

## Seasons of change: Robin calls time

Some say Queens Park is the jewel in Invercargill's crown, now our master jeweller has decided to hang up his tools. After more than five decades working in the Parks and Reserves team, and 26 years as Manager, Robin Pagan will retire in October. **HANNAH McLEOD** sat down with Robin to find out just what 53 years with Invercargill City Council has been like.



**IT'S** a crisp Invercargill morning, and Robin is sitting happily at his desk in the Parks Division office – the same office he was interviewed in as a hopeful horticultural apprentice, age 15.

Robin explains that when he left school he had a choice – either to follow the money to a job at the freezing works, or to get into horticulture. “The attraction was I was interested in growing plants.”

### A young green thumb

Beginning his Amenity Horticultural Apprenticeship in January 1966, Robin was tasked first with working in the nursery, where he learned about plant propagation.

Such was the time though, that apprentices were given wonderful opportunities to explore their environment.

“We did things that were interesting like going out, plant collecting on top of Mid Dome – before the wilding pines were even there – things like that. That made the job really interesting.”

Fast forward to 1992, and Robin was appointed Manager, the role he's held ever since.

“Once you get into administration you're dealing with user groups, dealing with the public, finding out what they want. Trying to work out what we can do and what we can afford.

“With the opportunity of doing that you had more influence on what was happening,” he says.

### Gardens a work of heart

A humble man, Robin is hard pressed to put a finger on a part of parks and reserves he's “most proud of”.

But with a push, he can rattle off a few spots in Queens Park which stand out.

“There's so many!

“The stumpery is just fantastic. It was sort of a bit of a whim, we weren't sure whether that

was going to work or not ... but it's interesting.

“I suppose areas the likes of the Sub-Antarctic Island display, I actually went to the Islands and collected some of those plants, to Auckland and Campbell Islands, so that's quite special. But there's just corners everywhere.”

Considering the list of projects he's been involved with, and helped to lead, it's no wonder Robin finds it hard to choose favourites.

From the Japanese Gardens, to the Aviary, various sculptures throughout Queens Park, more recently the Disc Golf, Robin

seems to have had a hand in many of the main features of our green spaces.

### About that jewel...

So what is it about Queens Park which makes it so fabulous – and loved by generations?

“The uniqueness of this is it's right in the middle of the city, laid out from the first day,” Robin says.

“And it's alive. It's still developing. It will never stop. So there's new things we're bringing in, and I've put a few things on, Lawrie Metcalf before me, and Ron Petrie before him, so you can see the flavour that

people put on it.” Robin sees Queens Park as an important part of the city's heritage – and his perspective reveals how deep his passion for our green spaces runs:

“The history of Invercargill is the trees in the parks, more so than the buildings. People have grown up with the structure of the parks, even Sandy Point, the beach, everyone talks about going to Daffodil Bay as a kid.”

### Cultivating community

But Robin's also held an important mantra about all of the city's green spaces firm in his mind – they don't belong to any

one person.

“The parks are not mine, they're the community's, the public's, the ratepayers', and so on.”

It's because of this that the future of parks in the city are in good hands – even if they aren't his own.

“We've got a park strategy, [which is about] linking our parks together better. Getting from one place to another via parks instead of the roads.

“We've got about 50-odd small neighbourhood parks. We'd like to be able to form a link to be able to go from one to the other, to travel from one safe place to another. If you give people the opportunity, they'll do more recreation without even realising it.”

### Reflecting on a job well done

Robin laughs when asked for any funny anecdotes he'd like to share – “most of them I can't say,” he reckons.

But he admits he's seen a lot in his role, and some of his favourite moments are beautifully simple, yet frequent ones.

“There's those little moments all the time where you see people enjoying themselves, you see something happening, you see someone rushing in with the kids to feed the ducks (and the kids are terrified by the ducks because they're taking over), just nice little things going on.

“It's people enjoying themselves, I think, as they walk through the park.

“Sometimes I worry about people who take recreation too seriously, because they look stressed,” he says with a chuckle, “but people that actually enjoy themselves, it's really pleasing to see the smiles on the faces.”

Will he be sad to leave? “Oh, yeah, but I certainly won't be barred from using the parks, I'll probably use them even more because I'm going to have

PICTURES: Kelly Braithwaite

more time to actually use them and enjoy them, as opposed to rushing from one thing to another.

“So I'll be sad not to play a part in it, but as a ratepayer, like any ratepayer, I'll still get a part to play and I can still write suggestions,” Robin says.

“I'm fortunate that I've started and stayed doing something that I've got a passion for, and I suppose maybe I'm fortunate that I'm one of the last people that's spent their whole working life working for one employer.

“I'm very fortunate that every time I was ready for a change, a new challenge or a new position came along and I was fortunate enough to get that.

“Otherwise I could've moved around, but there's an advantage on having that knowledge right from the ground up.”

### Sowing new seeds

When Robin's final day in the job, October 26, finally arrives, he reckons he'll do what most retired people do – work on the home and garden, and spend plenty of time with family, including grandchildren.

“I've got lots of things to do, like anyone, there's a whole heap of unfinished work to do at home, and I'll spend more time in my own garden, which I haven't had time to do as the job got busier.”

So what will you find in Invercargill's master gardener's home garden?

“Not a lot. It's just a normal garden, but I would like to start growing a few more unusual plants, given time.

“In an urban garden it's surprising what you can do. You can grow plants people think the climate's not suitable for – with a wee bit more time and care and looking after.

“There's nothing really unusual about my garden at this stage – that's what's going to change.”



## Council meetings

Notice is hereby given of the following meetings:

- Child, Youth, Family Friendly**  
Monday, 30 July, 4pm
- Bluff Community Board**  
Monday, 6 August, 7pm
- Community Services**  
Monday, 13 August, 4pm
- Regulatory Services**  
Tuesday, 14 August, 4pm
- Resource Consent Hearing**  
Wednesday, 15 August, 9am
- Audit and Risk**  
Friday, 17 August, 3.30pm
- Infrastructure and Services Committee**  
Monday, 20 August, 4pm
- Finance and Policy**  
Tuesday, 21 August, 4pm
- Events Committee**  
Friday, 24 August, 9am
- Council**  
Tuesday, 28 August, 4pm
- Audit and Risk**  
Friday, 31 August, 8.30am

The above meetings will be held in the Council Chambers / Committee Room, First Floor, Civic Administration Building, 101 Esk Street, Invercargill, except for the Bluff Community Board meeting, which will be held at the Bluff Municipal Chambers, Gore Street, Bluff.

- www.icc.govt.nz

## Dog registrations due next week

The last day to pay your dog registration fee is **Friday 3 August**.

Pay by the due date to avoid a penalty.

Register online at [www.icc.govt.nz](http://www.icc.govt.nz).

You can also register your dog at 101 Esk Street or at the Bluff Service Centre.

Phone **03 211 1777** with any further enquiries.



## noticeboard

For more about the Council's Noticeboard items contact the Communications Department on (03) 211 1777.

### Communications Manager

Eirwen Harris Mitchell  
(03) 211 1678  
eirwen.harris@icc.govt.nz

### Communications Advisor

Hannah McLeod (03) 211 1601  
hannah.mcleod@icc.govt.nz

### Graphic Designers

Colleen Montgomery (03) 211 1582  
colleen.montgomery@icc.govt.nz

Kelly Braithwaite (03) 211 1459  
kelly.braithwaite@icc.govt.nz

### Web Administrator

John Leask (03) 211 1723  
john.leask@icc.govt.nz

You can find us on

