



Well another exciting day and here I am the Ambassador for The Coaster's Club. For those of you that don't know me I would like to tell you a little bit about myself. I am Mike Keenan and I live in Hokitika. As a 5th generation Coaster it's so easy to be excited and passionate about our past, present and future.

My Dad was Mick Keenan and the family history is all around hotel ownership & horses.....of course he was from Irish stock.

Dad's and his Mother's family were the longest serving proprietors of the Woodstock Hotel, being continuous for over 82 years. My Dad then bought the Railway Hotel and we all moved to town and lived there. Some of my fondest memories relate to these early days serving as a youngster behind the bar. Men of our town like Laurie Roper the lawyer Mattie Baird, Kevin O'Brien & Andy Staines told me stories while I served them, and as a very young man, I listened intently. I loved working there and could easily have spent my life as a barman.

I got my first job working for Matt Syron as a labourer. Matt was a local builder and we went out to work at the Sticks to build a forestry base there. It was not really my thing so I looked for something else and got the opportunity to join the Post Office and became a postman. I loved the job. I would arrive at work at 7 o'clock in the morning, I'd be finished by 10 o'clock, and I then had all day to do what I wanted. It suited me down to the ground.

I was so good at doing not a lot I got promoted and went behind the counter of the Post Office and started to pick up some administration skills. It was great fun!

One day Ken Beams from the Westland Savings Bank tapped me on the shoulder and asked me if I would like to work for him. I jumped at the opportunity and at that time the Westland Savings Bank was very small and had Jack Leslie as General Manager. It was my job to go around, speak to the elderly people around town, most of whom I knew, and create a relationship between them and the bank. I remember with pride that within the first year I got over \$1.5 million in deposits. Everyone was very impressed.

There were some funny things that happened while I was working at the bank that I have to tell you about. I struck a blow for men's liberation when I discovered that the women in the bank got three uniforms a year and the men didn't get any. I decided that I would wear a smock to work to make a point. Jack Leslie, the General Manager, walked past me and said if you're wearing that thing at the end of the day you're fired. Then I had a stroke of luck. Paul Renton, who was a bank trustee, came into the bank and said to me, "You've got a dress on. Why?" I explained to Mr Renton how the ladies got three sets of clothes a year but the men got none. He said to me "I'll get that sorted out. Now you get changed." Well he did get it sorted, and I got changed.

We had some great customers. There was one gentleman, and I won't tell you his name, who got behind with his mortgage payments. We were all at the counter on this particular day and in came this big man with a pig under his arm. He put the pig on the counter and said, "I've got \$180 in cash plus the pig, which is worth another \$180, and that brings my mortgage payments up-to-date." Well we didn't know what to do, so we took the pig up to Mr Leslie's office and I can tell you he wasn't impressed. So Kevin Manera and I bought the pig for \$180, gave the money to the bank, and took the pig home. Our customer was happy, and we were happy.

In those early days of the Westland Savings Bank we were also the local gold buyer. The largest producer of gold on the coast was someone called Rob Muldoon, at least that's what the docketts said, but as I've always said, Coasters have always been very innovative.

On another occasion Colin Howat, who drove the mobile banking van was on the RT (radio telephone) which we thought was pretty cool. He called in to tell us Mrs Butler has a couple of hand knitted jocks for me for doing her tax return. Of course it was on the RT and went right up and down the Coast. But when he arrived back at the bank Colin handed over the package and inside were the most magnificent pair of hand knitted socks, not jocks. Colin had embarrassed us a treat.

After a number of years with the bank a job came up to run the Events Department at Westland District Council. I got the job and I had the most enjoyable 21 years running the annual Hokitika Wildfoods Festival. I took the Festival from 4500 people up to 22,500 at its peak in 2003. The beer tent sold 20,000 litres of beer that year and there were about 90 stallholders.....what a day!!

The tide turned when restrictions started to occur with a crackdown on the amount of alcohol being consumed and a huge increase in security, which Community Public Health deemed necessary. This change was the beginning of a change in the behaviour of people at the Festival. With security ever present the level of aggravation went from almost nil and increased. So here we were with the best brand the West Coast had ever seen, run by Council, that always acted as underwriter, but never put one cent into the Festival. For the three years from 2003 to 2005 the festival made a combined profit of \$783,000. A Festival that, according to the report written by Berl, now generates \$6.5 million per year for the Westland economy. Year after year the Festival created surpluses to allow other events to be tested, pursued or discarded. The community organisations changed from running meat raffles to running a stall or running a camping site at the Festival and a whole year's funding was earned with this one event. Events like the New Year's Eve party, Arts Fever, 60th Anniversary of the 1st Licenced Air Service in NZ, the Guy Menzies Day in Harihari, the Haast Pass Road Reunion, the Lake Kaniere Triathlon, and numerous other events benefited from the surpluses generated from the Wildfoods Festival.

I'm often asked where to from here for Wildfoods and it's something that I can answer quite clearly. Events are a fantastic generator of income for a region and the Wildfoods brand is so valuable. The Festival went to shopping mall openings in Singapore, and I even went to the Pai Chai University in South Korea which used the Wildfoods Festival as the basis for a community fundraising and development course. It was and still is my view that the future for Wildfoods is as a franchise, along with the creation of the sister city structure in Australia, France, Singapore, China and Japan. This would have allowed Wildfoods Festivals to be run in these countries all based around the concept developed in little old Hokitika New Zealand. And of course, the franchise fee would have come back to Westland District Council. This fee, in places like Japan, would have exceeded the total cost of the Events Department within Council, allowing further events to be promoted.

And now to the present. I'm delighted to tell you that I'm now involved with the Kumara and Ross communities as a Development Officer. We are developing the marketing for the cycleway through the town of Kumara, with particular emphasis on the Chinese heritage back to 1865.

Kumara has an extraordinary lady in Kerrie Fitzgibbon who has brought such enthusiasm and a fresh drive to the town. I'm so excited about the opportunities that we have. The cycleway is still at an early stage and there are a couple of construction matters that need to be completed. When these are done the cycleway will swing into full action. Original projections looking at 10,000 visitors per year.

That's small stuff when you consider the town's commitment to its Chinese pioneers. This has resulted in a project to construct what will be the most visited memorial Chinese garden in New Zealand before we are finished. If you take the number of average income earners in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, USA, Europe and the UK, in ten years' time they will be approx the same as they are now. If you take the number of average income earners in China, India and Indonesia, in 10 years' time they will be 10 times what they are now. We need to be ready to entertain and impress them, and the time to start is now.

I see The Coasters' Club as another tool in keeping Coasters connected, and celebrating success is something we need to get better at. We have so many amazing people with Coast connections who are doing amazing things out in the world and this is a great forum to tell their stories. Let's go forward together.

MIKE KEENAN