said his members were not awarded a 1.73 per cent pay increase in August 2010 as part of a two-year collective agreement with the district health boards and Radius.

Union members working in rest homes were among the lowest paid at a base rate of \$13 an hour, with most earning \$13.60, he said yesterday.

"There has been several attempts at negotiation and mediation and we'll endeavour to reach an agreement tomorrow," Mr Miller said.

"Striking is a hard decision to make because they lose money when they're already on a low pay and a lot of them are women on their own or families on their own."

Radius chief executive Brien Cree said the industrial action would not affect the standard of care for the elderly because the action affected only a small number of its facilities. Radius had enough staff on duty to maintain services.

Mr Cree said any wage increases came from indirect Government funding via the DHB process.

"It (Radius) could only fund larger pay hikes by reducing costs elsewhere and thereby lowering the level and standard of care for its residents. This Radius is not prepared to do," he said.

The profits in the residential-care industry were not great. He disputed union claims that pay rates at Radius were the lowest in the industry, saying they equated with those other providers paid. The union did not take into account allowances paid by Radius to staff as they achieved higher qualifications on the job, Mr Cree said.

Although he said he had considerable sympathy for the workers and wanted to see them get a higher hourly rate, the workers' argument was with the Government and DHB process.

"I believe the Government has historically unfunded the residential care industry by as much as 40 per cent. "That is just not good enough," he said.

# Ahpene's need for speed cost his life

By Kristin Edge

Seventeen-year-old Anaru Ahpene was a car enthusiast who had a habit of driving too fast.

Evidence presented at a coroner's inquest into his death suggested it was this need for speed that killed him.

Experts said the car Ahpene was driving would have been going no less than 160km/h when he lost control on Western Hills Drive, got airborne — and flew nearly 30 metres across a stream — before smashing into a bank on July 26, 2009.

It was a miracle the three male passengers were not killed, Coroner Brandt Shortland said.

Ahpene had not been drinking but had cannabis in his system when he lost control of his friend's north-bound Nissan Skyline GTS just before the Waiarohia bridge near Manse St sometime after 3.30am.

The young Kaikohe man died of multiple traumatic injuries suffered in the crash.

During the hearing his mother, Erena Ahpene, expressed her thanks to everyone who had been involved in her son's inquest and said until hearing the evidence she had been unaware of the full story leading up to her son's tragic death.

"It's getting closure, it's just been so painful."

"I lost my husband and Anaru did everything for me. I got sick and he used to do everything."

She said he had left school to work at New World in Kaikohe to support the family.

"He was young and had a lot of things put on his shoulders at a young age."

"I blame myself more than anything. As a mother I should have stopped him."

Coroner Brandt Shortland said no matter how responsible parents were and as much as they did to stop their children from endangering themselves, ultimately it came down to the individual and the



**TRAGEDY:** Anaru Ahpene lost his life after the car he was driving flew nearly 30 metres across a stream near the Waiarohia bridge.

PHOTO/JOHN STONE

choices they made.

In a written report, released yesterday, Mr Shortland said Ahpene had acted responsibly for most of the evening by not drinking, but his death was not an uncommon incident on New Zealand roads.

"Unfortunately, this is a death that is often played out many times and on many occasions across New Zealand."

"We have seen in advertising both on television and in various mediums of the dangers of young people in cars and speed."

He said it did not matter whether the setting was urban or rural, the dangers of speeding were well documented.

"The fact of the matter remains that young drivers who die as a result of speed-related deaths are over-represented in the fatality statistics."

"I can only reiterate and endorse the importance of the messages that are out there already... speed kills."

# A small mouse with big dreams

It was all tutu exciting when little ballet dancers Tahī-Ora Tito and Corey Te Hei met their favourite mouse, Angelina Mousling, who is in Whangarei for her big audition.

Angelina Mousling is a fictional mouse and the star of about 20 popular children's books *Angelina Ballerina*, which became an animated television series in 2002, then a musical, and now a ballet.

The charming, fun, child-friendly ballet *Angelina Ballerina's Big Audition* is about how Angelina loves to dance and dreams of becoming a famous ballerina. In a production packed with colourful characters and costumes, Angelina prepares for her most important performance — before a judge from the Camembert Academy. Will she be good enough? Will her dreams come true?

Among characters who cannot fail to charm are Angelina's ballet teacher Miss Lilly and best friend Alice Nimbletoes.

The popular stage show as been brought to Whangarei by the Royal New Zealand Ballet during a national tour.

There will be three performances in Whangarei today. With such an exacting schedule, three dancers play Angelina in the tour. Yesterday Tahī-Ora, 7, and Corey, 5, who learn dancing with Dance Inc, Northland, met one of the principle dancers, Bridgett Letters-Peak — one of the Angelinas.

Designed for a younger audience, this delightful ballet provides the perfect treat for children aged from two-years-old but also has wider appeal. The 75-minute performance (including a 20-minute interval) features ballet, hip-hop, contemporary dance, tap dancing and "a little bit of magic".

"The production may be the first many children have experienced, so it has to be the right introduction to dance and theatre," said RNZB managing director Amanda Skoog.

A second RNZB company has just returned from a successful



**SMALL STEPS:** Tahī-Ora Tito (left), receives a ballet pointer from Angelina Mousling (Bridgett Letters-Peak) ahead of *Angelina Ballerina* performances at Forum North today.

PHOTO/MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

Australian tour, performing to 62,000 Angelina fans in six centres including

Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Originally an English National Ballet production, the NZ

version of *Angelina Ballerina's Big Audition* features dancers from Australia, NZ and Britain.



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