

Does Geoffrey Palmer have the answers to plug the bottle?

MATE MARK WILSON



THIS is the third and final instalment of my battlelines look at New Zealand's drinking culture. Having grown up in what I would call a reasonably stereotypical Kiwi kinda way, wandering through a fair proportion of the good, the bad and the ugly intricacies of binge drinking, I get quite frustrated at the seemingly out-of-touch approach to alcohol law reform being bandied about.

Today, sharing a yarn with mates over a quiet Speight's to relax after working harder than Helen Clark's makeup artist leading into the new year, we yakked about how to effectively manage our drinking culture to ensure the enjoyment is not lost, the innocent are not persecuted when trying to buy a wine for dinner, and the troubled are nurtured and kept from perishing at the bottom of the bottle or in a ditch.

How do we find the balance? Do we employ Geoffrey Palmer, the Exclusive Brethren, the tooth fairy and the SS to close bars early, tinker with licensing legislation to place even more responsibility on manager and less on individuals than we already do, ban alcohol in public places, sports events and concerts, make retina scans the only official form of ID and confine drinking to private homes and shady public areas such as the back of the bike sheds and run-down alleyways?

Do we instead take a European approach and demystify alcohol and take it out of the spotlight? Human reaction to something we can't have is to want it more - it's natural to be excited by the infamous and naughty. During our whole upbringing we are taught to fear alcohol, stay away from it or be spanked and grounded.

Then when the chance arises we grab it by the horns and boof as much as we can before someone takes it. Like a lamb in the vegetable garden, a teenager in the booze cabinet is a scary thought.

Why should the whole country pay the price for those who overindulge? Why should my jug and your jug cost more because of a nutbar who wants to drink five in an hour and drop someone outside? He could just do it at home - and with the price of booze in bars versus the supermarkets these days he will, with no bouncers to stop him.

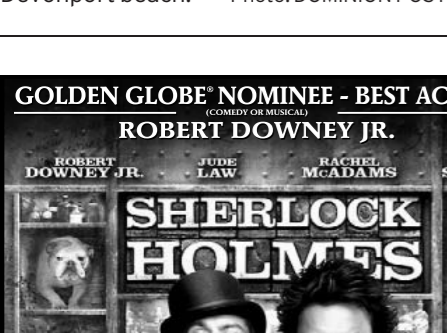
By changing laws all we are doing is further confusing the situation. We have tried this to no avail; the problem still exists.

It's like speeding; you can't be everywhere, so your only hope of policing it is to change our culture and keep drinkers in controlled environments.

Reward those who drink in licensed premises. Don't punish them with cavity searches at the door and overpriced handles.

Do we want more Undy 500s where everyone loads up on cheap supermarket booze, gets together and lets loose?

It's hard and no country has completely won the battle. Human nature dictates no matter what the demon some will overindulge and make a bloody idiot of themselves.



On the sauce: Teenagers drinking on Devonport beach. Photo: DOMINION POST

# Want a world-class job done? Go ask busy Bobbi Brown

By TRISH MacKENZIE

IT'S 9am on a Thursday and Bobbi Brown has just arrived in Balfour from her home near Clinton. It is meeting time with members of the Northern Southland Arts Trust with the aim of finalising their trust document.

With a cup of coffee in her hand, Brown settles in to help the group. This is her eighth meeting of the week and just one of the many groups she has worked with as Venture Southland community development planner.

While some people know Brown from her professional life, many more recognise her name from a netball angle; she is listed as Southland's top netball umpire and rated as one of New Zealand's best.

The words busy and hectic are very much part of Brown's vocabulary as she manages to tie together the many facets of her life. Wife, mum, netball umpire, farm hand, mother help, daughter, netball committee member.

At 34, Brown celebrated her 20th year of umpiring in 2009, little realising what lay ahead when she took hold of the whistle to umpire a game of netball at the Gore courts at 14.

"As my parents were highly involved in netball (and still are) I would go along to the Preston St courts every Saturday, all day long," Brown said. "All I remember is that one day someone gave me a whistle and sent me out on a court to umpire and that's how it all started."

Brown's year has been highlighted by her appointment as one of the top four New Zealand umpires for the 2010 ANZ Cup.

Having just hung up her whistle from the 2009 netball season, which included several trips overseas, weekly trips to Invercargill to umpire Steel training games, all on top of her ANZ commitments, Brown knows that all too soon the netball side of her life will start up all over again and will somehow have to be fitted into her work and family routine.

And now with the news that she has been appointed to umpire in Scotland and England in February when the Australian team tours, 2010 has all the signs of being just as hectic as 2009, if not busier.

Brown revels in her role as a community development planner for Venture Southland, with her work adding to the already extensive travelling she does for her umpiring. Although a lot of the work can be done during the day, there are meetings at night and, over a week, Brown can be in Gore one night, Tokanui another, then into Northern Southland to work with another group.

"It's more that I am everywhere, but it is important to go and see people where they are," she says.

"Sometimes it doesn't feel like work as you get to know people and their homes and their families, and with community groups you do get personally attached and involved."

This, she says, takes a lot of juggling and replies on the support of her husband, Alasdair, and Gore-based parents, Anne and Peter Reid.

Normality comes to her family life, including son Josh, who started at Clinton School in September.

"I couldn't have done and achieved what I have without my family there, especially when I look back, and also when I see others who haven't had the support that I have had."

"I remember travelling overseas with mum and Josh as a small baby. It's amazing what we did and where we went, my baby and my mother in tow."

The same goes for her job. Brown says her bosses Rex Capil and Jeff Troon are great.

"I know what I have to do and they trust me to do it. I am accountable to my employer but I am also accountable to the communities I work with. I hate letting anyone down, but do wish there were



Bobbi Brown

Photo: SONIA GERKEN 623659394

more hours in the day sometimes. "Sometimes I look at my car, and just don't want to get in it. I average 50,000km a year driving for work and netball."

Brown has been working for Venture Southland for eight years, after graduating from Otago University degrees covering French, Japanese and business management and post-graduate study in tourism. She's also worked on her masters thesis for two years but still has "about five chapters to write up" when she gets the chance.

"I really should do it, although currently I don't seem to have enough hours in the day."

As community development planner she works alongside a wide range of groups helping them with things such as establishing a legal entity, making rules, linking them to relevant agencies such as Inland Revenue, the charities commission, councils, helping them develop operational guidelines, how to employ people. She also works with them on specific projects.

"We try to work with them in the early planning stages to plan out projects,



High achiever: Bobbi Brown (right) with husband Alasdair and proud mum Anne Reid at the 2009 Gore district civil awards, where she was named Woman Achiever of the Year. Photo: EMMA CARLE 623544556

timeframes, funding plans, assess feasibility etc and then try and link them to relevant agencies, funders and other groups that can help."

Her territory has been Northern and Southern Southland (Catlins), where one of her latest projects is working with the South Catlins Trust to upgrade the

camping ground and develop a world-class heritage centre linked to the petrified forest.

Dairy farming is the Brown family's life beyond netball and Venture Southland.

"Alasdair is very much a netball widow and not a netball fan. I joke that he has to turn on TV each weekend to see where his wife is."

"Fortunately Josh, at 5 going on 10, is pretty cruisy." Living in a rural area isn't without its challenges, Brown says,

especially when organisations working out of Auckland can't understand that you can't get a rental car out of Clinton, no matter how many times you explain that to them.

"But just because I can face extra challenges is not an excuse and doesn't affect your performance with a whistle. "It just requires extra planning when you live rural and on the farm. But the benefits definitely outweigh everything else."

Adding into the equation last year was buying into the herd on the dairy farm Alasdair manages.

"This has been really exciting for us to move to this next step. With Josh going to

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Bobbi Brown

school, we now know that we don't have to move in the near future," Brown said.

"Alasdair loves dairying. This is what he wants to do and we are happy."

A block of land at Invercargill gives the family even more pieces to fit into their jigsaw.

"We certainly have variety in our life," she says.

For her 34th birthday present, her husband gave her a pregnant Highland cow, which they have named Beyonce.

The idea was all Alasdair's. "He was so proud of himself. We have always had to buy normal cows and Alasdair's dad was Scottish so we'd always wanted one."

And the name? Beyonce (after singer Beyonce Knowles) because she seems quite highly strung, a bit of a drama queen and had a few high kicks in her repertoire, Brown says.

"I am not going to turn into one of those 'Highland cow enthusiasts' and start going to shows etc, although if Josh wants to do it, I will support him."

This change in cow purchase perhaps mirrors the changes Brown has witnessed on the netball scene.

Having officiated in the earlier Coca-Cola Cup and National Bank Cup competitions, Brown saw the introduction of the ANZ trans-Tasman championship as an exciting concept for the players, the public and the officials.

"The best game we could ever umpire in netball is an Australia v New Zealand game, and now with this competition we get the top Aussie teams against the top Kiwi teams, over a longer timeframe, so it's the best we are ever going to get and could hope for. It's really exciting and gets better every year."

It also helped international netball, with player imports.

"There are also new rules relating to injury breaks to understand, which aims to keep the flow and speed of the game intact by avoiding deliberate time-outs. The public should be happy with this, although a 10-minute halftime is a very new innovation. It's hard to stay focused with the half-time entertainment sometimes, which is why we (and the teams) leave the court area."

For the umpires, just getting to the games is sometimes a major job involving two or three flights.

Added to this are what Brown describes as increasing demands on them during the games.

"The games themselves are much harder, with some real pressured situations to cope with, and we as umpires need to be stronger, fitter and faster than we have ever had to be." Training for all that becomes part of the family and work regime at least five days a week.

"I use my lunch hours when I am at work, and I am out on the gravel roads around home quite a lot, trying to avoid the milk tankers that use them."

"I am lucky to have my trainer Will Payne to keep me on track. I am good at finding excuses not to train and he is good at scaring me into it."

She is one of the more experienced umpires, which she sees as odd because she's still one of the youngest.

"It's tough for younger umpires - they haven't had as many life experiences to draw on in pressured situations as others have. Mentoring is a really important tool that helps umpires work through issues."

"I deal with things a lot differently now than I did when I first started umpiring international test matches 10 years ago. "There's not much that I haven't umpired in my 20 years - punch-ups, swearing in foreign languages, tears and tantrums, chair-throwing. You can never say umpiring is boring."

It is important to look after young umpires, she says.

"We have some exciting emerging talent in Southland and have always been known for the freakish number of world-class umpires that we produce, particularly from Gore."

Brown credits people such as Colleen Bond and Alison Cormack for this and believes that Southland has possibly the strongest and most passionate netball base in the country, a result of the Sting-Steel phenomenon, Netball Southland and netball-mad rural communities.

"It's hard to beat the atmosphere at a Steel game at Stadium Southland. The closest I have come is the World Cup at Jamaica in 2003."

"Everyone says that I've still got years ahead of me umpiring but I am still undecided about that. While you can, you make the most of opportunities when they come your way."

Golden Globe Nominee - Best Actor Robert Downey Jr. Sherlock Holmes. In Cinemas Now.

Reading Cinemas. 29 Dee St, Invercargill. 31 December 2009 - 06 January 2010. Alvin & the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (G) - No Free Tix. Planet 51 (PG) - Low level violence. The Princess & the Frog (G) - No Free Tix. The Time Travellers Wife (M) (violence). The Twilight Saga: New Moon (M) (supernatural themes & violence). Where the Wild Things Are (PG).

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