

Community minded career

Graeme Leggat can boast of a stellar career in the water industry, complemented by years of work for his local community. **By Mary Searle Bell.**

Born in Invercargill in 1935, and raised in Nelson, Graeme's interest in maths and the sciences led him to study civil engineering. His degree was funded through a bursary from the Ministry of Works, which then tied him to the organisation for six years following graduation.

His first job at the Ministry was in its housing division, where he worked on the development of a housing estate in Porirua. He then worked in its Power Design office on the design and construction of the Hayward Scheme converter station.

His bond to the MOW complete, he joined Beca Carter Hollings and Ferner, but shortly thereafter decided he would like to travel and work in the United States. Obtaining the necessary visa to do so took 18 months. During that time he worked as an engineer for the Wellington City Council. In 1968 his visa came through, so he and his wife, Rosalie, headed to Boston with their two small children.

He spent two years in Boston with Metcalf & Eddy Consulting Engineers as a project manager working on solid waste projects. This was followed by a further two years with the firm's branch in Palo Alto, California, where he was project manager for a water treatment plant for Panama City, which was "quite a contrast", he says.

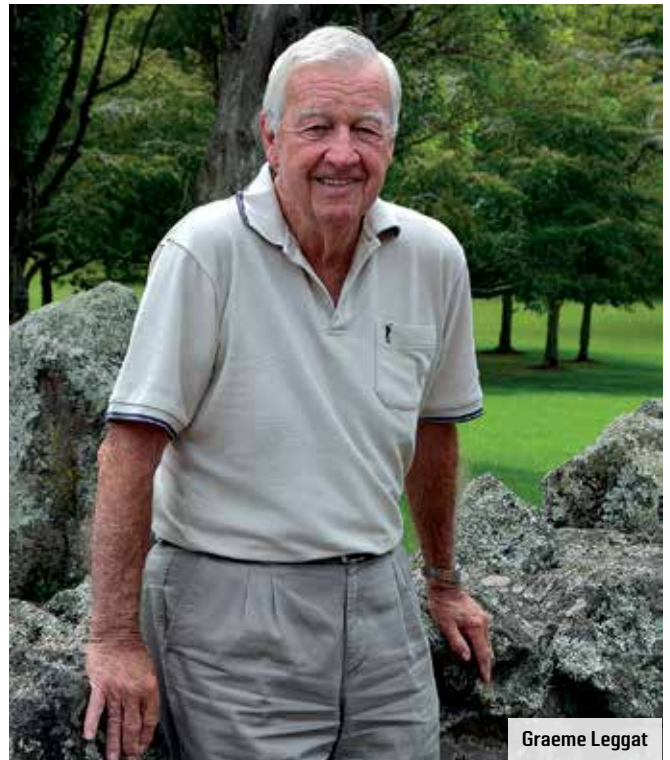
At Christmas in 1971, the family, now complete with three children, decided to return to New Zealand. Before he left the US, Graeme wrote to Steven Fitzmaurice & Partners in Auckland and secured a position as an associate. After six years, he was made a partner.

Steven Fitzmaurice & Partners was one of the pioneering firms when it came to water and sewage, and Graeme worked on projects throughout the country. His first was a pipeline in Te Kuiti.

"After the US, this brought me down to size quite quickly," he recalls.

Other memorable projects include the Mt Maunganui Outfall, which cracked on installation.

"We had to work out how to seal many hundreds of joints in the pipe underwater, some 1000 metres out to sea," he told *Water New Zealand*. "We were lucky to have such a lateral thinking chemist on our team, Frank Lowe, who developed a method of pumping in a mixture of chemicals that acted



together to seal the pipe. It took some time, but it gradually sealed itself."

In 1989, the company merged with, what is now, Beca, and Graeme found himself working on a water supply project for Kabul, Afghanistan.

"It was after the war with the Russians, before the local factions started fighting each other again," he says. "It was relatively peaceful – the mujahedeen fired about 10 rockets a day randomly into the city.

"I was there for about five weeks in 1991, working for the UN. We completed the design but just as money was to be assigned for the project they started fighting again.

"If they ever stop, they have a water supply ready to be built."

Graeme stayed with Beca until his retirement in 1995. However, he continued to work as a consultant for the firm

for a further three years until he finally put his professional career aside.

He had joined the Howick-Pakuranga Cricket Club in Auckland on his return from the US and has remained a passionate member. He served for many years, first, establishing the junior club, then on the senior committee. When the club wanted an indoor wicket, Graeme designed and supervised its building, the same too when new clubrooms were needed following a fire.

For his efforts, he was awarded life membership of the club, and has served as its patron since 2009.

Graeme also served on the Whitford Residents & Ratepayers Association for several years, primarily battling Manukau City Council to ensure proper operation and conditions for the Whitford Landfill. Once he retired from professional life, he was elected to the Clevedon Community Board, serving six years – three of them as chair. He was also chair of the Whitford Community Trust, among others, for many years.

In 2001, Graeme was appointed as a resource consents hearings commissioner for Manukau City Council and continued in that role (and for the Auckland Council) until 2011.

In 2002, when the Manukau council wanted to build a community and sports centre at Maraetai, Graeme was appointed chair of the Te Puru Trust to steer the completion

of the \$4.5 million project, which opened in 2005. He continued to serve on the trust until 2010.

His commitment to serving extended to his professional career too – he is both a fellow of IPENZ and a life member of Water New Zealand.

He joined, what was then, the Water Supply and Disposal Association on his return from the US in the 1970s.

“Someone asked John Fitzmaurice to be on the committee but he declined as he didn’t have the time, so I put my hand up,” says Graeme.

That was 1978, and Graeme went on to serve on the committee for 10 years, spending five or six years as treasurer.

“My wife was reading her diary the other day, the entry said, ‘Graeme and I doing the accounts for the Association. Finished at 11pm.’ It was midnight the next night,” he says with a chuckle.

For his service to the water industry, he has been honoured by the American Water Pollution Control Federation and is a recipient of the Arthur Sidney Bedell Award.

However, his most notable accolade came in 2012, when he received a Queen’s Service Medal for services to the community.

“I was pleasantly surprised,” he said at the time. “I was pleased and flattered the things I had done had been recognised.” [WNZ](#)