



TRIBAL HUB: Above, the opening of Tuhoe's Living Building was attended by hundreds of people when it was unveiled in 2014. Photo Lottie Hedley

VISION FULFILLED: Opposite page, the vision of a tribal headquarters was initiated by Tuhoe kaumatau, who wanted a place that iwi members could feel proud about. Photo Ana Dermer

living building pays off

by Karla Akuhata

ACHIEVING Living Building status for Tuhoe's headquarters in Taneatua has been a long and arduous road. But the tribe's chairman, Tamati Kruger, says the outcome has been worth it.

First raised by Tuhoe Establishment Trust, the idea was to build a modern headquarters after the tribe settled its Treaty grievances with the Government.

The forerunner to the tribe's post-settlement governance body, Te Uru Taumatua, the establishment trust is comprised of kaumatau, respected elders, who acted as representatives for the areas within Tuhoe's tribal boundaries. Tamati says it was these kaumatau who wanted to build a modern tribal headquarters.

"One of the things that was being expressed and coming through was the need for a modern Tuhoe building. Not a marae but a headquarters, something that was inspirational, something that the new generations could relate to. Something that was digital and something that could advance the view that Tuhoe was global while maintaining the connections to the environment and the forest."

Tamati says it was also those kaumatau who decided on the budget for the building, but they believed it was important for the tribe's future.

"It was a few million dollars towards the building and of course, like any other iwi that has come from a background of poverty and oppression, when one of the first things that you do is dedicate a few dollars to build a building you get a few critics."

"But the Tuhoe Establishment Trust was confident that the idea was from the people. And now it is a symbol that we are capable of doing anything. We are capable of putting something up that has a futuristic view to it."

"It was very pricey, but soon after we built it you quickly saw the high costs dissolve by the low cost of maintenance. Not even the high price up front would be enough to put us off if we had our choice again."

Te Kura Whare opened in 2014 and last month, after providing all of the necessary documentation, it became one of only 14 structures in the world with Living Building certification.

The Living Building Challenge is the most stringent of sustainability and environmental standards internationally. It requires a building

to not only have no impact on its environment, but to improve its land, place and community.

It requires the building's performance to be confirmed after at least a year of operation through recorded data rather than theoretical performance predicted on paper.

Tamati says he was proud of the tribe's achievement but he was happier because they had stayed true to their identity and what was important to them.

"We are very happy with the fact that we have this world-first, certified, regenerative building. It is the first in Aotearoa and the first building by an indigenous people to receive the certification so, of course we are proud and happy with that, but more importantly, this is consistent and true to our connections, traditions and values."

"Although [the Living Building standards] were important, it had more to do with Tuhoe values and virtues and the connection of our whakapapa to nature."

During the building of the headquarters, many tribal members helped out with the hands-on work and Tamati says it was an important part of the project that the people felt involved and part of it.

"When the building was started there was a call from the people that it had to have the footprint and fingerprints of Tuhoe people throughout it."

"So they are there, in the making of the 5000 earth bricks that are used to absorb and hold heat – Tuhoe people were involved in that. We learned about carpentry and engineering and for many Tuhoe it was the first job a household had had in two generations. It was the first time that mothers and children saw some people going out to paid employment."

"There was a degree of pride and connection that is still there today. Many people who helped on the project bring their friends and want to show them what they had worked on."

Tamati says now Te Kura Whare acts as a blueprint when designing other buildings, such as the one that is set to open in Ruatahuna next year.

"The building has created a habit. I don't think currently that those of us who are in the leadership can go back to off-the-shelf buildings. These living buildings are such a good expression of our commitment to nature and the environment and it does express quite clearly how important all of those things are to us."

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