

Paul Petrowski - TCRT

Business adviser and accountant Paul Petrowski has a more intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the Taranaki Community Rugby Trust than most.

His first involvement began in 2009 when he was working for Price Waterhouse Cooper and doing the accounting for the trust before he became director and owner of New Plymouth firm Velocite.

“As we transitioned away from PWC and into Velocite the role at the trust had grown so much to what they needed that we had a discussion about having a manager for the trust,” he said.

“Obviously there was an affordability side to that because everyone at the trust have been volunteers all the way through.”

The solution was to use his allotted community volunteer hours through his work to act as the trust’s manager while sharing the accountancy work with colleagues from Velocite.

A central point for trustees to work through, Petrowski coordinates a lot of the projects that need to be completed while managing those of his own.

“In this position the trustees are definitely a lot more operational than other governance positions,” he said.

The work former chairman Malcolm Sutherland did to set up a sub-committee structure has helped Petrowski in his role as he became the central point for each committee to provide consistency across what everyone was doing by the time the board convenes, he said.

He points out that no one at the trust has been paid, the trust has never paid an employee, while the work that is needed to be done is sub-contracted out.

“All those contractors are providing services at discounted rates, so all of that help has allowed the trust to grow,” he said.

“It’s a massive community effort and if the community was not as involved as it has the trust would be nowhere near as big as it is today. It gives us a massive leg-up.”

While he admits the sheer volume of voluntary work and donations that come in provides complexities the structure of the trust meant it was manageable.

“The work that Malcolm did allowed us to focus us on what we are trying to achieve and a lot of volunteer organisations don’t have that,” he said.

Petrowski said he had always been impressed by the calibre of people around the trust’s board which excelled largely because people’s specific talents have been identified to align with what the trust needed at the time.

“When you compare it to a typical rugby committee for instance, it’s usually made up of whoever is available and wants to do it. The trust is different, we really encourage people to join who fit the criteria and who are passionate about rugby and what we are trying to achieve.”

The farm ownership, combined at the rate the trust was knocking off its debt, meant Petrowski sees a bright future to what it could actually achieve in the long term.

“When that debt is gone we will have an asset that is pumping hundreds of thousands of dollars into community rugby,” he said.

The speed of the trust’s success has surprised him, as has the continued volume of people who give their time.

And that’s a whole range of people who give their time at discounted rates like plumbers, dairy service staff.

“It all adds up because it’s growing that equity base,” he said.

Petrowski believes better communication from the trust to show stakeholders just where the money is being spent has also helped keep the trust relevant to people who have donated whatever they have, be it stock or time.

He also believes in the importance of having trust representatives attend all the events the trust helps out with like the Roller Mills tournaments, the coaching clinics, whatever it might be.

“The original farmer who donated cows 13 or 14 years ago can see the marquee at these events and they can approach us and talk about what we are doing and what we are trying to achieve.”

As for his time with the trust and how much longer he wants to be involved, Petrowski made it clear he wants it to continue for some time yet.

“I’d love to be involved for as long as I’m wanted,” he said.

“The trust manager’s role grows and grows as the organisation gets bigger and busier so there will be a point when the trust will need to understand if we want to get the most benefit out of that role then it may need to be an employee, potentially.

“But for me personally, I’d love to be a trustee one day. Evolving from the accountant on the job to the trust manager through to trustee would be special because I love the trust and what it has achieved.”