

# 'Ribbon' development blamed for closure

By **ROB MAETZIG**

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ONE of Taranaki's longest-serving shops has closed, and New Plymouth's "ribbon" pattern of retail development is being blamed.

Para Rubber's New Plymouth branch is understood to be one of the oldest in New Zealand, being established soon after the first outlet was opened by George Waldeman Skellerup in Christchurch in 1910.

But now, the Devon St East premises has shut, and Para Rubber's head office blames the increasingly spread-out nature of New Plymouth's retail sector.

"The business has suffered because the town is too spread out," chief executive Vaughan Moss said. "The location of New Plymouth's Para Rubber store

probably wasn't that good anyway," he said of its location on the intersection of Devon St East and Gover St.

"But the advent of The Valley mega-centre out at Waiwhakaiho has also hurt us. So unfortunately the New Plymouth store has been the victim of all that."

Mr Moss said Para Rubber's remaining 10 retail outlets throughout New Zealand had been trading well, albeit with profits down as a result of the economic downturn.

"But the worst affected has been New Plymouth."

He would not discount the possibility of Para Rubber opening another outlet in New Plymouth, and confirmed there had been a significant level of inquiry from potential franchisees.

He also confirmed that a change of ownership of the Para

chain occurred last week. In 1996 Para Rubber amalgamated with Clark Rubber of Australia, but there has now been a buy-out by three members of the New Zealand management. The new company is called GMT Franchising, trading as Para Rubber.

■ Meanwhile, a little further down Devon St East another shop is closing its doors – but this time its owner blames the too-high cost of central New Plymouth commercial leases and a noticeable drop-off in foot traffic.

The shop is The Boudoir, which specialises in lingerie and adult products.

Owner Robyn Adam said her lease was due for review, and she had hoped the cost would be lowered to reflect the current economic situation.

"But it isn't happening, so I'm shutting down, she said.



**Closing doors:** Para Rubber in New Plymouth was established soon after the first shop opened, in Christchurch. Photo: CAMERON BURNELL