

Hands-on training fulfils big dreams

Story: Hayley Leibowitz

REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE, SPECIALIST educators and revenue generation. What more could one ask from forestry training? Not much it seems from the quality of forestry workers graduating from Gisborne's ManaiaSAFE Forestry School.

"We see a lot of wasted youth potential out there, so we're doing something about it. Mobilising youth potential will be key to our region's economic recovery," says Henry Koia, Managing Director of Train Me Quality Services (Train Me) which governs the school.

It all began back in 2013, when Directors of Manaia Safety Systems, Henry and his nephew, Steve Beach, set out to bring an end to forestry deaths while creating meaningful employment for the benefit of local people. While testing their prototype safety compliance system for logging contractors, the true extent of the knowledge gap within the forestry industry became apparent. In 2016 they joined forces with Christine Beach's training company, Train Me. The ManaiaSAFE Forestry School grew out of that union.

"In many ways, the ManaiaSAFE Forestry School can be seen as the manifestation of community uprising against forestry deaths; widespread economic hardship; and wasted Maori potential. A key focus of the School is to improve socio-economic outcomes for Maori, keeping the training culturally responsive," says Henry. Likened to a bird sitting on one's shoulder, in Maori mythology, the Manaia is a supernatural creature and guardian protector over one's spirit – the name already evoking the School's distinctive character.

As "a training provider that logs" and not a "logging contractor that trains", the School has a practice and delivery model that emphasises learning by doing and skills repetition to develop learner competence and confidence.

This involves a threefold approach. Firstly, servicing a harvesting contract with Ernslaw One to provide hands-on learning experience before stepping up to a full-scale production environment.

Secondly, experienced forestry professionals teach the technical subjects, providing

mentorship under strict supervision protocols. Lastly, revenue from log production helps meet the costs of training and "keeps our people in jobs".

The School recently completed its third 20-week training programme, delivered in partnership with the Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) and Te Uru Rakau.

Train Me was recently registered with NZQA as a Private Training Establishment (PTE) and delivers training in the forestry domain through trading as ManaiaSAFE Forestry School. Those new to the industry who successfully complete the School's 'feeder' programme will graduate with the NZ Certificate in Forest Harvesting Operations with Strands qualification (Level 3).

"Of the 10 rookie loggers who started the programme in February, nine made it through. Eight are now in full-time logging jobs and one will be progressing into Level 4 training," says programme manager, Victor Beach.

Those in jobs are Maori between the ages of 17 and 28 – five of whom were unemployed at the start of the programme.

Opposite page: Company Directors Steve Beach (left) and Henry Koia return to the School's very first skid site to welcome the dawning of a new era for the Company as a newly registered Private Training Establishment.

The School has been actively trading as a training provider in partnership with EIT since October 2018, producing 23 Level 3 graduates since its inception.

“Without the commitment of Te Uru Rakau/Forestry NZ and funding support through the Government’s One Billion Trees programme, the School would not have survived the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic,” says Henry.

Coming full circle

Henry explains that the School is serving a vital purpose: “Some contractors are reluctant to invest in training someone new to the industry because there is no guarantee of a return on their investment.

“The trainee might not last, or if they do, they could go to a competitor offering a higher wage. Our graduates are in high demand because the investment has already been made into getting them work-ready to NZ certificate standard, so they are productive and know how to do their jobs safely from day one.”

A shining example is 20-year-old Jordan McLarin who graduated from the School’s second cohort last year. With no forestry experience, he enrolled in the course, graduated, and now works for the School.

“Up until a couple of years ago I don’t think I knew of anyone who worked in the forestry industry,” says Jordan, “but working with machines has always been an interest of mine.”

After Jordan spotted an advert on Facebook he attended an information evening and thought “yup this is me”. He graduated with the NZ Certificate in Forest Harvesting



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Operations with Strands in June 2019, then did a stint with a local logging company before coming back in a different role.

“In February this year, I gained employment with Train Me,” he says. “I saw it as an opportunity to grow and further develop my skills and experience. In my current role with the School, I jump between various jobs on the landing, mainly operating the loader and doing quality control. I mainly work with a Cat 329DL loader with an Ensign 1730 grapple.”

He says his days go by “pretty quickly” typically starting off on the loader then helping out with line shifts.

“I love working with machines, honing my skills and learning new things. Unlike some people, I enjoy the hours as well,” he says.

Asked about the challenges, Jordan says the initial learning curve of “just being in a logging environment” was a challenge, “and

obviously each job has its own individual set of challenges”. But that comes with the satisfaction of learning new things and always having something to strive for, he adds. “Knowing that I’ve given it my all and completed a job to the best of my ability is also a reward for me.”

As to whether it’s a good career choice for young people, he says: “I definitely think you have to be a certain type of person to enjoy the work, but if you are keen to work hard and work your way up, I would absolutely recommend forestry as a career choice for other young people.”

He cautions that coming into the industry new workers need to “be prepared to work hard every day, have a good attitude and help out where you can”.

“Pay close attention to how more experienced crew members do things,” he adds, “you can learn a lot just from watching, but also don’t be afraid to ask questions.”

As to his future in the industry, Jordan says he’d like to experience “pretty much everything the industry has to offer”. “It’s definitely a long term career for me.”

He adds that his parents are happy that he’s doing something he enjoys and is enthusiastic about and his friends think it’s “pretty sweet”, especially the ones from back in Auckland “who haven’t really heard or seen much about logging at all”.

Henry says Jordan is a stand out graduate who has the potential to run his own logging company one day. Six students on the current cohort, completing their 20-week programme in December, are already following in his footsteps.

Bring on the trucks: Jordan McLarin standing in front of his log stacks.



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- 1: Inside the on-site classroom, Steve Beach (left) delivers a lesson on safety inspections and auditing to Level 3 students Shem-Paul Laga’Aia (22), Nikita Noanoa (18), and Xanthe Beach (17).
- 2: Level 3 student, Nikita Noanoa (18), completes his assignment to conduct a safety inspection of the School’s work vehicles.
- 3: School students, Nikita Noanoa (18) and Shem-Paul Laga’Aia (23), learn how to break out.
- 4: Level 3 student, Xanthe Beach (17), learns the practical role of Quality Controller.
- 5: Machine operator and School mentor, Dale Koia, observes Jordan McLarin loading his second packet ever.
- 6: Dale Koia gives feedback to Jordan McLarin on his loading performance.

Dreaming big

“We are moving young unemployed Maori into jobs in an industry that will still be going strong in 30 years,” says ManaiaSAFE Executive Director and Business Performance Manager, Steve Beach.

He believes the School has a key role to play in the region’s recovery: “We are helping to address the forestry skills shortage which has plagued the region for decades before COVID-19 came along.

“Our dream is to build a forestry centre of excellence and well-being based in Gisborne that has a forest-based training facility, with a live-in hostel located close to our harvesting crews.

“This means that young people who are geographically isolated will have a safe place to live while they learn, and on graduation, they can return home to work.”

Executive Director and PTE Manager, Christine Beach, says that the School recently becoming a registered PTE is a milestone that has been years in the making.

“It’s significant because our community can now have confidence that our School is governed with integrity, and that students will

be provided with quality training in a culturally safe learning environment,” she says.

Now that Train Me is a registered PTE, the next step is to apply to NZQA for programme approval, accreditation, and consent to assess. Once granted, Train Me will be able to access funding from the Tertiary Education Commission from 2022 to supplement its log production income.

Henry says the company has a long-term view, aiming to put 120 graduates into the labour supply pipeline and contribute to regional productivity to the tune of around 384,000 tonnes of logs over the next decade.

“More wood means greater export volumes. This means more revenue for Trust Tairāwhiti to redistribute back to our community. So the social impact of the mahi we are doing now has the potential to become exponential in the long run,” he explains.

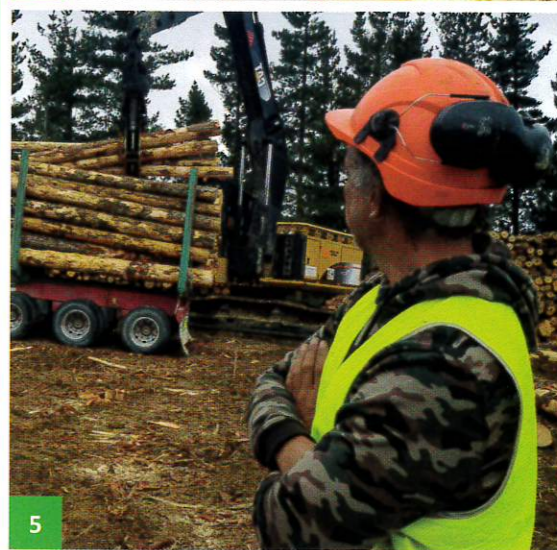
Train Me will also address the issues of drugs and environmental impacts and is collaborating with Massey University’s Research Centre for Maori Health and Development on a project that examines forestry drug policy on the East Coast.



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“The aim is to gain insights to help develop a quality intervention to reduce the likelihood of a graduate relapsing after they find employment,” says Henry, adding, “I truly believe that one day, the fruits of the collaborations that have got us this far will be feeding a lot of people, long after I’ve gone.”

Clearly, the school motto of Dream big, Believe in yourself, and Keep moving forward, is an ethos that runs deep.