

Waipawa Bowling Club : Surviving Cyclone Gabrielle

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Waipawa during the cyclone, with the bowling club in the centre

When Waipukurau residents Gary and Marie Allerby woke up the morning after Cyclone Gabrielle, it was difficult to believe an incredible storm had passed through the day before.

“It was pretty calm and quiet.” says Gary who is Assistant Captain of the nearby Waipawa Bowling Club, and his wife Marie is President. “But we thought we’d better shoot over to Waipawa and check if there had been any damage to the club.”

“It’s only a 10 minute trip, and when Marie and I got there, it was a lovely sunny morning. There was no flooding. But the Waipawa River was a raging torrent ... it was just below the buttress of the State Highway 2 bridge, and lapping the lines of the railway bridge and the top of the stop banks.”

“When we got to the bowling club, we couldn’t believe it. It was untouched. You could have got out your bowls and had a roll-up!”

That all changed about half an hour later.

“Even though it had stopped raining, the river was still rising ... the Waipawa has a large catchment.”

“Shortly after we got there, the river broke through the stop bank by the rugby grounds, and again by Stephensons and Isaacs. Pretty soon it was pouring through the camping ground down Harker Street where the bowling club is.”

There wasn’t much Gary and Marie could do ... but watch.

“The power of the water was incredible,” says Gary. “After it subsided later, it was unbelievable what it had done. It had ripped up great hunks of tar seal from the roads. Isaacs had a whole lot of plastic water tanks in their yard ... they just floated off down the river ... one was later found miles downstream.”

“Stephensons were really lucky. They had a whole lot of trucks in their yard because the drivers had been told to stay home during the cyclone. So they had to get them out quick-smart. By the time they got the last truck out, the water was waist-deep.”

And the newly-installed carpet green at the Waipawa Bowling Club was destroyed.

The Waipawa green looking pretty sorry for itself

“We thought if we removed the silt from the green, we might be able to salvage it,” says Gary. “It was a heck of a lot of silt ... 14 or 15 club members came down and we removed over 400 wheelbarrows!”

But closer inspection revealed that the water and silt had gone right through the carpet and damaged the base.

Cleaning the silt from the Waipawa green

“We were insured,” says Gary. “But not for enough. We’re going to have about a \$25,000 shortfall after they’ve removed and replaced 20mm of the base, and laid a new carpet.”

That shortfall is a lot of money for a small rural club like Waipawa. And that’s just the shortfall to repair the green. There’s other repair costs as well.

“But we’re not sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves,” says Gary. “We’re looking at all sorts of ways to raise money.”

“We applied for, and got, \$5,000 from the Central Hawkes Bay District Council Mayoral Relief Fund. We’ve been running a ‘donate-a-brick’ campaign, and we’ve raised over \$8,000 at \$100 a pop. We raffled a set of bowls for \$1,000. And the nearby Porangahau Bowling Club, which is also just a tiny club, gave us \$500 and the Ngongotaha Bowling Club over \$250. That’s fantastic!”

“We’ve set up a Give-a-little page, and that’s sitting at nearly \$700. We’re hoping to raise nine thousand there.”

Click the image to visit the give-a-little page and donate

It’s a page that’s hoping to attract donations from bowlers New Zealand-wide. After all, clubs like Waipawa are not only the backbone of the bowling community, but are a backbone of the local Waipawa and wider farming community.

“We play all sorts of bowls here,” says Marie Allerby, Club President. “We have our regular club tournaments and roll-ups, but we also run all sorts of community-based events. Like our ‘Four Fun Fridays’ for people who don’t play bowls. And fun days for the Waipawa Rugby Club, the Waipukurau Primary School teachers, the local car club and others. The week before Gabrielle struck, we had just started our annual business house bowls. That won’t be happening now.”

“And that’s the real sad part of the cyclone. Sure ... there’s the money that’s needed. But it’s also likely put the kibosh on playing bowls at the club for the rest of the season until the green is back up and running. FieldTurf have been great and they’re moving as quickly as they can to fix things.”

“Having said that, it’s only a game. No one died or lost their home as some poor people did in Gabrielle. And in that respect, we’ve been lucky!”

Kia kaha Waipawa.

Please donate at <https://givealittle.co.nz/cause/save-our-waipawa-bowling-club>