

Address by Mayor Neil Sinclair to Start Local Seminar June 22nd 2016

E Nga Mana e Nga reo e Nga iwi O Te Motu, E Nga Waka Rau rangatira ma Tena Kotou Tena Kotou Tena Kotou Katoa

Kia Ora, Kia Orana, Talofa lava, Bulla Vinaka greetings, that's the usual greeting of the mayor of the South Waikato, It make a proud statement about who we are. A truly multi-cultural District right in the centre of the North Island between Hamilton Rotorua and Taupo. A District of 23000 that is about 30% Maori and 11% Pacific Island. We are young District our main town of Tokoroa really only happened when the large pulp and paper mill at Kinlieth was built in the 1950s and now we are 50 % farming 50% forestry. We were a rough tough union town. Yes we had a tough image an image that unfortunately lives today. We still get the press referring to South of Tokoroa for the horrid murder of the lollipop man but opening the bridge alongside the next week was as north of Taupo. We are a proud caring compassionate community. I know I was dentist in the South Waikato for 40 years. Actually now we have the lowest crime stats for the Bay of Plenty and my towns are almost devoid of any graffiti. But now like all rural NZ towns we are looking at a decline in population as well as an aging population. We have additionally high youth unemployment, some poor housing stock and generally regarded as being a low socio economic district not an exciting picture and so why are we so confident about our District and our towns. **For we are.**

Councils and communities in general have to recognize their situation, accept who they are and then they can work out just what they have to do to create change. **So identify your local strengths.**

For us it is that we have a particularly caring resilient community. When I first became mayor in 2004 through a series of circumstances Kevin Keoghan of No Opportunity Wasted was approached and he came and met with a small group, of us. He wanted to 'put the Tokoroa spirit on the map'. On a Thursday night we all stood on an empty section of Council land then at Sunday lunch time I opened a children's park with Sound Shell, flying fox, BBQ, unique play equipment, a talking pole to play on, swings, a Graffiti board. All done by the community, all manner of people were involved in the construction clubs, groups, individuals, firms, groups of people who fed us, \$20000 raised. Nor a dollar from Council. Looking back now not even a resource consent! **All done in 48 hours.**

So if the community, were going to be the doers and then it would require an innovative, imaginative courageous Council to work with them and harness that spirit.

Our homes are in the main 60 year old Forest Product homes that are cold and draughty. Air quality is right at the top of the list of concerns My Council was one of the first to get involved with ECCA with the Government insulation programs We concerns even had the Samoan ladies knitting tube

So Council had to tackle a PM10 issue in a community that had used wood as their free source of heating forever so we had to convince them that the old wood burners were the source of the PM10s. No easy job so Council allowed ratepayers to take loans out associated with their rates to replace their open fire places and old wood burners. We aren't there yet but the size and number of exceedances has fallen

dramatically. Council was even more innovative as we offered industry the ability to set off their emissions by insulating and replacing the heating for a large number of homes.

Then high youth unemployment is a concern. We as a Council, knew education was the way forward. That's why we instituted the mayoral Scholarship. We have great schools producing very talented individuals. Our town because of the mill has many engineering firms of high quality, many into exporting but all calling for trained staff. Council looked at the Otorohanga project and decided to copy it but upgrade it, Council put in \$90,000 but instructed that the best of lathes were to be bought. If we believed in our youth, then they needed the best of equipment 'give them second hand gear and that will be how they think we feel about them. A group of the leaders from those engineering firms came together and they set the syllabus around what they wanted as employers, then Waiariki Polytec was asked if they were interested in being the ITO with our lathes and the syllabus set by industry. They came on board. It has set the bench mark for Trade Training schemes... Now we have engineering, auto engineering, horticulture farming and then a couple of years ago those leaders said that there was a deficiency in the availability of welders. So Council fronted with \$100,000 and 13 welding pods set up with top gear. When they graduate they will all have jobs? Over all the job uptake by all our students is 97%? They know stay home and miss attending then there is someone ready to take your place.

Trucking is big business in the District but the drivers are all aging so Council has responded to the transport industry cry by bringing the new BOP poly TEC and Waiariki group together with industry so with equipment of trucks, forklifts, donated by the industry and I opened last week the Logistics course. This is what the Head of Technology at the Polytec said "it is an example of the forward thinking and visionary attitude that drives the South Waikato Council"

As leaders and I mean Councils we must recognize our concern areas, while still identifying the strengths of our community, one of ours is the high number of volunteers that we have in our District and they are remarkable high but we also must recognize the natural attributes of our District. For us that means we are on a rail head, we are centrally placed and on SH1 and that we have some of the best natural beauty and best farming soils in the country.

Again tapping into the community thinking of our industry leaders we as a Council, have gone into a public private partnership with a transport firm to create a public road/rail terminal that will feed off the Tauranga port for imports and the sending out of exports. Council invested 2 million dollars Already we are getting growth with firms like James and Son from Australia, and RD1 using it as their central north Island distribution centre. 4000 tons of what you think of as Kitty Litter actually it's Zeolite and it has a multitude of uses has been exported to Bangladesh by Blue Pacific Minerals Already 30 new jobs

70% of NZ bottled water comes from Putāruru and goes around the world. The source of that water the Blue Spring was named as the hidden Treasure of NZ. O God what publicity it got. So we were over whelmed by 9000 people in one month visiting this gem and we weren't and aren't even now ready. Success is a problem but it is part of the discovery of our natural beauty. Our Waikato River Trails is used by thousands, we have just discovered 70 Kokako in a nearby reserve the only gene

pool with that number Problem how do we work with that as an attraction way-out destroying it Watch for the Circle of Fire cycleway development.

So as a Council, we have the ideas, the innovation to create good sub-regional growth, the imagination to build on an exciting committed community so we can if not confound the computer projections for our District at least delay them.

Local Communities like mine have that community determination; Councils like mine have the ability to create partnerships with industry like we did with Fonterra's new \$385 million milk drier, Blue Pacific and their increase, John Deere engineering factory, yes even the 50000 hectares of forestry conversions. That has been done showing best farming practices. That brought more than 90 new families into the District so we can do but how do we get Central Government to recognize that sub regional growth is taking place. Small communities like mine are making things happen because we have to if we are to maintain that which we treasure. I have had only one Cabinet Minister visit he was in and out for the opening of the rail hub. Regional Growth they say is exploding but they mean Hamilton. We need recognition of sub-regional needs

Perhaps the answer is in what LGNZ is proposing as Special economic Zones place like the South Waikato to help us with Kiwi rail

Encourage Local Councils like mine to be brave, courageous with their innovation and imagination. Encourage us, don't wait and then say congratulations. As always finance is the biggie. Most of what we have done took more time than it could have as we had to justify every penny, we aren't rich far from it so caution was the message, and frankly sometimes courage. We can do. Rural NZ can do we all need to think local and let local do.

Come and see the South Waikato for your selves. Tena Kotou Tena Kotou kata