

Gary Carnachan - TCRT

Taranaki Community Rugby Trust chairman Garry Carnachan's retirement plan hasn't gone exactly to script.

After a lengthy career that involved teaching, professional development, managerial and governance roles, Carnachan returned to his home province with a desire to ease back on the work front.

The fact he hasn't been able to achieve a quieter retirement has been fortunate for the trust which has benefited from his boardroom expertise since 2018.

Having been involved in a lesser capacity at the beginning of the trust, which he always thought was "a fantastic idea", he found himself pulled into the mix upon his return to Taranaki.

"When I came home and tried to retire I was looking for some things to do in the community that might allow me to give back," he said.

"While I've been involved in a lot of sport I hadn't been involved a lot in Taranaki sport and the trust approached me at the time to see if I would consider coming on board."

It was the opportune time for him given his passion and desire to do something locally.

"Rugby is one of my passions and I'm a firm believer in the power of sport to change people's lives," he explains.

His motivation for coming on to the board was not so much to see rugby being played but the betterment of the mental and physical health of the communities the trust operates for by providing team sport.

Carnachan's involvement with sport and its governance stretches back decades and includes a long period as chief executive of School Sports New Zealand.

He's also been heavily involved in consultancy work for a number of sporting codes looking at strategy and youth space.

That experience has proved invaluable for the trust and he has proved to be a natural successor to Malcom Sutherland when he stepped down as chairman.

Carnachan said he always maintained an interest in the trust while not living in Taranaki and it became a topic of conversation whenever he connected with anyone involved.

"I always had a watching brief without having any real involvement and I really enjoyed watching it grow from leasing land off an oil company, to buying a herd and paying off that herd," he said.

"From then to go on and lease another farm and taking the plunge and buying and paying off another herd, being part of that last journey and the second farm has been really rewarding."

However, it did not compare to being at the helm when the trust moved to farm ownership, something Carnachan described as massive for the future.

"It's been a long held ambition of the original trustees, farm ownership, and it secures our future," he explains.

"The lease market can be difficult because in reality you could end up with a herd but no farm."

Carnachan said the board did not know if it was in a strong enough position to buy the farm when it became available, despite thinking they might be close to taking the opportunity.

"We worked with a few banks who told us they would definitely back us and that has probably been the major milestone for the trust, that farm ownership, since it began."

The ownership, he admits, has consumed a lot of his tenure on the trust.

“We talked about it for a good part of the year, did a lot of due diligence and had a lot of discussions with banks and partners.

“There is a lot of work in the day-to-day running of a farm and we are really fortunate we have a really good team.”

He’s also keen to acknowledge the support of those partners like Velocity and farm advisor Brendan Attrill.

“We’ve got a really solid group of people doing the day-to-day work and while we are volunteers, we’ve also got a great network of donors and supporters out there who want to be associated with the trust because it’s a pretty good feel-good thing to do,” he said.

Carnachan says he’s happy to take “his turn at the front end” of the trust while he knows there will be a need for “fresh legs” at some point.

“I think you need that,” he said. “Bringing new people into the trust is great, you get some fresh ideas and fresh enthusiasm with a new lens to look at the way we do things.”

He believes the way the trust was operating at governance level was working really well, with strength across all sub committees which remain an important part of Sutherland’s legacy.

“When the trust only had one farm and was leasing it there probably wasn’t a need to be perhaps as sharp but as we got two farms and the business grew things became more complex and the risk got greater which it has again with farm ownership,” he said.

“You need to be a bit sharper and Malcom’s work in setting up that framework has been really important.”

Carnachan also believes the working relationship with Taranaki Rugby remains solid despite a reasonably high turnover of staff at the union.

“I think it’s a really good line of independence there,” he said.

And he’s more than happy with where the trust was concentrating its funding through development programmes and the increased sponsorship of Taranaki referees.

“We think it’s a really good fit and we’re pretty happy with how we are funding the community game and not putting money into the administration of Taranaki Rugby because that’s their business to do.”

Asked how he measures a successful audit of the trust each year, Carnachan said what they like to see was that their money was hitting the ground and they have a level of distribution that suits where the trust’s financial situation sits.

“We’ve committed to Taranaki Rugby that while we are focussed on debut replacement there will be a minimum distribution of \$140,000 a year,” he said.

“But that’s a minimum and if there was something else they wanted us to consider they could ask us and we would balance that off against the need to secure debut repayment.”