

Ian Russell extraordinaire

Prominent swimming and surf life saving administrator Ian Stuart Russell has died in New Plymouth, aged 79.

A long-standing volunteer and chartered accountant, Mr Russell had an interest in various community organisations ranging from North Taranaki IHC to New Plymouth Old Boys Surf Lifesaving.

In 1987 he received an MBE for services to swimming and surf lifesaving.

A former president of Swim Taranaki and Swimming New Zealand, he chaired the national body during the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch and managed a team of swimmers competing overseas in 1975.

He helped establish the Taranaki Sportsman of the Year awards, and convened the annual Port Taranaki harbour swim, the Flanagan Cup.

Former New Plymouth mayor David Lean, another surf lifesaving stalwart, described Mr Russell as a sports administrator "extraordinaire".

"He was a good sounding board and someone who would listen to concerns of young people and provide advice when it was needed.

"He was the exact epitome of what a patron should be," said Mr Lean, referring to Mr Russell's role as NPOB surf lifesaving club patron, life member and former president.

"Ian has given a lifetime of community service in all shapes and forms."

Wellington-born Mr Russell moved to New Plymouth as a child and lived in the city all his life.

He worked for L.H. Johnson Motors, Masterprint, Moller Holdings and the New Plymouth City Council. He was New Plymouth Civil Defence controller from 1988 to 2004, and in semi-retirement worked for Bell Block company Nuchem.

Mr Russell was married to Fay and was the father of three daughters.

Daughter Bonnie Heberton said her father loved the water and enjoyed helping others succeed. He coached swimming and lifesaving, and swam every lunch-hour for many years.

He was an auditor for various volunteer groups such as Habitat for Humanity, and a keen vegetable gardener.

"I can remember being out with him in the summer evenings, hosing the tomatoes and beans, and he loved eating produce from his garden."

Despite his prodigious community involvement, he was never too busy for his family, she said. He retained a great sense of humour.

"His uneaten dinner was often sitting on a pot on the stove because he was out at a meeting but it never felt like he wasn't there."

Mr Russell sat on the national IHC council at a time when it was undergoing much restructuring, as well as being the local president for about 10 years, said John Eaddy, chairman of the IHC's North Taranaki association.

Former NPDC chief executive Kinsley Sampson called Mr Russell "highly competent".

"It was with great pleasure that we were able to recruit Ian to assist in a great variety of tasks. In particular, I remember him quickly coming to grips with the growing IT requirement at the council."

Mr Russell's other interests included the New Plymouth Opera House centenary project, Rotary, the Holy Trinity Anglican Church and Atawhai industries.

Ends

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