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LOCALS SUPPORTING
LOCALS

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A world class helicopter for a world class region

A message
to the thugs -
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By Kerrie Spicer of the Auckland and Coromandel Westpac Rescue Helicopter

The Coromandel Peninsula is a destination synonymous with clear, sandy beaches, native forests and a feel-good holiday vibe, but another thing the locals know it for is its accessibility to a world class air ambulance and rescue service.

Jo Burton and her family settled in Whitianga three years ago after leaving Auckland for a more laid-back way of life. Having previously been a nurse, and with two young children in tow, it was important for Jo and her husband Kim to know that, although the location may be remote, they were still nearby emergency services.

They were already regular supporters of the Auckland and Coromandel Westpac Rescue Helicopter and continued their support now settled in Whitianga. What they didn't realise was just how soon they'd need it.

On 29 January this year, Jo was enjoying the work/life balance of working from home. She was outside on her deck when she pushed shut an open window and was shocked to find her hand went straight through the plate glass.

"I remember a strange feeling in my fingers and I looked down to see my arm was covered in blood," she recalls. "My youngest daughter, Aimee, who was home with me at the time, quickly wrapped my arm in a towel and rang 111. The nearest ambulance was in Tairua, so a girlfriend drove me to the doctor, who suggested to call the helicopter."

The Auckland and Coromandel Westpac Rescue Helicopter was already close-by, with the crew staying in the area over summer due to the large influx of tourists enjoying the holiday weather.

"Before I knew it, I was down at the Whitianga hangar, in the helicopter and on the way to hospital," Jo says. "The crew



Whitianga's Jo Burton at the Auckland and Coromandel Westpac Rescue Helicopter base at the Whitianga Airport.

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A world class helicopter

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were amazing and really friendly, they even involved my kids with getting the stretcher ready for me.”

Jo was taken to the Waikato Hospital - a journey which took just 30 minutes. “I was so grateful to go by air,” she says. “If I’d have gone by road, it would have taken about three hours and the pain was pretty intense.”

Once at hospital, surgeons repaired five tendons and her superficial radial nerve. Jo was told it would take three to six months before she would regain full movement and had to undergo weekly physio therapy sessions on her hand.

Soon after, she visited the crew at the base and took a thank you card. “I’m so glad we already donate to such a great service,” she says. “Because if people don’t donate they won’t be here - it’s really that simple.”

This year the rescue helicopter crew will be back in the area and that’s largely thanks to the generosity of the Coromandel community and the Coromandel Rescue Helicopter Trust (CRHT).

“The Coromandel Peninsula residents are really proud of their local rescue helicopter,” says CRHT Chairman, Walter Russell. “I’m regularly having people come and tap me on the shoulder wanting to give me a donation because they recognise the lifeline

that the helicopter is to the community.”

While the rescue helicopter resides in Auckland for most of the year, the CRHT drives the service from the region and ensures the base at the Whitianga airport runs smoothly.

Trustee Brian Bowering wants locals to know that it is their local rescue helicopter and that the Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust and the CRHT “work together” to provide the region with this world class service.

As well as being on-hand over summer and during long weekends, the helicopter service provides much more than just speedy transportation to hospital.

It is the first civilian rescue helicopter service in New Zealand to fly with emergency trauma doctors on board and the first service to carry blood, allowing patients to receive blood transfusions en-route to the hospital.

Jo is one of 238 rescues to the Coromandel so far this year, and 61 to the Whitianga area alone, with that number steadily increasing.

If you’d like to keep your rescue helicopter in the air and servicing the Coromandel Peninsula, please visit www.rescuehelicopter.org.nz/make-a-donation or call 0800 4RESCUE (or if you’re in Whitianga - just tap Walter on the shoulder).



The Whitianga Lions Club has recently donated \$2,000 to the Coromandel Rescue Helicopter Trust. Present when the cheque was handed over were, from left to right - Brian Bowering (CRHT trustee), Greg “Browndog” Brownson (helicopter crewman), Malcolm Brown (Whitianga Lions president) and Bruce Kerr (flight paramedic).