

Connection and celebration the goals of Matariki festival

Marisa King

The stars will be out in Featherston next month. And I don't mean celebrities.

This year's Matariki Festival will be the biggest yet, with the steering committee aiming to make it a time of *tūhonotanga* (connection) to both celebrate *mātauranga* Māori and to develop stronger cultural awareness within our community.

A wide range of events is planned to suit all ages. There will be a community *hangi*, cemetery clean-up, kite-making workshop, *noho marae* (overnight stay), storytelling and lunar calendar workshops, a Matariki dinner and a classical music concert. Events will run from 22-29 June from early morning to sunset. There will also be a Matariki star exhibition, with nine large lit-up stars, each representing one star in the Matariki/Pleiades constellation, to be installed at a different shop on the main street. Information will be provided on the stars and their history.

The Festival programme is community-driven, after residents were invited to participate in a survey shortly after the 2021 Matariki Festival. The results of the survey have been used to plan this year's events.

The Festival steering group is led by Pae tū Mōkai o Taurira, a local kaupapa Māori group established in 2018 to represent Featherston Māori residents on the South Wairarapa District Councils' Māori Standing Committee.

The steering group is largely made up of community members such as *taura* here (Māori from other areas living in Featherston), business owners, Featherston Booktown representatives, school principals, the Library, local clubs, parents and South Wairarapa District Council representatives. Fab Feathy has also come to the party with funding.

This will be the third consecutive year that Featherston has celebrated the revitalisation of this ancient temporal marker of the *maramataka* or lunar calendar.

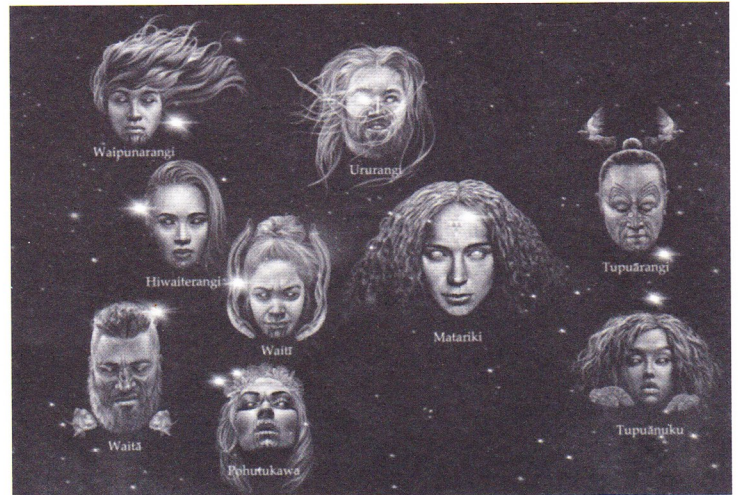
The aims of the Festival include wide community engagement, *mātauranga* Māori knowledge sharing and – most importantly – fun for all residents and participants living in Featherston and South Wairarapa.

Matariki is the Māori name for the cluster of stars known to Western astronomers as the Pleiades in the constellation Taurus. *Matariki* is a shortened version of *Ngā mata o te ariki o Tāwhirimātea*, or “the eyes of the god Tāwhirimātea”.

According to Māori mythology, Tāwhirimātea, god of wind and weather, was enraged by the separation of heaven and earth – his parents, Ranginui and Papatūānuku. Defeated in battle by his brother Tāne, Tāwhirimātea fled to the sky to live with Ranginui, but in his anger he first plucked out his eyes as a gesture of contempt towards his siblings, and flung them into the sky, where they remain, stuck to his father's chest.

Traditionally, Matariki is an occasion to remember our loved ones passed, celebrate the present and prepare the ground for the coming year. More information on the Festival programme will be available on a Facebook page coming soon.

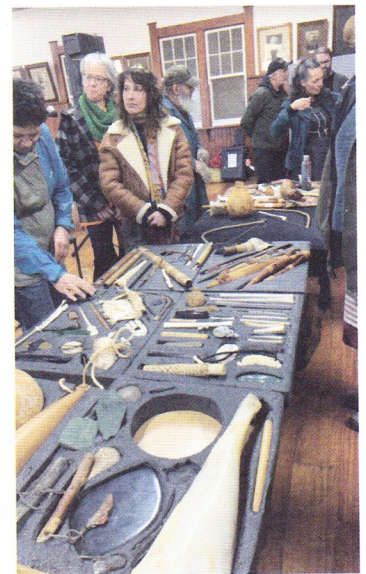
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Te whānau Matariki. Image: Te Haunui Tuna, 2016, supplied by Rangi Matamua.



Mini Fell train rides at the 2021 Matariki Festival.



A display of taonga puoro (traditional musical instruments) at the 2021 Matariki Festival.

