

OPINION

Mayoral Moments

Gary Tong



Getting out and about in the field

IT'S always good to get out and about to meet the public.

I spent a fair bit of time last week at Southern Field Days. From my point of view as mayor, going to an event like this — one that brings together Southlanders from all four corners of our district — is a great opportunity to hear from a diverse range of people.

When I first went to Waimumu as mayor, I made a point of blocking out a fair chunk of my time each day to sit down and have a yarn with members of the public who popped into our tent. This time around was no different, and it was fantastic to see so many ratepayers coming in for a yarn.

Among those I met up with during field days was a group of representatives from the Safe Communities Foundation, which just last week awarded Southland District and Invercargill City accreditation as International Safe Communities.

This is a huge achievement, and has been made

possible because of the collaborative spirit shown by stakeholders. I'm chairman of the Safe in the South governance group, a partnership of stakeholders that includes the police, the fire service, ACC, the Southland Chamber of Commerce and both Southland District and Invercargill City councils, among others. The Safe Communities framework is internationally-recognised, including by the World Health Organisation, and focuses on injury prevention and safety education.

Establishing a strong focus on safety within our communities isn't just about preventing injuries and reducing crime, it's about building strong, vibrant communities that work together to look after everybody within them.

Being awarded accreditation as a safe community shows how committed stakeholders serving our region are to being proactive, and not just being the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Together we are focused on reducing harm to the members of our communities, be it on our roads, in our workplaces, or at the hands of substance abuse or domestic violence.

Gaining accreditation means each stakeholder has committed themselves to a co-ordinated approach towards making our communities safer and stronger. That's got to be good for us all.

— Gary Tong is the
Southland District Mayor