

doing it



"We are happy to repair things but we don't have a clock, so you take us as you get us."

man to man

The Men's Sheds movement is a win-win for all ages.

Above: Henley Men's Shed manager John Bush with local school children and their Resene-painted wheelbarrow planter.

John Bush believes he has the best job in the world, as the official 20-hour-a-week manager of Henley Men's Shed in Masterton. The shed is a community initiative which began in Australia in the mid-1990s when it became apparent that many men retiring in their 60s had no idea what to do next.

"They suddenly felt isolated, without a purpose, and some developed depression. Let's face it; they felt that their skills were no longer required or appreciated. When cases of suicide began occurring it was clear that a support network was needed. This rural initiative has been a true lifesaver and it's taken off world-wide," he says.

Known variously as Menzsheds or Men's Sheds, depending on a local group's preference, the movement now has a presence in countries such as the United Kingdom, Finland, and notably, given recent economic turmoil, in Ireland and Greece.

New Zealand has nearly 80 member sheds in the national association, located in towns and cities from Kerikeri in the North to Tapanui in the South. "Each one adapts to the particular needs of its local community," says John. "We don't have too many rules but there's a simple constitution that member organisations must adhere to, and it includes basic safety guidelines."

Henley's branch in the Wairarapa has established itself as the heart of the Menzshed movement in New Zealand. "They refer to us as 'The Mother Ship'," John jokes. While local sheds operate largely as voluntary bodies and charities, John's Masterton chapter has a purpose-built venue and is run like a business. "Having said that, we aren't here to compete with other local establishments."

Henley Men's Shed is mainly open during the day, although others also operate on evenings and weekends. "For us this approach enables self-employed people to get together with kids and teach them some useful skills," John says.

Harley Reynolds is 11 years old and attends Greytown School. He spent his 2015 winter school holidays at a Men's Shed holiday programme at the Henley headquarters. "My nan told me about it," he says. "I hadn't had much to do with tools before, so it was very interesting. I think I might become a builder."

One of Harley's favourite activities was constructing wooden crosses in honour of the 100th anniversary of the New Zealand Forces' Gallipoli landing. "Then we got to paint them with Resene paint," he says.


The youngster's grandmother, Gay Taylor, is a true convert to the concept of Men's Sheds. "Harley doesn't have many strong male role-models in his life and these men have taught him such a lot."

Another successful collaboration came about when children at nearby Lakeview School were asked for ideas for making their school more attractive. "They decided to decorate it with brightly coloured animal and alphabet shapes," John says. For one period a week over two terms the students cut, sanded, primed and painted their masterpieces. "Resene supplied paint in a multitude of colours and before long there were purple cows, orange pigs, green letters...!" Henley Men's Shed also helped the kids build wheelbarrow planters which can be wheeled inside at the end of each day.

For his part, John Bush can see Men's Sheds building in momentum. "We are happy to repair things but we don't have a clock, so you take us as you get us. There are no deadlines here!"

"We really enjoy our projects with school children, and we also run men's health groups, a writers' group and help out the SPCA, local playcentres, and other community organisations. At the end of the day we are all doing something very positive and our blokes just love it!" See www.menzshed.org.nz. **H**

words Louise Richardson
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Resene Unwind 

Resene Adrenalin 

Resene Quarter Black White 