

## **McDonald's in Newmarket - Jane & David Weikart**

Jane & David Weikart, from San Francisco, first visited New Zealand in the late 1970's, fell in love with the place and returned to Auckland to live permanently in 1984. Their background was in IT. Their only involvement with McDonald's had been as customers and in Jane's words, "we felt we understood the concept after years as customers. Whenever we needed quick convenient food of predictable quality and reasonable cost, we chose McDonald's". Having said that, as "systems" people they both studied and admired the operation.

When the opportunity came up in 1989 to take on the Newmarket franchise they were in! They also welcomed the fact that the business would also give them a way to put down roots in Auckland and to play an active role in the community..... unaware, at the time, that they would end up with 3 McDonald's in Newmarket!

## **Newmarket's first McDonald's - 238 Broadway – 1989**

The building at 238 Broadway comprised of 4 floors;

- Ground Floor: containing counter service, the kitchen, a walk-in chiller and freezer
- First Floor: two dining rooms.
- Second Floor: party room, public toilets, crew room, managers' office, dry stores
- Top Floor: playground. There were no lifts in the building and many a push chair was carried up and down stairs!

The top floor: Playland (originally squash courts), now became the mecca for families, often with one adult supervising the children, while the others relaxed in the party room or dining rooms below. The young children played happily on an assortment of equipment, based on McDonald Land characters.

The second floor Party Room was a popular place to celebrate birthdays for all ages and for business and club meetings. The parties were designed for children, but adults made the most of the occasion, sometimes smuggling in "adult" food & drink. Many a celebrity was spotted here.

The two Dining Rooms on the first floor were initially segregated as smoking and non-smoking areas. The smoking area, it turned out, was very popular with the after-school crowd. But David became uncomfortable with implied toleration of an acknowledged bad habit and approached local school principals for advice, all of whom were in favour of strict no-smoking rules. The restaurant, in keeping with the times, then went completely smoke free – but not before the schools caught and made examples of several students for smoking in uniform. Unfortunately, once the word got out that the schools were "on to it" smoking simply shifted from inside McDonald's to the parking area behind the building. Today (30 years on) that is still sometimes a popular spot for underage smokers!

There was more to come:

## **77 Broadway - 1996**

The second McDonald's, a much smaller restaurant, opened at 77 Broadway on 1 October 1996, directly opposite NZ's first Burger King which had opened in 1993.

## **277 Broadway - 1996**

It was inevitable that a McDonald's would open in the Shopping Mall Two Double Seven and so, just 4 weeks later, on 1 November 1996 the self-service (cafeteria style) McDonald's opened there at the top of the escalator at Morrow Street/Broadway.

Over the years the Weikarts employed over 1000 young people, mainly part-time, while at college and university, but also many core fulltime managers and weekday staff. The most staff at one time was 100+ in 1996-1998.

Their community involvement was huge particularly with the local schools. They loved getting to know all the schools in the area and offered fund raising pancake breakfasts, hamburger nights and school lunch days, which the schools used to raise money for school events and for Ronald McDonald House. A high point was the 'Young at Art' show at Studio of Contemporary Art in Newmarket, exhibiting art works submitted by all the primary schools in the trading area, 30 of which were selected to be framed and hung in the bedrooms and communal spaces of the initial Ronald McDonald House Auckland.

Periodic fun days were when Ronald McDonald himself, along with the local police school officer would visit local primary schools and kindergartens for road safety lessons, "Make it Click", safe walking, bicycle helmets etc.

Another interesting aspect was when local schools would bring in their economics classes for store tours. David would address the class in the Party Room and then tour the operation with a view to business aspects such as kitchen area, tracking raw materials through from delivery to storage, to processing into finished goods, to selling.

On several occasions, "celebrities" - school staff, politicians, sports figures, media etc would come and serve to fundraise for Variety or the Ronald McDonald House.

Community events such as the painting of the old Newmarket Railway Station, saw the Weikarts feeding all the volunteers, many of whom were members of the Newmarket Rotary Club. It comes as no surprise that David was invited to become a member of the club.

Both David & Jane continue to serve the community through their involvement with the Ronald McDonald House and Newmarket Rotary. Jane was recently recognised for her 10 years outstanding service given to the "Heat and Eat" programme for the Ronald McDonald House.

Thank you, Jane & David, for your wonderful service and contribution to Newmarket.