

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wharenui carvings get some TLC at Whakatū marae

The carvings at the entrance to Kaakati, the wharenui at Whakatū marae have recently been restored and reinstalled thanks to the Iwi of Whakatū, support from NMIT and an investment from the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF).

The wharenui was established in the late 1990s and is a place of manaakitanga for tangata whenua and manuhiri. This year the iwi of the marae have taken the opportunity to provide same manaakitanga back to Kaakati. The mahi was focused particularly on repairing the *maihi* or diagonal bargeboards at the front of the building, which signify the arms of the ancestor, and the *raparapa* or fingers at the ends. One of the *amo*, the vertical supports that hold up the ends of the *maihi* was also replaced.

Craig (Shep) Shepard, Kaitūmata mō Ngāti Koata (Cultural Manager at Ngāti Koata Trust) says a few years ago the Ngāti Koata kaumātua put their hands up to lead a project to restore the carvings, along with the five other Iwi affiliated to the marae: Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Kuia, Te Ātiawa and Ngāti Rārua.

Getting the tōtara wood needed to laminate into the eight metre lengths wasn't easy. However, Shep says thanks to a storm in Southland about eight years ago the team was able to get what they needed.

"We managed to acquire the tōtara in Mātaura and brought it to a mill which found the best bits for us to use and cut it up," he says.

Leading the carving was James Rickard, a Tohunga Whakairo (Master Carver) at Te Wānanga Whakairo Rākau o Aotearoa, the National Wood Carving School in Rotorua. He is also Ngāti Koata and has many whakapapa connections to the wharenui.

Although the *maihi* has a slightly new design Shep says the carving is true to the original message. This was also echoed by master carver Mark Davis, who was one of the original carvers of the wharenui.

The carving team undertook the restoration work in the NMIT Building Barn which was able to accommodate the long lengths of wood.

“We had great support from NMIT and the tutors, especially allowing us to use their space,” Shep says.

Reid Carnegie, Curriculum Manager Engineering and Construction at NMIT says the carpentry and joinery tutors, and the students were able to observe the amazing work of the master carver and his team and he hopes they can assist further in the future. NMIT’s Te Reo Māori students were also frequent visitors, with some able to help with the painting work.

“From my perspective it has been a privilege and honour having the carvings restored within NMIT facilities,” Reid says.

The restored *maihi*, and the *amo* holding them up, are now back in place at the front of the whareniui.

Shep says the Marae whānau are happy with the result.

“All the iwi of the whare have helped complete the mahi. There was a hui held at the Marae where kōrero was shared, waiata were sung and kai was enjoyed to celebrate.”

Ends

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