

Dreams and hopes of Kaumatua represented by Ohaki Maori Village



Rangimarie Hetet, New Zealand's 90-year-old foremost exponent of Maori weaving, who has been the "driving force" behind the village's development.

by Sonya Haggie

The "driving and inspirational force" behind a venture designed to preserve, protect and promote Maoritanga is a 90-year-old woman renowned for her traditional Maori weaving.

Rangimarie Hetet has been the guiding light for her King Country family which has developed the Ohaki Maori Village — a 2.8h.a. block with a traditional semi-fortified pa on a hilltop and an arts and crafts centre below.

The project, spearheaded by Rangimarie's grandson Dan Te Kanawa, was officially opened and dedicated before a crowd of about 200.

Sited 500m from the Waitomo Caves, near Te Kuiti, the village is the latest tourist attraction for the area. Visitors will pay to see the pa with the appearance and spirit of yesteryear, and crafts will be on sale within the centre.

But according to Dan the commercial side of the venture was not the most important aspect of the project and its development.

The main reason for its existence was to give his grandmother and his mother, Digger Te Kanawa, a place to pass on their knowledge of traditional Maori weaving, for which they are both well-known.

"It was really an attempt to try to establish a place where she (Rangimarie) could teach people the art. We are not concerned about selling her art. We really want a training place where we can pass it on. See, Nana's 90 and Mum's 62," he said.

Although Rangimarie will not play a constant part in the teaching, which began at the centre on August 31, her knowledge will reach the students through her daughter Digger.

"Nana has been very much our inspiration, one of the driving forces."

The village began to come to life when Dan, a 33-year-old Ministry of Works draughtsman, returned to his birth place after several years as a Wellington city dweller.

It was 1974 then and Dan's approach to the Hetet and Te Kanawa families with his idea for the village was met with a reserved enthusiasm.

But with their support he scoured the area for a suitable block of land and found the perfect piece — but it belonged to a pakeha farmer.

Luck was with him though. The landowner was willing to sell and, with his