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Business skills to fore in Aquatic Centre post

Council appoints Recreational Facilities Manager

An internationally experienced professional from the sports, leisure and tourism sectors has been appointed to manage the new \$23.5 million Caroline Bay Aquatic Centre.

Gary Easthope will join the Timaru District Council in March taking responsibility for the management and business performance of the new centre currently taking shape on Maori Park as well as pools and swim programmes district-wide.

His appointment to the newly-created position of Recreational Facilities Manager for the Timaru District was announced today by council district services manager Ashley Harper who said Mr Easthope would bring to the job a level of business and sporting acumen the centre needed to meet council goals in sustainability and performance excellence.

Over a 20-year sport and tourism-oriented career, Mr Easthope has worked in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

Currently the Central Otago District Council's aquatic centres (centres crrect) manager based in Alexandra, Mr Easthope has wide experience in national and international recreation and tourism models that include regional management of the Ngai Tahu Tourism business cluster based in Nelson-Marlborough. In that role he was accountable for several water-based tourism businesses.

Formerly the general manager of one of South East Asia's largest adventure tourism operations in Bali, Indonesia, specialising in white water rafting, eco-jungle experiences, 4WD journeys, mountain bike tours and day hiking, Mr Easthope restructured and led the company back to financial stability following the 2002 Bali bombing. He also held a co-ordination and aid role in that country following the Boxing Day Tsunami.

Mr Easthope said today he was delighted to be involved “from the ground to opening” in an aquatic centre project that had the potential to become an Australia and New Zealand showcase.

But it was the sustainability of the centre and development of operational revenue streams to minimise impact on rates that were a priority, he said.

“I am from a commercial background. I do bring a commercial realism about sustainability.

“The focus will be to ensure the right balance is adopted to make the aquatic centre sustainable going forward as well as delivering on the levels of service expected by the community,” Mr Easthope said.

Establishing a quality swim school in two Central Otago centres as part of a review of income stream opportunities to reduce aquatic centre rates contributions for the Central Otago District Council, he said his focus was increased business development opportunities and cost-effective operations in the Timaru aquatic environment.

Other initiatives in the field include Central Otago’s primary school learn-to-swim programmes working with the Central Lakes Trust, Water Safety New Zealand and Swimming New Zealand, which provide free professionally-taught learn-to-swim lessons for children aged one to eight in the district.

Mr Easthope is no stranger to high-level performance goals in the aquatic setting. As a regional manager for Swimming New Zealand he was involved in leading swim education programmes, coaching development and sport management.

A qualified Search and Rescue maritime co-ordinator and diving instructor with commercial offshore ratings, he has also lectured at AUT sport and recreational certificate and diploma programmes as well as Auckland Teachers College’s physical education programmes.

Internationally, he has managed health clubs in Perth and London and in a private company capacity set up an international leadership development training programme using experiential outdoor pursuits for major Japanese and Asia corporate graduates.

Mr Easthope takes up his position in Timaru in mid-March.

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Caption:

Gary Easthope.jpg

Gary Easthope, who will join the Timaru District Council in March taking responsibility for the management and business performance of the new Caroline Bay Aquatic Centre.

