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weekender

Good sport 3
Meat-fest 5

NO MAHIA KI TE AO
FROM MAHIA TO THE WORLD

Rongomaiwahine kuia Pauline Tangiora will be presented with the prestigious International Bremen Peace Award in Germany later this month, recognising her advocacy work around the world and in Aotearoa. Michael Neilson went to her Mahia home for a cup of tea and to korero with her about her dedication to peace.

PEACE TO THE WORLD: Mahia kuia Pauline Tangiora has travelled the world over promoting peace, and later this year she will receive the International Bremen Peace Award in Germany. Her Mahia home is covered in special momentos, including this plaque which reads 'Peace to the World', given to her by people in Baghdad.

PICTURE © Liam Clayton

Name an environmental, peace or indigenous rights cause around the world and it is likely Pauline Tangiora has been there, standing up for those who cannot do it themselves, or for those who just need a helping hand.

From her Mahia home, the Rongomaiwahine kuia has travelled to Mexico to stand with indigenous people against the army; campaigned alongside water protectors in Brazil; and comforted children in Iraq, victims of chemical weapons.

Yet some of her greatest impacts have been here in Tairawhiti, working with iwi, and throughout Aotearoa with the Maori Women's Welfare League, supporting people in prison.

Her peace advocacy work at home and overseas will be recognised by the prestigious International Bremen Peace Award, presented by the Schwelle Foundation in Germany, in November this year.

She was nominated by New Zealand filmmaker and novelist Kathleen Gallagher and Dr Kate Dewes, director of the Disarmament and Security Centre in Christchurch, which Pauline has been involved with over the past 30 years.

"She is the leading kuia in the peace movement globally," says Kate.

"Her work in prisons and at the flaxroots, coupled with her knowledge of the rights of indigenous peoples and the need for conflict resolution and mediation, is respected here and internationally."

Pauline, known affectionately as Nanny Pauline or Aunty Pauline, was born in Ahuriri before WW2, and moved to Mahia 30 years ago to better connect with her iwi and campaign for justice.

Her great-great grandfather was the famous Mahia whaler John "Happy Jack" Greening, who married Mahia woman Wikitoria Te Hei.

Pauline was one of seven negotiators in the Wairoa iwi treaty settlement, Te Tira Whakaemi o Te Wairoa, finalised in November last year, bringing a $100 million dollar settlement and social assistance package, and an apology from the Crown for its abuse of their rights and confiscation of lands.

Rongomaiwahine was pushed in with iwi and hapu of Te Rohe o Te Wairoa, despite their differences.

"We are an iwi in our own right, so it was a tough process working together," Pauline says.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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COLLABORATION:
Pauline with Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 2000 when they were speakers at a spiritual conference in Bali.

PICTURES © Supplied

SHARING THE AROHA:
Pauline (centre) in Nepal in a village near the Himalayas in 2013. She travelled there with the Grandmothers for Peace group.

Innate instinct to stand up for others

FROM PAGE 1

"It is time to move on. We can't let it rule our lives anymore. But history must be told of why Maori feel resentful after their land was confiscated.

"Pakeha seem to think we have a lot of money, but that money needs to be used wisely. The trustees have to come together to decide how the people want to use the money for the people."

Drawing on her Rongomaiwahine roots, and connections to Ngati Porou, Te Aitanga a Mahaki and Ngai Tamanuhiri, Pauline has shared her knowledge with indigenous peoples all over the world.

She helped the San people in the South African Kalahari to preserve traditional places and their cultural heritage, assisted the Australian Aborigines in reviving a lost ritual with whales, and travelled through North America with a peace caravan in order to draw attention to the problems of the indigenous people in the South Pacific.

She constantly calls for a change in thinking at national and international conferences, explaining her perspectives.

Within the United Nations and at other international forums she has represented New Zealand peace groups, worked as a regional representative for women at both the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and the World Charter, and is an ambassador of the Earth Council International and member of the World Future Council.

Her work with iwi in particular has gained recognition on the world stage.

"It shows colonial guilt does not have to be swept silently under the carpet of history," a statement from the Schwelle Foundation said.

"Laying a claim to responsibility is a chance; showing responsibility is a step towards more justice."

Pauline's list of achievements and honours, and organisations she has been involved in, is long enough to fill a book.

In Aotearoa they include the Queen's Service Medal for community service in 1988, the New Zealand Commemoration Medal in 1990 and the Queen's Service Order in 2001.

However, ask Pauline herself about them, and you will find she is much more intent on passing the acknowledgement to those around her.

"It is very humbling to receive the Bremen Peace Award, and to be nominated by Kate and Kathleen. But really, there are hundreds of people behind me."

All around the world people have given her places to stay, while others have collected funds for her to go to places like Iraq.

She was "greatly supported" by the Disarmament Centre in Christchurch.

"People were calling out and asking for help," Pauline says of why she travelled overseas.

"Standing in front of the soldiers in Chiapas, Mexico, where boys were shooting away at government troops, standing up for indigenous rights and their land.

"The worst was when we went up to a mountain, where women had been taken and raped, and the men could do nothing.

"In Iraq we visited children suffering from leukaemia from chemical weapons. A lady told me her baby was going to die. She had already lost five children.

"Working in peace is hard work. But there are also many wonderful things, the friendliness, kindness and warmth of people, and the trust they put in me.

"If the world supports each other, it would be a better place."

Ever since she was a child Pauline had an innate instinct to stand up for others. The first time she can remember was at primary school in Napier.

"A quiet boy was sitting in the field, eating his morning tea and these two girls came up to him and belted him. I went up to them and said, 'You do it again to him and I will do it to you'.

"We have to stand up for people who can not stand up for themselves."

When the Vietnam War got under way in the 1960s Pauline went on a demonstration in Palmerston North. From then on she became very involved in the peace movement,

"Keeping my eyes and ears open, writing letters to MPs, annoying anybody involved."

Soon after, her attention turned to the prison system in the King Country. She volunteered with the Maori Women's Welfare League, taking kai to the prisons.

However, after five months they were told to stop.

"The manager said it was creating problems, he said 'Now everybody wants your kai'."

She has been visiting people in prison all over the country for the past 47 years.

"What worries me is the people who are left in there for 20 to 25 years, without any contact.

"If you have a family member in there and you are ashamed to visit them, write them a letter — especially these young ones, who commit crime on drugs.

"When they come off drugs and have rehabilitation, they are as good as you or I."

She has been involved with the Maori Women's Welfare League ever since, becoming a life member in 1986.

"It was very important in my life. It was where we would take our recommendations to pass on to the Government."

Pauline addressing the United Nations Human Rights World Conference, in Vienna, Austria, in 1993.

Pauline was instrumental in getting books for prisoners into prisons, through then Justice Minister Doug Graham.

She has become increasingly concerned about the effects on Maori children who have been in state care.

"Just about every person I have spoken to in prison has been through so many homes. We have to have another look at what we do with these kids."

Pauline is active within her iwi, and feels New Zealand's shared history needs to be better taught in schools, along with te reo Maori.

She learned te reo from her father, and was involved with her husband in the Maori-language recovery kohanga reo movement in the 1980s to immerse infants in te reo.

"We could easily introduce te reo into schools. Children learn languages so much easier. There is some beautiful history of the coming together of our people, Maori and Pakeha, but it is never told."

Pauline has taken these insights with her in her peace advocacy work around the world.

She has a flight itinerary that would tire out even the most energetic young Kiwi off on their OE.

Barely has she sat back on her comfortable recliner at home on the Mahia Peninsula, with a cup of black tea and a biscuit, before she is off again.

In the next few months she will visit Standing Rock in North America, to support the Lakota tribe's protest against plans to build an oil pipeline threatening their water supply and burial grounds, then to New Mexico to present at a university, before travelling to Germany to collect her award.

She said she can only travel with the support of caregivers Mary Wilson from Wairoa, and Jenny Cracknell from Napier, to whom she is "extremely grateful".

She also has great support from friends and whanau at home.

However, it is her passion to leave a better world for future generations that keeps her going.

"My 14 children, 52 grandchildren and five great grandchildren."

She also has many more "adopted" around the world.

Despite her worldly life, she still calls Mahia home.

"When I come under the railway bridge and look across to Mahia, I think, 'I'm home'."

She has worked with many education institutions in the area, including Eastern Institute of Technology, which awarded her their Tuakiri Medal of Distinction in 2015 for her contribution to education in the community.

In addition to tutoring in nursing and health, she took several students on trips around the world, encouraging them to look at indigenous issues.

She wants youth these days to dream big, the way she did.

Once, when she was seven-years old, laying in a paddock reading a Marco Polo comic about a village in Kazakhstan, she thought she would love to get there one day.

As an adult she stood in that very village, watching workers dig up part of the old Silk Road.

Her advice to children, "Dream a dream, and you will get there . . . but it won't come without hard work."