

## **Flying dream comes true for Upper Hutt pilot**

The path to joining the Royal New Zealand Air Force's (RNZAF) Black Falcons aerobatics team wasn't an easy one for Squadron Leader Richard O'Flaherty, but he didn't let a few knockbacks stop him from achieving his flying goal.

From Upper Hutt, where he attended Silverstream's St Patrick's College, Squadron Leader O'Flaherty thought he'd like to fly for the RNZAF.

However, his journey to the skies started firmly on the ground after missing out on the 2007 pilot intake, instead being offered a role to train as an avionics technician.

"I did that for about eight years, working mostly on the P-3K Orion at No. 5 Squadron, but I always wanted to take another crack at being a pilot."

His opportunity came up again in 2015, and by then Squadron Leader O'Flaherty had matured and gained a good amount of Air Force experience.

"I'd done well at that point and had been promoted quickly during my career. I also gained leadership skills with opportunities like being chosen as the captain of the Defence Force cricket team when I was a Leading Aircraftman."

He went straight into the role of flying instructor after completing training.

During his career, joining the prestigious Black Falcons team was always in the back of Squadron Leader O'Flaherty's mind and he was thrilled to be asked to join the team this season.

"I'm enjoying the flying and the new challenges it brings. It's also a great opportunity to speak to young people that are keen on aviation and hopefully inspire them to follow their dream of flying."

Flying in the team's fourth position, he said the role was challenging but worth it.

"Flying in the synchro pair is exhilarating; we get down low and fast and there isn't much room for error."

Squadron Leader O'Flaherty is now an instructor at RNZAF Base Ohakea's Central Flying School.

The past eight years as an instructor included a two-year stint in the Royal Australian Air Force instructing student pilots on the Pilatus PC-21 – a role he relished.

This year's Black Falcons' display season has covered a raft of events spanning the country.

The first event of the season saw a display at Marlborough for the local Air Training Corps, followed by a meet and greet with the cadets.

"It was cool to have a chat to them and try to ease any doubts some of them had about if they would be good enough to become a pilot. We encouraged them to give it a go and don't give up."

Looking back on his 19 years in the Air Force, Squadron Leader O'Flaherty said he's pleased he stuck with his piloting goal and didn't let the knockbacks throw him off-course.

"I've enjoyed my time in defence. One of the great pleasures has been being able to travel and play sport as part of the job. If you're into sport, hanging out with your mates and travelling the world - it's a great career option."

*Source: New Zealand Defence Force*

16/03/26

## **Mawaihakona Stream Update: 16th of March, 2026**

Message to all Mawaihakona Stream Users.

Please note that the ford is now closed off for all users as the process for building a temporary bridge has commenced. The bridge is for heavy machinery use to avoid crossing through the stream thus preserving the ecology of the stream from continual heavy traffic movements. There will be many heavy vehicle movements across this new temporary bridge daily

Construction Fencing has been erected, closing both the college side and the Hutt River side of the stream tracks at the ford. The tracks are now out and back walk for a time to be determined by the speed of the company making changes to the area's flood plain.

Ramparts/ abutments are now in place for the bridge.

And the bridge is now in place so the heavy machinery can commence work in the paddocks closest to the river.

Erection of construction fencing will be completed inside of the current orange mesh fencing to close out the heavy machinery worksite over the next week or so.

The orange mesh fence could be thought of as a viewing fence for those interested to look at the heavy machinery at work.

<https://uhconnection.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/mawaihakona-stream-map-snip-updated.jpg?w=1024>

Legend:Line colour=txt beside

Blue=The Hutt river  
Light Blue= The Mawaihakona Stream  
Purple= The Hutt river trail  
Orange= Orange mesh fencing  
Black=Earthworks fencing  
Red=Earthworks  
Light Green=Northern Paddocks for walking  
Teal=Heretaunga Park

Please note the north paddocks closest to Royal Wellington Golf course are available for all foot traffic users.

A working bee next week (day and time to be advised) will cut a couple of tracks to allow easy access from the stream track to the paddocks allowing some variety in walking patterns for walkers and hikers.

Also of note is that Bart's crew are making rapid progress in nailing decking boards on the new boardwalk and this is close to completion.

Many thanks to the companies whose kind donations have helped Friends of Mawaihakona Stream keep costs down.

I think Bart and co are due several platefuls of scones, cakes etc. They are there most days from 9am to 10:30ish most days weather permitting.  
A marvellous effort and thanks.

We are all looking forward to the new boardwalk opening.

Cheers  
Kevin Braddock

*A "thank you" to Kevin Braddock for sending this article to The Upper Hutt Connection.*

16/03/26

### **Menzshed Update - March 2026**

The shed was moved to its new concrete pad and work has begun to transform into to a wood turning facility. This has only been possible through a kind donation from the estate of a previous member Garry, who passed away last year. We are about half way in recladding and fitting donated windows with John S and his team driving progress. The shed is also being lined and insulated. Preloved kitchen cupboards will also be installed, making it a home from home!

We now have a CNC Router, kindly donated by Mike H, which will be sited in the new shed. Members with interest in this recent addition should contact Mike H or Doug. A steep learning curve is anticipated in making this work effectively. We have also completed our first project using the newly acquired equipment by making a relief house sign for a local resident. Thanks to Mike H for the setting out and cutting and Doug for the finishing.

The new kitset building has been ordered and the order for the pad to receive the building has been made. We now will have to wait for the building consent to be granted before the concrete can be laid. The site has also been reorganized by relocating our container from its current position to a new location to make the area available for the concrete pour. The Totoro logs (stored for local iwi), will be moved shortly to free up access to the land adjacent to new building plot. The Grand Opening, will take place once the building has been completed and fittingly our main sponsor, Malcolm Gillies, will declare the Upper Hutt Menzshed, finally open.

Community projects still come in from a variety of sources. The helping of "injured animals" is still in vogue, with a cast iron bird having leg surgery. Sorry, the photo's are too graphic to display!

The Lilliput Library and Community Pantry has now been completed and is due to move to its new home shortly.

The park benches made for a local Church will finally be delivered this week. Several small jobs have also been received, repair of a broom, repair of an ironing board, and making an angle poise lamp base.

We are always running out of storage space whether for our stock of timber or equipment. If you know of someone with a surplus container, please contact us at the contact address below.

We would also like to remind all the Kindy's in Upper Hutt of how we may be able to help them. During this year we intend to be in contact with as many Kindy's as we can, and provide help to at least some of them. We will have a team of "Kindy Champions" who can act as intermediaries and identify where and if we can assist.

If you have a project in mind and you think we can help, then feel free to contact us for a chat and we will do our best to assist you.

contactus@upperhuttmenzshed.kiwi

Don't forget to visit our website for details on where we are and what we do.

You can visit it here:-

<https://upperhuttmenzshed.kiwi>

We are always on the lookout for new members and later this year we will have a metalworking facility. Maybe you have seen our display in the Mall which shows some of the things we do and who we do them for. If you have and would like more info, contact us for a free tour and meet the team.

contactus@upperhuttmenzshed.kiwi

If you want to join us, even for just a cup of tea and a yarn, pop in to see us, you will be more than welcome. Just come along @ 10am Tue to Fri. We are open 9 – 12 Tues to Fri. You will find us at McLeod Park just past the BMX track.

*A "thank you" to Upper Hutt Menzshed for sending this article to The Upper Hutt Connection.*

17/03/26

### **Roadwork updates for Lower Hutt commuters: 13th - 22nd of March**

Wellington Electricity are continuing to relocate underground electricity cables through the city as part of the prep work for Te Wai Takamori O Te Awa Kairangi programme. They are experiencing delays due to challenging ground conditions, which continue to impact progress.

If you're travelling by car please follow all directional signage and allow extra time for your journey. Remember, navigation apps like Waze or Google Maps can also help you plan the best route on the day.

Public transport is also an option: Metlink encourages commuters to catch a bus or take the train. It reduces pressure on the road network, lowers emissions, and can be a quicker journey. Use the journey planner on the Metlink app, and find your fare at [metlink.org.nz](http://metlink.org.nz)

We know these changes can be frustrating, and we truly appreciate everyone adjusting their routines while this important work continues.

Please note some nightwork operations will be in place on Rutherford Street and the Melling Road roundabout. More details below.

Unless stated otherwise, footpaths remain open so you can continue to move through the area and support your favourite local businesses.

Here's where they'll be working from March 13 to 22:

- Underside of Ewen Bridge: Site workers will be present to guide cyclists and pedestrians through the area
- Queens Drive: Northbound lanes are scheduled to open this week. However, the slip lane to Laings Road will be closed
- Laings Road: Scheduled to close from Monday 16th between Queens Drive and High Street (southern end of the city)
- High Street: Scheduled to close this week south of its junction with Andrews Avenue
- Andrews Avenue: Remains closed. Business and residential parking on Andrews Avenue remains available
- Dudley Street: Gradually reopening from today
- Melling Link Bridge: The footpath heading towards the Western Hills is closed (from Rutherford Street to the Repco building)
- Melling Link Bridge underpass: Site workers will be present to guide cyclists and pedestrians through the area
- Rutherford Street: Day works continuing from Melling Link Bridge to Connolly St roundabout. Night works from Sunday March 15, 7pm to 5am. No access to through traffic north of Melling Link Bridge during this time. Please follow detours
- Connolly Street/Melling Road roundabout (pictured): Night works from Sunday March 15, 7pm to 5am. No access to through traffic during this time. Please follow detours
- Connolly Street: Southbound lane closed from Mills Street to Melling Road roundabout. Single lane traffic management in place at the north end by the power station. Site workers will be present to guide cyclists and pedestrians through the area

And don't forget!

Queens Drive / High Street roundabout (near McDonald's) remains closed until December 2026 as part of the SH2 Melling Transport Improvements project

You can find further information on this project and wider, regional disruption on the [NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi - Wellington Facebook page \(https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DDBDuDQxU/\)](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DDBDuDQxU/)

Source: *Te Awa Kairangi - Delivering RiverLink*

13/03/26

## **The National Police Patrol Dog and Detector Dog Championships are back, tougher and more operationally relevant than ever.**

Senior Constable Aaron Senior and police dog Cole, from Tasman, are our new National Police Patrol Dog Champions after coming out top in all but one of the disciplines. Northland's Senior Constable Patrick 'Bula' Derbyshire and detector dog 'Princess' Ripper were crowned National Narcotics Detector Dog Champions after seeing off competition from fellow Police, Corrections and New Zealand Customs.

In recent years, Nationals have been missed due to Covid and other events, so Inspector Todd Southall, National Coordinator: Police Dogs, says it was a good time to review the competition and make some changes.

As a result, this year each of the competing patrol dog teams had to obtain a certificate of excellence at their national certification to qualify to compete. Some of the exercises at Nationals were also updated with practical scenarios to better reflect what our patrol and detector dog teams experience on the street.

The changes paid off with a tightly fought competition.

Aaron and Cole, who graduated as an operation team in 2023, scored an impressive 85% overall to take out the patrol dog championship. Auckland's Senior Constable Andrew Clarke and his dog Sam were runner's up, while Sergeant Elyse Lewis and Ukah, representing Northland, came third.

"Aaron and Cole have shown some outstanding work and were impressive against the intensive competition from the other teams," says Todd.

"They've stood out in demonstrating the high-performing ability and success they show when they are out operationally on the job."

As well as winning the Frank Riley Cup for highest overall marks, Aaron and Cole also scooped the William Rose Bowl for Criminal Work and the Colin Guppy Cup for Tracking, which was presented by former Mayor of Upper Hutt and Colin's son, Wayne Guppy.

If it wasn't for Waikato Constable Zane Carlyon and Obi-Wan winning the Commissioner's Challenge Cup for Obedience, Aaron and Cole would have bagged the lot.

Aaron says he's "thrilled" to win with Cole, who's his third operational dog.

"I have competed in the Nationals twice before with police dog Nour, and previously won the tracking award with him, but this is the first time I have competed with four-year-old Cole, who is exceptional.

"It was however a very challenging competition against some amazing and talented handlers."

"It was however a very challenging competition against some amazing and talented handlers."

It's a common misconception you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but nobody had to when it came to the winning team in the Narcotics Detector Dog competition.

Police were quick to lock on to the title, with former champions Patrick and seven-year-old Ripper winning the Alan Symes Cup. They're no strangers to the title, having won it in 2023 and been runners-up in 2022.

"It's really not about me, it's about Ripper," says Patrick. "She's a fantastic dog.

"It's nice to win but an absolute privilege simply to take part against the other great teams from Customs and Corrections."

Corrections dog handler Todd Carpenter and Tui came second, while Corrections dog handler Damian Hancock placed third with Kaos.

***The 51st Police Dog Nationals were held at various location in and around the Royal New Zealand Police College and the Dog Training Centre (DTC) in Trentham.***

Prizegiving at the DTC was attended by Commissioner of Police Richard Chambers and executive staff from Department of Corrections and New Zealand Customs Service who also helped present the awards.

As a previous Nationals competitor himself, Todd says he understands what the handlers go through and the frustration of those "if only I'd done..." moments. But he says qualifying to compete at Nationals is an achievement in itself and congratulated all the handlers for doing so.

"It's been a challenging few days for all the handlers," says Todd. "The tests they've faced under the keen eyes of the judges are indicative of their daily frontline operational work, and in all weather. They're based on the real-life incidents and decisions that handlers and their dogs must make when they are attending jobs, day and night.

"Dog teams do a fantastic job in helping keep our communities safe. They provide a critical frontline response, supporting all our frontline teams. They are exceptional at detection and prevention capability, and we can't do without them."

## RESULTS

### NATIONAL NARCOTIC DETECTOR DOG CHAMPION - Alan Symes Cup

1. Senior Constable Patrick Derbyshire and Ripper - Northland
2. Corrections Officer Todd Carpenter and Tui – Hawke's Bay
3. Corrections Officer Damian Hancock and Kaos – Christchurch

### NATIONAL POLICE PATROL DOG CHAMPION - Frank Riley Cup for highest overall marks

1. Senior Constable Aaron Senior and Cole - Tasman
2. Senior Constable Andrew Clarke and Sam - Auckland
3. Sergeant Elyse Lewis and Ukah - Northland

## WILLIAM ROSE BOWL FOR CRIMINAL WORK

- Senior Constable Aaron Senior and Cole - Tasman

## COLIN GUPPY TROPHY FOR TRACKING

- Senior Constable Aaron Senior and Cole - Tasman

## COMMISSIONER'S CHALLENGE CUP FOR OBEDIENCE and HEELWORK

- Constable Zane Carlyon and Obi-Wan – Waikato

*Source: New Zealand Police*

13/03/26

## **Upper Hutt Cossie Club donates \$42,571 to Age Concern Wellington and \$8,963 to Te Omanga Hospice**

A fantastic result from our Charity Housie and community fundraising events!

The Upper Hutt Cossie Club is proud to present \$42,571 to Age Concern Wellington and \$8,963 to Te Omanga Hospice. These incredible organisations provide vital support and care within our community, and we're honoured to help contribute to the important work they do.

A huge thank you to everyone who attends our Charity Housie sessions, community events, volunteers, and members — your support makes moments like this possible.

Together we're making a real difference in our community.

*Source: Upper Hutt Cosmopolitan Club*

13/03/26

## **SPORTS**

*Published 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2026*

Taking place this Saturday 14 March, the Match For Good will see the Phoenix wear a bespoke match-day jersey designed by children and siblings staying at Ronald McDonald Houses across New Zealand. Their drawings - butterflies, hearts and personal designs - have been incorporated into the kit, placing their stories quite literally at the heart of the game.

This year's match forms part of a special Phoenix double-header, with both teams wearing the bespoke kits as the club rallies support for RMHC and the families it supports.

Last year's Match for Good raised vital funds for Ronald McDonald House Charities, which provides accommodation and wraparound support for families with children receiving hospital treatment. This year builds on that impact by directly involving the children and siblings themselves in designing the jersey worn on the pitch.

As part of the initiative, McDonald's New Zealand will also match every donation made to RMHC via restaurant kiosks and Drive-Thru from 9–15 March, helping amplify the impact of the match even further.

For families like the Slaughters, the Macca's Match for Good represents far more than a game.

Early last year, Jordan and Ashleigh Slaughter's lives were turned upside down when their baby daughter Layla was diagnosed with aggressive infant leukemia at just four months old. Within hours of diagnosis, Layla was airlifted from Wellington to Christchurch to begin urgent treatment.

Over the following months, Layla endured intensive chemotherapy, multiple surgeries, severe infections and lengthy stays in ICU across Christchurch and Auckland. Throughout that time, Ronald McDonald House became the family's anchor - providing a place to stay close to hospital, space for Layla's big sister Bailey to feel safe and supported, and moments of normality during unimaginable stress.

"Ronald McDonald House became our second home," says Ashleigh. "Having somewhere close to hospital, meals provided, and a space where Bailey could play lifted an enormous burden. When everything else felt out of control, that support meant everything."

Today, the Slaughter family is back home in Wellington - together. While Layla won't remember her time at Ronald McDonald House, it will always remain part of her story.

*A "thank you" to Katharine Broughton from Omnicom for sending this article to The Upper Hutt Connection.*

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