

Animal empathy motivates Perry

The Hauraki Coromandel is full of characters – people who influence the lives of those around them, strive to fulfil almost impossible dreams or just put smiles on the faces of strangers. Today *Hauraki Herald* reporter **Gillian O’Neill** meets a dedicated advocate for the rights of our furry friends

IF IT’S true that we can judge a society by how it treats its most vulnerable, then Perry Dovell can attest better than most to how Thames stacks up.

Having worked with the SPCA for 15 years, the popular town jeweller has seen both the best and the worst kinds of human behaviour reflected in the treatment of animals.

But after all that his conclusion is a positive one. “The good definitely outweighs the bad. The people of Thames are good, they have always responded well to us whenever we have needed their support.

“We also have some very good people who volunteer their time with us. Yes, we do see some horrific things, things we could never publicise, but there is definitely more positive than negative.”

Perry’s arrival in Thames 16 years ago was somewhat of a homecoming – he grew up here and completed his training as a watchmaker in the town. He admitted some of his Auckland friends were cynical about his move south. “I’d lived in London for a number of years as well as Auckland and my friends in the city thought I’d never survive in ‘the country’ because I’m quite hyper and like being on the go. They said ‘you’ll slow down’ but it hasn’t been like that at all. I think you can be as busy and active as you want to and I definitely feel like I have plenty to keep me occupied.”

Having originally opened a jewellers’ store in the town’s shopping mall, Perry later moved the business to Pollen St. But, as callers to Thames Jewellers will know, his shop has succumbed to



its owner’s other passion and now effectively doubles a drop-in centre and depot for the SPCA.

“We’ve had people come in with cats, birds, rabbits, all sorts. We have the donation box in there of course, where people can contribute and often people will come in to donate food, blankets or other items.”

At home, Perry often fosters animals that are in their final days. “I’ll take them home so I can better take care of them.”

When he does get time to unwind, classical music, playing piano and reading are his main distractions. He also described himself as a bit of a “movie-nut”.

Surprisingly, Perry revealed he hasn’t always been an animal lover and in fact, until he started working with them, he didn’t even like dogs. “I thought they were awful things, all up in your face and taking up space and wanting attention. I was definitely a cat person,” he said. “I had three cats and shortly after I came to Thames I was meeting a lady in relation to getting another Persian and she thought I might be interested in SPCA. I went along to a meeting, it was all very political back in those days, but that was how I first got involved and it went on from there.

“I changed my mind about dogs after I saw my first cruelty case. A dog came in and it couldn’t even



MAN’S BEST FRIEND: Perry Dovell has worked with the Thames SPCA for the past 15 years and is still passionate about looking after animals like Bella.

walk, that was it for me. We are very proud of our pro-life policy and we never euthanise an animal unless it is exceptionally aggressive or chronically ill.”

Perry’s work with the SPCA and in particular his development of the organisation through his roles as chairman and treasurer will be acknowledged next week when he

receives a Kiwibank Local Heroes Medal as part of the 2011 New Zealander of the Year Awards. But he is modest about the achievement.

“It’s really for the whole organisation and for all the people involved. If it wasn’t for all of them playing their parts, I wouldn’t be able to do any of it.”

While awards certainly aren’t his motivation, Perry is pleased about how SPCA is now functioning in the community.

“In the past two years, with our move to the new facility at Totara, as well as having more organised systems and policies, it has helped to build our profile. We now have more people coming to us, volunteering with us and people are more aware of us generally which is a good thing.

“I hope we can just continue that progress into the future. But what’s most important is of course the animals. Whatever improvements we make to how we operate, at the end of the day, our primary goal remains the welfare of the animals, that will never change.”

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