

New life for lodge after Rotary revamp

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The realisation of a major upgrade of the Rotoiti Lodge Outdoor Education Centre at St Arnaud is closer than ever after a year-long project led by Nelson's Whakatu Rotary Club.

Situated at the gateway to Nelson Lakes National Park, the 51-year old lodge has had \$800,000 spent on it since building work started in May this year. Now it is looking spic and span and more than ready to offer valuable outdoor education experiences for a further 50 years.

Opened in 1968, the lodge was built the support of the Rotary Clubs of Nelson, Nelson West and Blenheim, as well as other volunteer labour and community support. In its first 50 years it hosted more than 120,000 school pupils from across the top of the South Island and other centres including Christchurch. It is also hired by community groups for meetings, retreats and workshops, as well as a venue for weddings and other celebrations.

The freshly renovated lodge now boasts a commercial-grade kitchen, double-glazing throughout, including sliding doors opening onto a huge new deck that wraps around two sides of the lodge, new dining room furniture, recovered bed mattresses, a four-wheel-drive vehicle and a passenger van to transport students, a trailer, and upgraded outdoor utility area.

The highly ambitious project



The newly refurbished Rotoiti Lodge.

SUPPLIED

is led by Whakatu Rotarian Trevor Marshall, who has been instrumental in convincing businesses and organisations across Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough to put their hands up to support the project. Large donations were forthcoming from community organisations, including the Rata Foundation, Lion Foundation and Pub Charity, and numerous individuals and businesses stepped up with

donations and offers of services, labour, and goods in kind.

One of the most successful stages was the winter construction of the 350 sq m deck, which was designed by Arthouse Architects and built as part of the course work of the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology's Kaitiaki Whenua Trainee Ranger course, with the support of building equipment from Mitre 10 Mega Nelson and

Murray Leaning from the company's Helping Hands team. Over the course of a week, students learned how to construct a deck, including how to hand hammer or bolt 4.2 km of decking timber!

The project brief originally started out as simply a kitchen replacement but Trevor is a persuasive character and it soon developed much grander parameters. He came up with an

ambitious wish-list for the lodge and declared that the word failure was not a word in his vocabulary and that "success breeds success". Sure enough, as various funding was secured and improvements achieved, word spread of the major community project underway at the lodge, leading more businesses and funders to offer their support.

"When they heard what we were doing up there, people couldn't wait to be part of it," Trevor says. "Sometimes they were competing to secure their participation."

Although the bulk of the work has been done, there are still a few stages left to complete, which will bring the project's value up to one million dollars. This includes new vinyl in the dining area, carpet, curtains, furniture and AV equipment in the living area, the installation of solar panels, a second passenger van, a second utility workshop which is to be built with assistance from Blenheim South Rotarians, and the painting of the lodge roof.

A special re-launch of the much-loved outdoor education lodge is planned for March, at which time it is hoped the project will be fully or at least very close to being completed. For some users, the grand re-opening can't come soon enough.

The completion of the lodge upgrade project will be celebrated with an open day so users, the public and Rotarians can see the transformation for themselves.