



Willows make natural retreat for recovery

By TASHA BLACK

An eco-hut made from willow is taking shape on an Otaki Gorge property to help a young man in cancer remission.

The hut's frame was put together by Kapiti College students a week ago, completing a unit for their building, construction and technology course.

Students and technology teacher Kerie Holmes became familiar with the build process early last year when they built an eco-hut outside the college in a national Enviro-schools challenge.

Kapiti Enviro-schools facilitator Nicola Easthope said conditions for the latest build were perfect, with damp, easy ground for planting the locally sourced willow poles, and clear skies for the group to work under.

She said in less than two hours, the team of 10 year 12 students rammed holes, planted the willow in a circle, wedging it in at the base, wove the poles together, then tied them at intersections to create a stable, attractive hut with diamond lattice walls and a canopy.

The hut was built for 25-year-old Andrew Walmsley, who is in cancer remission.

Ms Easthope said the hut was intended as a meditation and creative space for Mr Walmsley.

Mr Walmsley works part-time for CanTeen and studies psychology at Victoria University.

Sarah Simpson, 17, said the most difficult technical part was getting the weaving right, but over time the joins would grow together and make it stronger.

Joshua-James Healey, 16, said it would get leafier in the spring.

"As it grows, it will create its own shower-proof protection.

"The hut looks out at the waterfall and stream.

"In time, it's going to look gorgeous," he said.

Mr Walmsley's mum, Cathy, said the willow would regenerate but she may grow roses or jasmine around it in the winter and more plants in the summer.



More to go: Cathy Walmsley will put the final touches on her son's eco-hut.

Ms Holmes said last year it took a whole day to build an eco-hut because the ground was hard.

"Now that we know how easy it can be, we'll look at creating a trail of eco-huts for various purposes, throughout the Kapiti Coast."



Canteen Kids enjoy day on the water

The 2011 Canteen Fishing Day was the most successful of the five held to date.

Based at Pine Harbour Marina with the marina company, Stevenson's Engineering Marine Services and Big Fish Bait & Tackle Co as the main sponsors and with dozens of other sponsors, the fishing day is an opportunity for teenage cancer sufferers to enjoy a day out on the water.

Says organiser Paul Gapes: "The weather could have been better but it didn't stop 34 Canteen members weighing in more than 130kgs of fish. They walked away with an unbelievable array of prizes, that without sponsors' support just wouldn't happen. We raised close to \$20,000 in prizes and money that went to these deserving Teens, along with the running of the day.

"The smile on absolutely everyone's faces reaffirms that we are doing the

right thing in giving these guys one of the most eventful, enjoyable and memorable days of their lives."

As well as the many sponsors, the fishing day is the result of the efforts of a large committee and group of helpers that includes All Black coach Graeme Henry, rugby stars Ali Williams and Steve Devine and fishing personality Geoff Thomas.

"We all look forward to a bigger and better event next year," says Paul Gapes.

"Meanwhile, please take a minute to reflect on the teens that have been to this event in past years who aren't with us today."

TOP: Organising committee members Lisa Ransom (left) with Paul and Cath Gapes and the many, many prizes on offer at the Canteen Fishing Day.

BELOW: Canteen Kids enjoy their day on the water.





Teenage battler says thank you

By REBECCA GARDINER

TARA Siljeur's smile is pure sunshine and, apart from her short hairdo and the hint of tiredness in her eyes, you would never know she has beaten cancer.

The 19-year-old was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma last October, and has emerged from it with the same cheerful outlook on life she's always had.

"I'm doing much better," says Tara, who lives in Pakuranga with her parents and two sisters. "I have health checks every three months."

It's not the first time the teenager's mental strength has been tested, or she's been placed under huge emotional stress.

Tara was part of the Elim Christian College group in which six students and a teacher drowned while canyoning in the Mangatepopo Gorge in 2008. She bears a tattoo of seven stars on her back - one for each of those who lost their lives.

Fighting the cancer was a different test altogether for Tara, who spent three

"Some people have been having chemo for years, so I had no reason to be upset."

- Tara Siljeur

months in hospital receiving chemotherapy treatment and was unable to eat regular food because of stomach ulcers that needed to heal.

The East Auckland community rallied around the Siljeur family, and showed their support by attending a fitness fundraiser which saw thousands of dollars donated to cancer charity CanTeen.

A car wash run by student Rotary groups from Elim, Pakuranga and Edgewater Colleges was also held with proceeds going to CanTeen.

Tara's parents Ross and Adele are grateful to everyone who helped their daughter, even in the smallest way.

"It's overwhelming and humbling, and we're appreciative of everyone," says Ross. "It meant we could concentrate on getting Tara well."

While in hospital their daughter met "a lot of interesting people", including a young woman called Amanda who was also being treated for lymphatic cancer.

They formed a tight bond and shared jokes about their illness, which didn't go down so well with family and friends.

"She's amazing, an absolute trooper," says Tara, of her buddy.

"It's been two years [of treatment] and she's still not down about it.

"Amanda and I had our song - *Tomorrow* from *Annie*."

The teenager - who is now in remission - says the nurses at Auckland Hospital were "fantastic" and she had a "brilliant" doctor.

"He gave me hope. He would say, 'just a few more months and then you can have a Popsicle for Christmas'."



Being constantly hungry and having to ignore her pangs was “worse than chemo” for Tara, who craved “real food” like lasagne, pizza and grandma’s chicken pie.

“Eating is a really social experience,” she says. “You chat with your friends over coffee and cake. I was hungry all the time, but smell-

ing things eased it a bit. I thought, ‘at least I’m smelling it.’”

Other patients who had fought long, hard battles with cancer were sources of inspiration, and reasons to be strong.

“Some people have been having chemo for years and years, so I had no reason to be upset or sad,” she says. “I have met so many people who have such amazing attitudes to life.”

The self-confessed “gym bunny” became seriously ill during the first year of a health science degree at the University of Otago in Dunedin.

Tara had been troubled with stomach pain for several weeks, but visits to a university health centre put the discomfort down to indigestion and an iron deficiency.

► Turn to **Page 3**



HAPPY: Tara Siljeur is all smiles after her battle with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma



Tara lives life to the full

► **From Page 1**

But after a chat with her dad Ross, who made her promise to call an ambulance as soon as she hung up the phone, she was rushed to hospital and later received emergency stomach surgery.

"I was in pain when I was hungry, and I was in pain when I ate," says Tara. "There was acid all the time coming up my throat. It was so horrible."

Family and friends have always been close to her heart, but are even closer now because they all helped to ease the dark moments

in her struggle against the cancer.

"Everybody has this idea that 'nobody really cares', but they do," she says. "They go out of their way to love and support you."

"My friends visited me every week, even when they had exams."

"My dad was a star. He learned as much as he could about cancer, and actually sounded like a doctor saying all the technical terms."

"My mum was my painkiller



TARA SILJEUR

expert, and she was really good."

Tara was given the all-clear in February, but says it took a while for the news to sink in.

"I was so nervous for that day," she says.

"I didn't want them to say the cancer was still there. I acted nonchalant

about the whole thing, but I was really scared. It was such a relief, and my parents were so excited."

She's put her health science degree on hold for the time being,

and has instead taken up Japanese, French and psychology at the University of Auckland.

"I've been blessed in my choice of subjects. I love to study and I find it interesting acquiring new knowledge. My friends think I'm kind of a freak."

Life doesn't stop when you have cancer, but being in remission has made Tara even more determined to live it to the full.

"I've learnt that you have to be positive. You've only got one life, so why spend it being miserable when you can be happy."