

Rob Dick

Rob Dick is one of those people you like a lot without actually knowing. You can catch him behind the bar on the twelfth of the month or more frequently on one of the tennis courts. I caught up with him recently after my weekly battle with Kevin Williams.

Rob was somewhat taken back when I phoned and asked if I could interview him for this series, wondering why anyone would be interested in him. But he's a great asset to our club and someone worth getting to know. I arrived not to find him serving drinks as expected but in front of a laptop. He pressed a finger to his lips for me not to say anything. It turned out he was in the middle of a videoconference with Sydney who are a couple of hours behind us. Rob is involved in something called service delivery, a job title that didn't mean much to me before I asked him to explain what it entailed and didn't mean much after either. Apparently it has to do with IT and is a role he'd morphed into during or after 24 years at Telecom, as Spark used to be known, who he joined as a temp after returning to New Zealand after 8½ year OE in England and needed a job.

To go back to the beginning, Rob was raised in Rotorua, his mum played squash and his father was more into mountaineering and skiing. Like Brenda Munro, who serves behind the bar on the first of the month and the subject of an earlier interview, Rob played squash and tennis at the Brownlee Club. At ten or eleven he was dispatched to a boarding school an eight hour bus journey from home. Sport played a big part in the curriculum so in addition to racket sports, rugby and golf, Rob also coxed the school eight rowing team. He went on to study horticulture at Lincoln University which prepared him for a career as a landscape gardener. To fund his trip overseas he worked first as a night manager then on the front desk of the Sheraton Hotel in Rotorua where he honed his people skills.

During his time in London Rob was based just off the Kings Road in Chelsea. He worked on the miniature gardens you find there and a couple of times took his diggers across the English Channel to work on client's holiday homes in France. A lucky encounter with the businessman and then Tory MP Phillip Oppenheim resulted in an assignment he is justly proud. The government of the day had introduced a scheme called 'Set aside' which paid landowners to plant trees on land that had been used for pasture. In this case it was in the Cotswolds where he lived in a caravan during the work. He'd love to go back to see how this project has evolved. Two of his bigger Landscaping roles were at Lambeth Palace (rebuilding a rose walk for the archbishop of Canterbury) and restoring a walled garden at Rothmans headquarters then based at Denham Place, Buckinghamshire. I didn't get round to asking Rob why he'd strayed away from landscape gardening for a life in Telecom but I'm guessing that the security and regular employment it provided was what was needed once you married and raised a family.

Rob joined Herne Bay around eight years ago. He, Bronwyn and the children; James and Emily, were living in Ponsonby and were looking for a club. There were three to choose from

initially they sampled the opposition down the hill then they came up here for an open day and that was it. Rob was attracted to the buzz of this place and the activities Dave Mustard puts on. And it would be Dave that taught both James and Emily to play tennis. We spoke for a while about the contribution sport makes to family life in general and his in particular. They play doubles here on Sundays chopping and changing who plays with whom. James loves his squash and represents Western Springs.

The decision to serve behind the bar came early. "When we joined the club I thought the best thing to do was to become a bar volunteer." He told me, "It's a brilliant way to get to know everyone on the two sides: tennis and squash." Rob regrets that there aren't closer links between the different codes. It is something that has been raised at the last committee meeting but turning an aspiration into an action plan for some joint venture needs bright ideas and work. In the past there have been fun events where tennis players take on squashes at squash and vice versa and it might be worth reviving this wheeze. And Rob enthused about the themed tennis events which are put on here to coincide with the tennis grand slams (Wimbledon, French, Oz etc) and convinced me that it was worth putting in an appearance if just to help out with the bar-b-que.

Our rather informal interview concluded with the arrival of Dave Mustard who entertained us with a hilarious account of the weekend he'd just spent in Australia, a trip plagued by delayed flights, food poisoning and vomit.

Most people agree that Herne Bay has a great club house. But it's the membership that makes this club special. And for this correspondent the innate warmth and friendliness Rob Dick has in spades represents everything that is good about our club. He might be someone you like without really knowing him but you like him even more when you do.

