

Black-tie dinner for Tuhoe leader

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NEWS he is being awarded a distinguished alumni award by his old university had Tamati Kruger searching for a dictionary.

The accolade is to be awarded by Victoria University in Wellington to the Tuhoe leader and five others – Olympian Ian Ferguson, businessman and sports administrator Alan Isaac, Anglican Bishop Penny Jamieson, curator and artist Helen Kedgley, and technology entrepreneur Derek Handley – at a dinner in June.

The invite for the award dinner says it will be a black-tie event.

A devotee of casual attire, Mr Kruger



Tamati Kruger,
Tuhoe leader

said he didn't know what black-tie was.

"The most difficult part was figuring out what all of this is: 'complying with the black-tie attire dress code'. I had to look up what black tie was."

Mr Kruger said he was "chuffed" about receiving the award and may have to rent a black-tie outfit for the event.

"And be under pressure to return it before midnight ... like Cinderella."

Mr Kruger completed a bachelor of arts, majoring in Maori, at the university in 1978 and said he was honoured that his old school remembered him.

"I think it is an honour to get it because it is not one of those things you apply for; it is something that Victoria University council considers privately.

"When they contacted me it was quite a surprise and an honour."

He said going to the university in Wellington had a profound effect on him.

"I was working before I went to University so I considered my options quite carefully as to where to go to. At the time Waikato was more of the popular choice for Tuhoe people.

"I went there because I wanted to go there, not because I wanted to go there so that I could get a job.

"I think it is an honour to get it because it is not one of those things you apply for; it is something that Victoria University council considers privately."

- Tamati Kruger

"I was influenced in the way I think and the way I do things by these people. A lot of my understanding around New Zealand politics and history was formulated there, not just from the lecturers but also from the people that I messed with ... the land march

and the work that was being done to revive our language – we were at the forefront of it all."

Since graduating more than 30 years ago Mr Kruger has been involved in iwi and hapu development and is a respected Maori society social and political analyst. He has taught te reo Maori at the private education institution Anamata, in Whakatane.

As Tuhoe's negotiator, Mr Kruger heavily influenced the tribe's settlement with the Government last year. He is now the head of Te Uru Taumatua, the body responsible for the management of the resources received by the tribe in the settlement, as well as the inaugural chairman of the Te Urewera board, which is responsible for the governance of the former national park.