



## Chair's Report 2008 - 2009

I am pleased to present our audited accounts for the 2008- 2009 Financial Year.

The background to this report is of course the recession which hit its climax during this financial year. Rodney was hit hard with devastating business closures and staff lay-offs particularly in Wellsford and Kumeu. REDT and RDC facilitated various community meetings and although there was apparently little we could do to stimulate the local economy some projects arose from these meetings that will bear fruit in 2009 – 2010.

Local body elections in October 2008 gave us a new Mayor and several new Councillors. I'd like to publicly acknowledge here the strong support we have had from Mayor Penny Webster and her Council. Their commitment and passion for Rodney is undeniable. We also appreciate the ever-improving working relationship we have Council officers, particularly the CEO and the Assistant CEO, and of course with the Economic and Community Development Manager.

The success of these relationships is evidenced by the Partnership Agreement signed this financial year prior to the renewal of our funding and service agreement. The Trust doesn't always see eye to eye with Council, but they listen to what we say, adapt where they can and if they can't, we can agree to disagree.

For the first time in its history, the Trust has to report a loss for the financial year, despite securing increased funding. This was due to two major events. The first was an office relocation and upgrade. Having signed the Partnership Agreement and a three year rolling contract with Rodney District Council, the board opted not to renew the lease on its Florence Avenue office but, given the growth in projects and staff, to relocate to larger premises. Associated costs included alternations to the premises and additional equipment and service costs.

The second event was a governance review and operational restructure which incurred various professional fees and redundancy costs. While this was a demanding process, it has resulted in an even stronger and more efficient organization.

### **Business Development**

With regard to our core services, our involvement with Business Mentors New Zealand (as a sub-agency of Enterprise NorthShore) continues to strongly and nearly 200 businesses have so far been mentored with the help of 70 business mentors.

In addition to government's Enterprise Training Programme, we have this year offered some of our own training programmes and there are plans for stair-cased business development programmes for next year, partly aimed at capitalising on the Rugby World Cup potential increase in business opportunities.

REDT's advocacy for the business community was tested with the controversy over the setting of commercial and industrial rates in RDC's 2008 -09 Annual Plan. Without going into the technical detail, the business community took umbrage at the size of the increase and what they perceived as the high-handed attitude of Council. REDT pulled together a group of businesses from across the district – the Rodney Rates Action Group – and facilitated some, at times intense, discussions with Council. Businesses across the district contributed to a fund and the money was used to hire a consultant to work through the technical issues and offer some solutions.

While this didn't achieve all that the RRAG would have liked, it did result in a reduction in some areas and some other concessions.

A landmark for REDT this year was the culmination of three years work on aquaculture finally bearing fruit in the form of a grant from the Ministry for the Environment's Aquaculture Planning Fund. This funding,

obtained with the support of both Rodney District and Auckland Regional Councils, was to develop a business case and quadruple bottom line assessment for an Auckland Regional Aquaculture Cluster. An informal cluster had already been working with the trust, comprising local industry leaders and researchers. The grant allowed them to proceed with the work of formalising a wider cluster and delivering the business case and QBL by late 2009.

### **Employment Programmes**

June 2009 saw the completion of our fifth year of Rodney Youth Transitions to Trades with the placement of 32 school leavers into sustainable employment with training outcomes, most usually a modern apprenticeship. It is most rewarding to see the commitment of support agencies, notably Work and Income, together with our own staff and trustees making such a difference to these young lives. Even more heartening is the willingness of local employers to give these young people a chance. Watching the youngsters respond to these opportunities certainly gives one hope for the future.

We continue to operate the Gateway Cluster Broker model, one of very few in the country. However, we understand it's extremely unlikely that funding will continue after this year. While we are disappointed it does seem that now Gateway is so well established, Rodney colleges no longer have the same need for the broker.

Our third youth project – Project 300 – was wrapped up in August with the presentation of our findings to our funder, Ministry of Youth Development, and other stakeholders. This project was one of youth engagement which trained senior students to facilitate workshops for youth disengaged from the education system. The aim was find out what these young people saw as the reasons they were not engaging with the system, what they perceived would make a difference to their involvement and what they aspired to for the future. The findings led to some potential future projects to help the situation but their implementation is entirely dependent on funding.

### **North American Experience**

Christmas 2008 and New Year 2009 saw me in North America. I funded myself on this study tour and visited San Francisco, Vancouver, Kentucky and Ohio where I met with local EDAs and gained clear insights into how they undertook economic development. I found the exercise extremely valuable and stimulating and have worked with Valerie Freeman on instituting a number of initiatives based on my findings.

A full report is available should you want a copy from our office

Finally I want, once again, to thank the Board of Trustees for all they contribute to REDT and to Rodney District. I particularly want to thank Sir Ross Jansen and Jonathan Rigg who both resigned this year and Mike Smith who was instrumental in establishing the Trust and who ran it virtually single-handed for several years. Without Sir Ross, I doubt we would have Alpur B2 operational today. Sir Ross acted for REDT in the Environment Court challenge to Transit NZ who, left to their own devices, would never have completed the motorway extension. Sir Ross' services were all donated and the Trust and Rodney communities were extremely fortunate to have such an experienced barrister and former Mayor with his wealth of legal and local government knowledge acting in their interests.

The last year has seen a significant change in direction and focus. There have been staff changes and board changes resulting in significant change which has been well received by our customers, Council and other stakeholders.

Sadly not all the changes were easy but with changes in direction there is always the potential for conflict. However, as always, the strategic direction is important and key to the future

I thank the current and past trustees and the staff for all their input, their help and most of all the excellent work they have all undertaken over the past year