

## **MEDIA RELEASE - Te Hauora O Te Hiku O Te Ika**

**For immediate use**

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### **Call for dairies to follow the lead of Kaitai's tobacco-free "VIP"**

The health promotion officer of the Māori health provider, Te Hauora O Te Hiku O Te Ika, is calling for dairies, convenience stores and service stations across the Muriwhenua to follow the example of VIP Dairy in Kaitaia which has been tobacco-free since September last year.

Henare Anderson says he really admires Sheryl Stankovich and Ham Petera, who now neither stock nor sell tobacco products in their VIP Dairy on the southern edge of town.

"They took a risk by getting rid of tobacco products, but in the end, they've found they don't need tobacco to make a dollar," he says.

Mr Anderson says smoking in Northland is a real problem with the rate 25 percent higher than the national rate and smoking the cause of about 25 percent of all deaths across the region. "For Māori, it causes almost half of all deaths (47 percent)."

Sheryl Stankovich says she and her partner Ham Petera decided to get out of tobacco products because they were sick of children coming in to buy tobacco, cigarettes and lighters for mum and dad sitting out in the car.

"I kept saying that we could not – would not – sell to under 18s, but still adult smokers would send their children in. The last straw was when a boy, not even five years old, came in for dad and said 'a hundred grams of Port Royal please'. When I said we wouldn't sell to the child, Dad just backed up his car from the takeaway next door and yelled through the window 'It's ok – it's only for me'. We didn't care it was just for him, what was it teaching that little boy? That was it for us – it wasn't worth the grief anymore."

The "grief" for Sheryl and Ham also involved teens - using the netball courts and rugby league playing fields across the road – fibbing about their age so they could buy tobacco products; having to pay a bill of several thousand each week to the tobacco companies, before the tobacco was sold to the public; and living with the knowledge that although people in their own families had died of smoking-related diseases, Sheryl and Ham were still selling the product that had eventually killed them.

"We have been surprised by how supportive customers have been," Sheryl says. "Parents of teens have been particularly pleased they don't have to worry so much about their netball and league playing children trying to hoodwink us into selling them cigarettes and tobacco."

"We did brass off a couple of old dairy farmers but on the other hand, the truckies have universally praised the move - even the smokers!"

Refusing to stock or sell tobacco also set Sheryl and Ham themselves on the path of quitting. It hasn't been easy but with the help of nicotine patches they are making a valiant attempt.

Faced with a decrease in sales, Sheryl and Ham came up with some innovative ideas to make up for the loss.

"Moving out the tobacco stands gave us room for an extra sandwich, cake, fruit and veges cabinet. We also set up a room for people to hire internet time. Together with a couple of other little ideas we've actually made up the lost tobacco sales.

"I feel like we've done something really good for the community. In the end you realise that tobacco sales are only about money and if you can make money somewhere else why bother with tobacco? It's not just the bottom line in terms of profit, it's what I call 'the real bottom line' in terms of being socially responsible, says Sheryl.

Henare Anderson says one of the aims of the Te Tai Tokerau Māori Health Plan is to normalise smokefree environments and Sheryl Stankovich and Ham Petera show that going tobacco-free doesn't mean a retailer has to struggle.

"A bit of imagination is all that's needed. I hope other store owners pick up the ball they've passed. In a region where smoking causes such grief, the retailers really can do something to help," he says.

For more information media can contact:

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