

The new \$350,000 community centre at Sutherland Park overshadows the former aftermatch meeting place — the corrugated iron shed in the foreground.

# From swampland shed to the pride of Woodleigh

Aftermatch talk at New Plymouth's Sutherland Park used to take place in a corrugated iron shed on the sideline.

But this will now be demolished following the completion of Woodleigh Sports and Social Club's new \$350,000 club rooms.

The result of three and a half years' worth of working bees and fundraising now stands in the southwestern corner of the sportsground.

Hard work and dedication has left the club with only a minor debt in terms of the project cost. The club rooms will be officially opened tomorrow with only \$40,000 remaining unpaid — \$30,000 of this is tied up in a savings bank mortgage.

Club patron and former New Plymouth mayor Denny Sutherland will unveil the plaque and open the door of the two-storey building.

### Levies

The club had applied for a \$60,000 share of the Taranaki United Council development levies but was refused. This would have paid off the debt and also provided more furniture which is badly needed.

The multi-coloured chairs in the social lounge were brought second-hand but the downstairs still needs furnishing.

The building will be available for various community activities. It contains kitchen facilities, a licensed bar, toilet and changing facilities, a social lounge upstairs and another large vacant room downstairs, a canteen and administration offices.

The main entrance is off Fernleigh St. The building overlooks two sports fields and is a prime spot for spectators.

It is a young club — the product of three which amalgamated in 1982 to become an incorporated club.

The ground was a swamp before the New Plymouth City Council tackled it five years' ago filling it in with 50,000cu m of soil.

In 1984 the Woodleigh Sports and Social Club was judged Taranaki club of the year.

It went on to win a highly commended prize in the competition to find New Zealand's top club.

This weekend sees the fruition of years of effort which contributed to winning these honours and has now resulted in fine new club rooms.

Reporter JILL DAAMEN and photographer SUSAN WELSH visited New Plymouth's Sutherland Park to get the background to this success story.

Only half of the 1.5ha area has been developed. If the need arises, the remaining swamp land across the road could also be improved, says city council parks and recreation director Alan Jellyman.

The Woodleigh Soccer Club which combined only junior members before the merger, adopted the park as its home ground. It then joined the Cosmos' soccer and Spotwood Old Boys cricket clubs soon after.

Building club rooms was the next logical step.

The initial push came when the Frankley Park Hall was demolished. A sum of money was left to go towards the first major project launched in the area.

The Woodleigh club took advantage of the \$12,500 plus, interest starting point and began on its numerous fundraising ventures.

### Mountain

The first was a run around the mountain which raised more than \$2000. Various contract work and smaller scale schemes steadily built up funds allowing work to begin.

A mural decorating a wall in the social lounge reminds the club members of the fundraising battle. Painted by a group of New Plymouth artists working for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, it depicts a group of runners circling Mt Egmont and is a point of conversation.

Club members rang every household on the Frankleigh Park tele-

phone exchange offering building shares. It was also an opportunity to make the community aware of the project. About \$6000 was raised including several donations.

Selling 44 gallon drums to be used as compost bins or rubbish bins was a novelty fundraiser.

The club also made use of discarded stones from a New Plymouth cemetery to build a retaining wall on the western boundary.

Ten foundation piles were driven into the ground, some of them up to 15m deep, before construction could begin.

The club members had hoped to finish the project in three years' but minor 'holdups' saw construction stretch a further six months.

A hard core of about 20 people worked solidly. A lack of expertise caused a few hiccups with some work having to be redone, recalls club president Mike Brooke.

Members of the St Andrews Work Skills programme and people serving periodic detention sentences chipped in on the painting.

But the club went the long way about it all. The original plan was to build the rooms on top of the existing changing facilities which the city council had assembled beside the new building. Instead, a separate structure was erected. Mr Brooke says this was the best long-term answer.

The club was swelling in numbers and needed accommodation. Sutherland Park hosts soccer in

the winter months and athletics and cricket in the summer.

The 700 club members make up the numerous cricket, soccer, softball and athletics teams.

It is believed to be Taranaki's first multi-sports club.

"We wanted to utilise the grounds as much as possible with the resources of one sporting code supporting the others," says Mr Brooke.

The club had a wealth of soccer and cricketer youngsters from the neighbouring Woodleigh School along with several at the intermediate school level who were not being provided for at school.

Mr Brooke says the project is an example of team work and community spirit.

Several community groups already use the building for meetings and holding club activities but Mr Brooke says he would like to promote it as a community centre.

"It's a definite asset to the community," he says.

### Finished

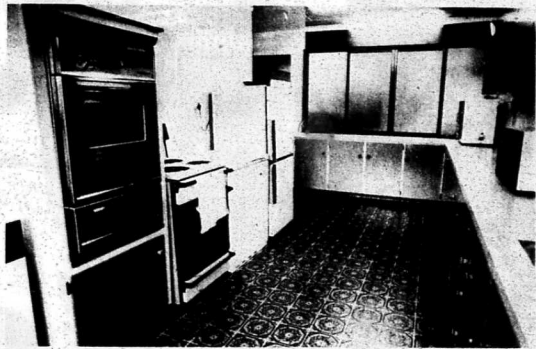
The holiday weekend was chosen for the opening to allow those who were initially involved in the project but have since moved away a chance to return to the province to see the finished product.

A disappointing aspect, however, is the recent vandalism. The club rooms have already become a target with a panel of glass in one of the main entrances badly cracked. Several smaller panels in the changing facilities have also been smashed.

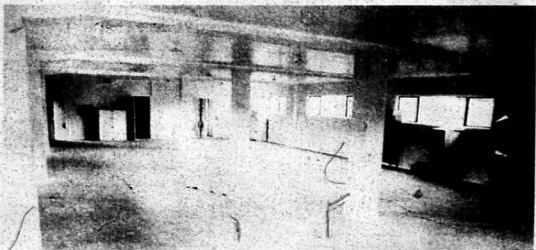
And a fibrolite panel on the front of the club rooms was shattered by a large brick earlier in the year and had to be replaced, says Mr Brooke.

Long term plans involve building a carpark next to the club rooms which is a high priority. Floodlights and a tennis and netball court are further plans.

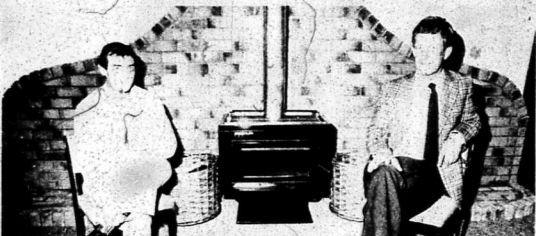
First on the list, however, is the removal of the old tin shed.



A well-equipped kitchen upstairs to cater for the Saturday sports crowds.



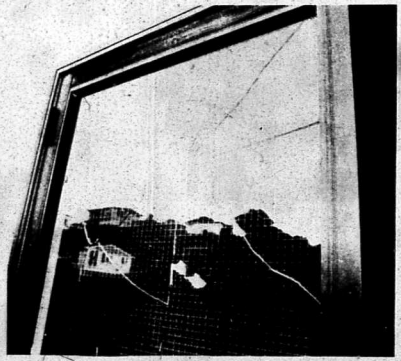
The bottom floor of the building which is still in need of carpet and furnishing. Community groups already use this area.



Two men behind the scenes . . . Tom Mazey (left) and club president Mike Brooke. They relax in front of the fire in the social room.



A topic of discussion — the mural in the social lounge was painted by a group working for the New Plymouth Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. The painters are Janine McCallum, Patrice Aplin, Terry Urbahn, Julie Reed and Ashley Snowden.



The club rooms have already been a target for vandals. A rock was thrown at this glass panel in the main door leading from the playing fields.