

# Hokitika girl has last laugh



Photo by West Etch

New Zealand's first female glass blower, 18 year old Leonie Rasmussen of Hokitika shows off one of her early attempts — a glass swan.

By Vivian Logie

It is almost two years ago "as a joke" a young Hokitika woman applied to be an apprentice glass blower and was accepted as New Zealand's first woman glass blower.

Eighteen year old Leonie Rasmussen applied for the job as an apprentice glass blower while she was still

at Westland High School, sitting her School Certificate for the second time.

A month later, in December, she found she was to start straight away.

Two other girls and four boys had applied for the job at the Hokitika Free Form Glass Factory. Leonie was shocked when she found out she was the one who had got the job.

With only one School Certificate subject, maths, Leonie started work on Tuesday December 8, but had no idea what she was really up against.

She says her first day at work seemed never ending.

"Starting at 7.30 am was bad enough, but doing the same thing for the whole day, made me wonder what I had got myself into."

The first week was restricted to holding the mould in the 1100 degrees furnace to heat the glass for her workmates.

"They could make things that I only dreamed of making."

But her chance soon came. On the second week of her job Leonie was given a chance to make a swan. But it had its problems.

She put the pipe into the blazing hot furnace to heat the mould, and when it was ready, she grabbed hold of the pipe. But she grabbed it too far down, and burned her hand. That was the end of her first attempt to try and transfer a blob of glass into a picturesque swan.

Leonie soon got into the swing of things and was soon adapt at making swans, kiwis and swizzel sticks.

Tourists admiring the things that she had made, provided an added satisfaction.

Now Leonie, along with her workmates, makes up to 300 lampshades a day.

If the glass is not of a high enough standard, the team spends the day making a variety of less expensive articles in welcome relaxation.

Being the only girl working in the part of the factory that she works, Leonie sometimes gets a hard time from her workmates.

Another aspect of her job which is different from many others is the fact that she has to wear clogs while she is working with the glass.

The reason is if the hot glass falls on the floor the workers are able to get their feet out of the shoes reasonably quickly before getting a bad burn.

The other reason is most of the time there is a lot of broken glass lying around and with the soles of the clogs being wooden the glass does not cut through them.

The Hokitika Free Form Glass factory was founded in 1974 by two Swedes and a New Zealander.

Leonie now enjoys challenges.

"When things get more difficult to make, it makes the job more exciting and you have to apply yourself."

## Two Retire

Mrs Meremere Petricevich of Ahipara, right, receives a silver tea service in recognition of her many years of service to the Maori people in the north.

Presenting the gift is Mrs Martha Moon, retiring president of the Tai Tokerau Regional Council of the Maori Women's Welfare League.

Mrs Petricevich was a teacher at Oromahoe School before joining the Maori Affairs Department as a community officer more than 30 years ago. Photo by Northern Advocate.

