



SPECIAL: The seven completed hei tiki.

Photos Brayden Lindsay E0456-17

Hei tiki class a real eye opener

Brayden Lindsay
Staff reporter

SEVEN people from around the North Island have spent the past three months creating a taonga their families will treasure for generations.

Leland Ruwhiu, Jenny Te Huamanuka Crown, Que Bidois, Pine Amine Morehu Te Raa, Ariana Sheehan and Whiuwhiu and Wiremu Huta-Martin were selected by Eastern Bay master carver Te Kaha to be part of the Hei Tiki wananga in Whakatane.

Over the past three months they have carved their own hei tiki and learned the history and meaning behind the taonga.

Mr and Mrs Huta-Martin, from Kawerau, were the only local participants with the rest educationalists from around the North Island.

Te Kaha ran the class – the first of its kind – at Eastbay REAP with Creative New Zealand funding but is unsure whether any further classes will be possible.

“I am the only person in New Zealand who does this sort of carving; it’s very special,” he said.

“It’s disappointing that this could well be the last one of these programmes and they won’t give us more funding.”

Ideally, the class would have run over a year but with Covid-19 disruptions delaying the start and less funding received than anticipated, Te Kaha worked around the clock to ensure it could be completed in three months.

He said what the students had created were incredibly special.

“There’s a lot of meaning behind them and that was a big part of Wiremu’s involvement with this providing the history around it.”

As well as being a student, Mr Huta-Martin taught his fellow participants about the history of the taonga.

“The special thing about these taonga is they were created by hands,” Te Kaha said. “It’s something you never forget – it’s not only set in your minds but also in taonga and hands. Every time you wear it, you think back to those special moments of creating these taonga.”

Mr Ruwhiu, who travelled from the Manawatu for each class, said the experience was a real eye-opener.

“I am honoured and incredibly grateful to be able to create something so special.

WEAVING: Que Bidois holds his taonga as Te Kaha finishes braiding the cord. E0456-025



HONOURED: Back from left, hei tiki carver Te Kaha with his hei tiki wananga whanau, Wiremu Huta-Martin, Whiuwhiu Huta-Martin, Que Bidois, Jenny Te Huamanuka Crown, Ariana Sheehan, front, Leland Ruwhiu and Pine Amine Morehu Te Raa with the taonga they have crafted.

Photos Brayden Lindsay E0456-031

I never used to think much of them but once I got the chance to carve my own and learn the history, it was really special for me.

“Just knowing so much more about that and being able to pass that knowledge on is massive and can hopefully keep people interested in hei tiki. I definitely want to pass it on to my family and teach them about what I have learned.

“I knew bits of stuff about them but receiving the information from Wiremu while we carved them was like putting all the ingredients of a cake together. It just gave the whole class so much more meaning.”

Mr Bidos, who travelled from Tauranga for the wananga, felt privileged to have been given such knowledge.

“What we have created is a bonus,” he said.

“The real taonga is the knowledge and

history we have learnt from Wiremu and Te Kaha.

“The knowledge that has been unpacked in these wananga has been beyond belief. A huge mihi to Wiremu and Nan Whiuwhiu – the wisdom that you have bestowed on us as tauira has been that of the highest.”

He has already had mates ask him about classes like Te Kaha’s and wants to instil what he learned in his friends and whanau.”

Mrs Te Huamanuka Crown said Te Kaha’s wananga had been incredibly grounding and inspiring.

“I have never been in wananga quite like this, so for us as humans to be enlightened again is simply fascinating.

“It’s been so well worth it and so privileged to be exposed to something like this and learn and grow in regard to our whakapapa.”

Mr Morehu Te Raa said the wananga was beautiful and a real eye opener for him.

“It’s the first time I have done something like this and to just hear all the knowledge and information and whakapapa of hei tiki has changed a part of my life.

“More of this stuff definitely needs to happen. I have already started telling my eldest daughter bits about hei tiki that she will understand.”

Mr Morehu Te Raa was stoked with his finished product, never thinking he would create something so special.

“I have never been a book person so to have the hands-on sharing and listening to the korero being shared by Te Kaha and Wiremu has been incredibly insightful and something I’ll never forget.”

Mrs Huta-Martin described it as a

wonderful journey.

“I have never learned so much about the hei tiki; it’s just mind blowing. It’s like a journey that carries you to the unknown.

“I have never experienced anything like it. We’re so blessed to have Te Kaha, he has so much knowledge.”

Mr Huta-Martin made his own taonga as well as bringing all the information together for the other students who referred to him as “the storyteller”.

“The language is what I concentrate on,” Mr Huta-Martin said. “It’s been a brilliant journey.”

He said they compared their taonga to a memory stick with all the history and the memories it held.

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