

New city base for ITL

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A TARANAKI DAILY NEWS ADVERTISING FEATURE

Character kept in renovation

A major refurbishment project has transformed the former RSA club at Strandon into ITL House, writes **Mike Shaw**.



New life: ITL colours now dress the century-old structure of this Strandon landmark. Pictured at the entrance, below left and from left, are Fletcher Construction foreman Terry Herlihy with ITL's general manager Colin Fromont, co-founding director Andrew Smith and project manager Craig Macquoen. Photos: PIP GUTHRIE

A glass-roofed entry and a fresh new livery of grey, black and red is the outward sign of change at the former RSA New Plymouth clubrooms on Devon St East.

Inside, the revamp is more radical. A smart new reception welcomes visitors to the sign-in register and access to the contemporary people-filled workspaces that have been created from the former club's restaurant and bars, dancefloor and gaming room.

The letters ITL emblazoned on the building reveals who has triggered the changes.

ITL is a Taranaki-based engineering company which specialises in the oil, gas, and marine industries. Its team of more than 90 is focused on industrial process plant construction and embraces project management, design, procurement and construction, commissioning services and feasibility studies.

The company bid keenly at auction for the building late in 2010, but another bidder eventually won the auction. Subsequent negotiations with that successful bidder saw ITL buy the property and plan their move in.

Space and location were the attractions for ITL, according to director Andrew Smith.

The overcrowded and inefficient premises at its Corbett Rd, Bell Block, property meant the company had to look for something more appropriate, he explains.

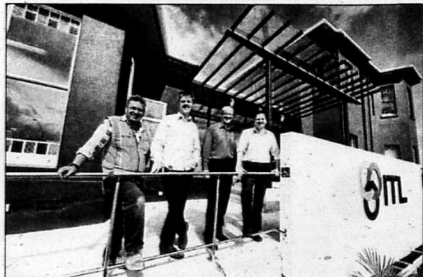
"There were lots of choices, including building something bigger and better," Andrew says.

"We looked at lots of spots in town with lease or buy options, and did a lot of thinking about what suited the culture of our company best."

The Bell Block setting had its attractions. "We have some large clients out that way, which was the (original) reason for being out there. But there are other clients housed in the middle of town."

When the former RSA building came up for auction, the ITL directors considered it a good compromise. "It was still handy to Bell Block as well as being closer to town, and it had excellent parking."

Their interest in the building kept them in the auction through to its conclusion... and after. "We were the last ones to drop out of the bidders. We had discussions from the day of the auction with the successful bidder and reached agreement to buy the property



just prior to Christmas."

Planning started almost immediately on the changes that needed to be made to the building to house the new owners and work started at the end of May this year.

Anyone who has ever renovated an older house will appreciate that that work is not always simple. And so this upgrade proved.

Fletcher Construction carried out the contract to reshape the building and foreman Terry Herlihy admits it had its moments. "We took the first bit of roof off and it rained for three weeks... but that's construction."

ITL director and operations manager Kim Glikson brought a creative input to the project with her vision for a large open-office environment rather than the collection of separate rooms and spaces that the building had become.

"This building was so full of nooks and crannies that lead to nowhere... it

was bizarre," Andrew Smith recalls.

In some ways, the building had grown as ITL's Bell Block quarters had done - incremental changes made as new owners and new occupants came and went and alterations and additions were made.

Uncovering those changes also uncovered problems that had to be rectified before the refurbishment continued.

As issues came to light, decisions had to be made quickly to allow the project to continue smoothly. That was made easier with ITL, there as project manager and building owner, Terry Herlihy says.

There were original concrete exterior walls that had become interior walls after additions to the building. They needed to be demolished in place and strong beams placed to carry upper storey loadings.

Original chimneys had been dismantled many years ago, but the



workmen found a stack of bricks - 1.5 tonnes in weight - sitting in one of the ceiling spaces.

Exterior walls that appeared to be solid concrete were actually a facade of concrete over a timber frame. To bring the building up to current earthquake standards, holes had to be cut in the interior linings against most of the outside walls, so that extra strengthening brackets could be bolted between wall facade and the timber framing. That added up to hundreds of holes that then had to be filled and the inner wall surfaces refinished.

"We roofed part of the building and found the old corrugated iron and roof framing still in the ceiling space underneath," Terry says. "We had to work around it to strengthen the ceilings... it was a bit of a crawl space."

Fire doors also had to be cut into the exterior walls and emergency stairs fixed to the outside to satisfy

regulations, he says. Despite the amount of such retrofitting that had to be done, it was very satisfying to see the building complete now, he says.

There were bonuses following the 'deconstruction' of some of the old spaces, according to ITL project manager for the refurbishment work, Craig Macquoen.

A highlight of the work, and an impressive feature of most rooms throughout the building today, was the discovery of the high-stud ceilings with their ornate cornices that were hidden above false ceilings that had lowered the room heights.

Where possible, original windows with their coloured glass panels were retained. Inside, two glass panes etched with the words "Members Lounge" were to be removed from their place above the old internal doorway but were eventually kept as a special

Continued page 10

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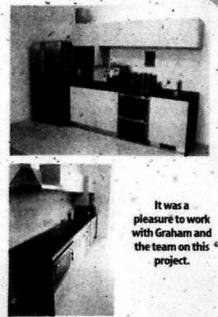
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Upper level has extra rooms for future expansion

I Continued from page 9

feature and to help mark the history of the building.

A tour through the building now reveals just how much work has gone into reviving this grand structure.

The new entrance with its glass and aluminium canopy is contemporary but sits surprisingly comfortably with the original concrete building.

The IITL colours of grey, black and red tie it all together. "The colour scheme was Kim Gilkison's vision," says Craig Macqueen. "It makes the building stand out, without being over the top."

Inside, the reception area is in approximately the same place as the old entry to the RSA. It's a sharp design, however, in the IITL colours.

Ahead is the curved corrugated-metal face of the receptionist's desk - appropriately finished considering the engineering focus of this company - and the direct hallway through to the

main open-plan office area.

To the left, a doorway into an administration area and access through there into the huge open-plan office space that was the back-end of the building.

To the right, doors open wide into the old restaurant area. This is divided into two meeting rooms by bold red folding doors.

The far meeting room is the largest and is seriously equipped with electronic aids to make anything from director's meetings to training sessions as effective as possible.

Equipment includes an overhead projector and a huge screen to carry its images, air conditioning, and surround sound, reveals Craig Macqueen. "We wanted to make this room a bit special and we have found out how good it is already at certain events."

There is also potential, he says, to hire this area and its adjacent meeting room out for seminars and small functions. "Facilities like this are few

and far between in town."

Catering is also possible with local businesses nearby able to deliver to the office, he adds.

The former commercial kitchen that served this area when it was a restaurant has been transformed into a staff kitchen and its immediate access to the open-plan office space is convenient for the IITL team.

The office area is impressive. It's a huge space filled with desks, computers and low partitions that once comprised the RSA lounge, bar, dance floor, snooker area, gaming machines room, and storage areas.

There were plenty of calls to 'keep the bar', Craig recalls with a smile. Needless to say, it had to go. "We did have a sending off for it, though," Craig reports.

The length of the office area opens out through several French doors to a sunny north-facing deck - part of which was there during its RSA identity, and a larger area that is newly

built. Tables and chairs out on the deck are popular settings for coffees and informal meetings among staff, Craig notes.

All these areas easily accommodate the IITL team at present... but there's more.

Take the stairs up to the next floor and you find a huge staff room with more kitchen facilities and a great view down to the sea. You can appreciate why a previous visitor of the building included apartments up here.

The directors resisted the temptation to have their offices up here, Craig says. IITL maintains a 'flat' management structure and each has his or her own desk around the perimeter of the open-plan office space downstairs.

The faceted ceiling of this upper staff room is impressive for the complexity and visual impact of the angles in its construction. Either side of this staff room are

generous supplementary meeting rooms that offer IITL room for expansion in the future if it is needed.

This refurbishment project has had its moments for owners and contractors, but has overall been a pleasurable development, says Craig. "We had a choice... apply a band aid or fix the problems. We wanted longevity and accepted the costs necessary for a quality job."

That decision respects the building and its role in IITL's future, he says. "And that quality approach reflects the quality approach we bring to the engineering work we give our clients. Our subcontractors worked on the same ethos."

The project team of IITL and Fletchers and their contractors worked well on this project, he adds.

"We worked closely with our contractors and in some ways it is sad to see the project finish. But we are glad at the same time that we're now in here working."

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More space needed for growing team

IITL has grown substantially since modest beginnings 23 years ago, according to its co-founder and director Andrew Smith.

The company started in quarters as modest as its beginning and its growth has subsequently been an ad hoc expansion of its Corbett Rd, Bell Block premises. The collection of buildings, portacomms and containers finally grew too small and inefficient last year.

"We started with two engineers and a secretary in 1988," Andrew recalls. "We got to the point where people were shoehorned into the buildings. It was lucky people got on well together."

"The company grew slowly to a staff of about 20 over the first 10 years as it established its credentials. The project-related business was influenced by the usual ebb and flow of activity in the oil and gas industry. "Workload can be cyclical," Andrew notes.

In 2002, IITL underwent a restructuring. "Since then we have had very steady growth and numbers accelerated within a couple of years. Two years ago, when we won the Westpac business awards we employed 50 people; a year later it was 60 and it's around 80 now."

Into the coming New Year, Andrew expects the staff numbers to reach the 100 mark. "We've ridden out the recession," he says.

There's a sense of satisfaction in that observation, reflecting the success of IITL's team environment and work ethics.

"We're a little different to some of our competitors," Andrew explains. "Our flexible work approach and company culture create a really good working environment with



Meeting needs: A doorway from the reception foyer leads into two spacious meeting or seminar rooms, the second of which, shown at left offers high-tech features.

enthusiastic employees."

That enthusiasm is shown in the very low staff turnover, he says. "It's unusual in this industry where people often go on to different companies or overseas."

IITL also values its relationships beyond staff, he says, working easily with most of the contractors and subcontractors in the region that are involved in the oil and gas industry.

IITL has also branched out across the Tasman with an office in Brisbane.

Significant contracts completed by IITL include:

- Major service contract with Vector for both the North Island natural gas transmission system and gas processing plant at Kapuni. This work program has seen the upgrade of numerous gas

metering and compressor stations and a number of pipeline realignments. Major projects have included the Enhanced Gas Storage project at Kapuni, the Derby Road pressure control facility, new metering facilities at Stratford and compression upgrade at Kapuni.

- Sidewinder Production Station development for TAG Oil. 30mmscfd gas plant and pipelines delivered in record time. The modular plant was completely pre-assembled offsite to allow rapid site installation during the New Zealand winter.
- Cheal Production Station - a crude oil processing plant plus multiple pipelines to a remote wellsite and for gas export. The facilities are capable of producing up to 2000 barrels per day of oil and 3mmscfd of gas. The oil is among the most way in-

Taranaki and is produced using high pressure jet pumping at over 200bar pressure.

- Contact Energy's Stratford Gas yard design and installation of gas reception and mixing facility for the Ahuroa Gas Storage and Stratford Peaker projects.

- Todd Energy's Mangahewa Gas Treatment facility - design and build gas processing plant to treat 41000sm3/day of gas, plus condensate processing.

- A wide variety of pressure vessels, tanks, heaters and heat exchangers for different oil and gas industry clients around Taranaki and New Zealand.

- Design and installation of major gas compressor equipment including several FPSO projects.
- IITL specialises in providing skid-mounted process equipment to the oil and

gas industrial sectors. With its complete in-house capabilities, IITL can efficiently customise a solution to the client's needs.

- IITL supplied the fuel gas trains for the Karraha Power Station in Western Australia including filter coolers, bath heaters and pressure regulators. All these process skids were designed for transport in standard ISO containers for ease of shipping and to minimise site installation.

- IITL's team also designed the MEG reclamation unit for Cameron Process Systems for the Kupe project - a 22m x 8m x 20m high, 200-tonne module.

- Onshore-offshore lifting equipment - IITL designs and certifies custom lifting frames to meet both New Zealand and international requirements and carries out retrospective certification on existing equipment imported into New Zealand.

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Community keen on project

ITL House was built about 100 years ago and has had a varied life in the years since, with commercial occupants at various times, offering accommodation to many as a boarding house at others, and in recent years, as the home of the RSA in New Plymouth.

That background drew hundreds of people back when ITL held its recent open day to mark the building's handover from contractors to occupants.

"We were blown away by the number of people who came through," says ITL project manager for the refurbishment work, Craig Macqueen. "The carpark was full, the street was full and the building was full. It was great for us; it showed we had a lot of support in the community."

"A lot of elderly people came through with memories," says ITL general manager Colin Fromont. "People told us 'I used to board upstairs'." Others recalled times they had worked in the building, or enjoyed it as the RSA clubrooms.

All were impressed with the work that had been done to give new life to the old building. "RSA members were pleased to see it was being put to good use," Colin says.

He also notes how well the local Fitzroy community had responded to ITL as a new neighbour. "The first day we settled in, we received a cake from the bakery... that was quite nice."

Many local residents visited the open day and during the construction period they would often come and stand outside watching the progress.

"They no doubt will appreciate the fact that their new neighbour is community-focused."

"We support a number of local charities and organisations," says Colin Fromont. "That's part of being in the community. And we also support some of our staff in their personal sports endeavours and council initiatives such as the Let's Go (walkway and cycling) project."

The list of ITL sponsorships includes:

- Witt apprenticeships awards
- TSB Festival of Lights
- New Plymouth Golf Club
- Taranaki Bridge Congress
- Taranaki Construction Safety Group
- Taranaki Rugby Football Union
- Taranaki Young Leaders (Platinum sponsor)
- Red Star Aerobic Team (Yaks)
- Hospice Taranaki NZ Surf Festival (Womans Wild Card Event)
- Round the Mountain Run (Leg sponsor)
- Round the Mountain Cycle

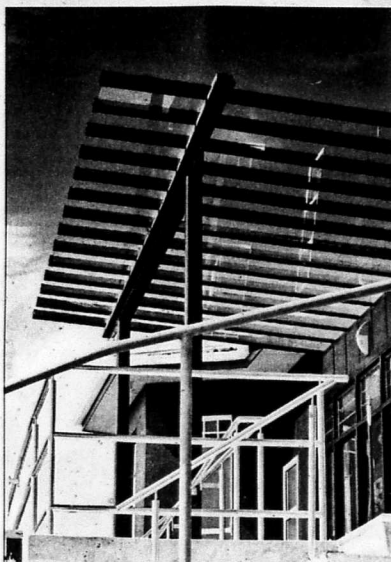


Add-on detail: While the major focus of refurbishment work was on internal areas of the ITL building to obtain the vital working spaces, the exterior also gained features to make it safer and more user-friendly. At top, a new fire escape stairway for upper rooms; above, a covered space for staff cycles; at right, the redeveloped and glass-covered entrance to the building.

(Leg sponsor) Taranaki Air Ambulance Taranaki Rescue Helicopter.

ITL's directors appreciate the interest in what the company has achieved with its refurbishment of ITL House, says Craig Macqueen.

The stories related by visitors at the open day have piqued their interest in learning more about their new premises, he says. "It's been good hearing about people and events here. We would love to find out more about the building's past... especially photos."



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