

Enterprise North Shore Business Hall of Fame

Peter Menzies Bio – August 2006

There are many achievements in Peter Menzies' long career, but most he attributes to advocating for the contribution of a good team. "Business only succeeds if you have a happy team and when the talents of that team can be fully utilized," said Peter Menzies when interviewed recently. What's more, "if you're motivating people and they're happy and contributing to the best of their ability, money tends to be a byproduct of success rather than an end goal."

In today's era of skills shortages, Peter Menzies recommends his own training, as a civil engineer, to those who realise that they have ability but still aren't sure what qualification to study. "It's essentially a problem solving course," he says of his engineering degree. Working primarily on major civil construction projects during the 1960s, Peter had plenty of opportunity to put his problem solving skills to use. Involvement in building hydro dams, wharfs, tunnels, military bases, bridges and highways feature in the early part of his CV. But joining the Mainline Construction Company in 1971 would prove instrumental in his development of senior executive and governance skills and ability.

Superb project management

Peter had become CEO then in 1987, Chairman of the Mainzeal Group (previously Mainline), before stepping down from the business in 1993. During this period, he had listed three public companies and privatised another. In the process, Mainzeal had built some of New Zealand's biggest and most complex high-rise buildings. A secret to Mainzeal's success explains Peter, was adoption of an Australian idea of contracting out as much of the work as possible to specialist contractors. This allowed Mainzeal to become more effective at project management and seeing the project through to its completion and tenanted. "No one in Auckland was doing this at the time," explained Peter. Mainzeal would work with consultants to sell projects to clients and then bring in specialist contractors to get jobs done well and quickly, rather than rely on generalists that could do a broader range of work. "It would take superb organisation and management on our behalf, while also being empathetic with the innate skill and nature of each contractor, for us to get it right. And for Mainzeal to be successful, they (the contractors) had to be successful as well," he adds. But it would also "ultimately lead to earning the client's appreciation for a job well done."

Keeping ahead of the market

Success in large construction projects compelled Peter and Mainzeal to become more visionary in its work as the market changed. "The team would need to understand the market and reading the future is a critical factor," explains Peter. "We retained the idea of always doing better and achieving at consistently better standards." Skills for seeing the big picture were required when Peter took on the Chairman role for Mercury Energy and Vector. The maintenance of the entire reticulation network was successfully

contracted out during this period which allowed Vector to concentrate better on its core business activities.

Peter explains that the skills he learned in business were just as important as those he needed in community and not-for-profit work. “Most often the opportunity to contribute in a community sense comes when you’ve been successful or effective in business,” says Peter. Again, he stresses the contribution that a good team makes. “I also recognised that I had a responsibility to contribute to the community in a practical sense and found places in the community where what I learned in business was needed just as well and could be just as rewarding”. Among community groups he has assisted are the Auckland Red Cross and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Foundation..

Goodwill from community work

It’s his sense of visionary thinking, honed at Mainzeal, Vector and other Chairman roles, matched with his community spirit that led Peter to become involved with establishing the Auckland Regional Economic Development Strategy (AREDS), during 2001 and 2002. He describes this as a fascinating experience that drew out a lot of goodwill as business, community, iwi and local government leaders came together to start developing a long-term strategic framework for New Zealand’s largest city. This work has led to the adoption of the AREDS programme, and establishment of a new economic development unit, within the Auckland Regional Council. During 2006, this led to development of the Auckland Metro Project that, with the contribution of overseas expertise, is charged with revitalising the economic prospects of greater Auckland.

Born in Taihape, Peter along with his wife Jane-Mary, settled on the North Shore in 1969, initially in Cheltenham, and now living in Takapuna. They have six children and 16 grandchildren. Peter speaks highly of North Shore’s family and community-focused atmosphere. Peter makes particular mention of the North Shore’s myriad of community groups and facilities such as the Belmont Music Centre and the Millennium Institute of Sport.

Peter’s current appointments include:

Council Member University of Auckland
Director Growth and Innovation Advisory Board
Director NZ Trade & Enterprise
Director New Zealand Seed Fund
Director DamWatch Services Ltd
Trustee Tindall Foundation