

Karitāne, birthplace of Plunket, honours organisation with new street name

A small southern town with a big heart is embracing an important part of its history with a brand-new street named after the iconic organisation that's helped generations of Kiwi babies thrive.

Karitāne, near Dunedin, now has a street called Whānau Āwhina, the Māori name for Plunket – the society that has its origins with two respected midwives in the small coastal settlement in the early 1900's.

David Ellison, upoko (chief) of Kāti Huirapa Runaka ki Puketeraki, at Karitāne, is the son of Thomas Rangiwahia Mutu Ellison, who was the first ever 'Plunket baby', known as Baby Tommy. David has been assisting the developer of a new subdivision in the town, which has created the new street.

"I thought it would be an honour for the selected name, not only for the Kāti Huirapa Runaka ki Puketeraki, but especially for the various whānau directly involved in the evolution of Whānau Āwhina," David says.

"The name is the Māori name used by Plunket since its restructuring in recent years, but I believe it was also used years ago".

David says two Māori midwives from his Runaka – Mere Harper and Ria Tikini, both of Kāi Tahu and Kāti Huirapa descent, were highly respected midwives and healers who worked with their neighbour in Karitāne, health reformer Dr Frederic Truby King, to care for the ill in their community. The pair did all the local groundwork and assisted in getting Whānau Āwhina started.

"In the history books, those two midwives were classed as washerwomen, and the credit, including a medal, was given to the matron of the Seacliff Mental Hospital. The history was corrected two years ago, with an appropriate hui at Puketeraki marae," he says.

Mere and Ria helped deliver 'Baby Tommy' – David's father – in 1906 – and brought in Dr Truby King when the baby began to become unwell following breastfeeding issues. The baby was restored back to health under the care and guidance of the three. Shortly after, the society was developed in collaboration with the two midwives, utilising their expertise and many years of traditional health care methods. Later, Governor-General's wife Lady Victoria Plunket threw her support behind the organisation, which then took her name.

David, who is a retired schoolteacher and Malaya war veteran, says the Runaka chairman will be asked to confirm the name of the street.

"It's time that Karitāne had a permanent reminder of being the birthplace of Whānau Āwhina Plunket, and to remember both Mere Harper and Ria Tikini, who were the real heroes," he says.

The new subdivision is made up of eleven sections that will house a range of homes. It is being developed by a syndicate headed by Jason Morey, who says Karitāne one of the most special places he has worked.

"My family normally spend entire summers out there surfing, riding bikes and enjoying the outdoors. From day one we knew we had found somewhere special," he says.

“All three of my kids have gone through Whānau Āwhina – Plunket. It’s such an amazing organisation. I spoke to David Ellison before we started the project and he told me the history, so when it came time to name the street I figured he was the best person to do that. As a company we feel honoured that David was willing to take his time to do this for us. After hearing his story and reasons why he chose Whānau Āwhina we instantly loved the name”.

The sections are being marketed by Andrew Berryman and Leona Munro for Tall Poppy. Andrew says it is a privilege to be privy to the history of the area.

“Originally, probably like many Kiwis, I knew about Plunket, but had no idea of the history or where it originated,” he says.

“It’s wonderful that the history is being acknowledged and the origins honoured with this street name”.

For more information on the subdivision, please visit www.tallpoppy.co.nz/homes-for-sale/property-detail?tppID=TPDN5302

About Tall Poppy

Tall Poppy is New Zealand’s fastest growing and award-winning Real Estate Agency, headquartered on the Kāpiti Coast, north of Wellington. It has been voted first equal for Customer Satisfaction 2021 by Canstar, Agency of the Year 2021 by RateMyAgent and was a recent winner in the 2021 Electra Business Awards. Founded in 2012, it operates throughout New Zealand and is working to create a fairer real estate industry for all Kiwis and prides itself in being an active member of the communities in which it operates.

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