

# Mayor Martin promises a fresh start

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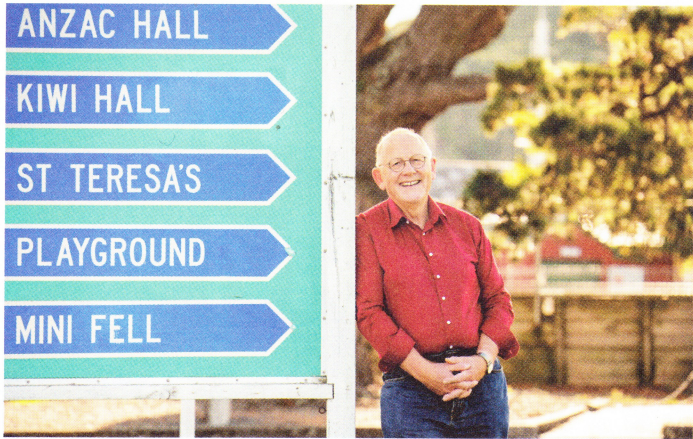
South Wairarapa's new Mayor, Martin Connelly, thinks people would be surprised to know he likes opera and rhododendrons. But what surprises me is that he arrives at our interview alone.

It's become common practice for people in high places to be accompanied to interviews by a media minder to help with curly questions (and to make sure they don't say anything silly). So I'm pleasantly surprised when Martin fronts up on his own, looking very relaxed about the whole affair.

He describes his lack of experience in local body politics as "a distinct advantage" in winning him the October mayoral election against three other candidates. "Sometimes you need a reasonably clean sweep and a fresh start," he says.

Martin decided to stand for Mayor early this year, after becoming dissatisfied with the way the previous Council was performing.

"I felt that it had been a council that had not taken responsibility for its actions, that had not represented people particularly well, and that it had made some poor decisions."



Martin Connelly: "Sometimes you need a reasonably clean sweep and a fresh start."

## New people

He was pleased there were a number of "young, new and energetic people" who put themselves forward for election, especially in Featherston. (One of these, Featherston Ward Councillor Melissa Sadler-Futter, is now the South Wairarapa's Deputy Mayor.)

Martin believes that under the previous Council, people felt they were not being listened to – something he wants to change.

"I am very keen to just meet and talk to people. If anyone writes to me I think they've got a 99% chance of getting a reply within two days. And I want to make sure that at least one morning a week I set up my office in Featherston."

He says there is a lot to learn in his new job, and admits he is already realising that getting things done could take a bit longer than he had hoped.

"The whole system is almost designed to stop you doing things. One of the chief things that stands in our way is the Annual Plan. Now, the Annual Plan is a good idea. But what if something comes up in six months' time?"

"I think that comes down to not planning things at a very low level. Let's make sure we're planning them at a category level so that if things change within each category, we don't have a bother."

He says an example of this is the damage to South Wairarapa roads that was caused by the terrible winter weather. "We would have planned to do so much maintenance, but we need to do more. So how do we make that happen soon?"

## Rates review

A review of last year's controversial rates rise is also on Martin's agenda.

"The council has prepared some material and I'm looking forward to reading it very soon. We are also planning for what's called a rates review, which looks at issues at a higher level about how do we go about rating people – what do we rate them for; what sorts of things do we rate?"

At this point the conversation turns to the three prominently neglected buildings on Featherston's main street. Martin argues these buildings should be rated much more highly than they are because they impose costs on Featherston, including a loss of image and economic costs caused by businesses not wanting to invest in the town. There is also an amenity cost affecting residents' enjoyment of Featherston.

"People tell me they are scared to walk past one of those buildings in the dark. I don't blame them."

He says he will know he has done a good job as Mayor if he has fixed Featherston's long bemoaned flooding and drainage issues, including those at Donald's Creek. "I'm not the only person on Council who thinks this is a real problem. Do people want to stop when they come into Featherston and see that? No."

## Early years

Martin spent his early years on a high country sheep station. He says growing up in such an isolated area resulted in an intense hatred of the cold and an awareness of the need to help your neighbours. "Then when you're in an emergency they will help you ... Where we lived there was no fire brigade or ambulance or helicopter; you were hugely dependent on your own resources."

He began his career as a teacher before completing university study in public policy from which he emerged as the top scholar in his class, leading to employment at the Ministry of Education. "I stayed there for quite a long time and ended up as a senior manager. I was responsible for providing advice on the entire schools budget at one time."

Martin also represented New Zealand at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as part of a working party to advise the Chilean government on its education system after the country became a democracy. He received the Prime Minister's Prize for Public Policy in 1998.

Martin and wife Tania bought a property in Greytown in 2008, where he now enjoys spending time with his family and grandchildren.



Martin and Carlos at C'est Cheese café.