

Two Decades at the Helm

- Stu McHale

P/M Stewart McKenzie made Life Member of Manawatu Scottish Pipe Band.



In June this year, P/M Stewart McKenzie was bestowed life membership of the Manawatu Scottish Pipe Band, a thoroughly deserved award for his outstanding involvement and service to the band over 35-years, including 20-years to date as Pipe Major. The award was presented by Band Chairman Shane Cotton, at the combined Manawatu bands' AGM.

Manawatu Scottish runs deep in Stewart's blood. Both his father Jock and brother Fraser have been made life members before him, and his Uncles Neil and Colin both played in the band along with cousins Raynor and Sally. His first pipe band memories were as a small child watching the band at marching practice at Ongley Park in Palmerston North, and being taken to parties where he formed friendships with other band kids. Dave Sutherland started him on the chanter at the age of 8 before he moved to Inverness, Scotland, for a year with his family where he received lessons from Alastair McAffer. Returning home he learnt from P/M Dennis Pierce and P/S Colin Caddick, and was one of the original Manawatu No2 band members, first competing at the Wellington National Championships in 1986.

During his teenage years he received tuition from Greg Wilson, Donald Bain and Murray Henderson, and developed into a very successful solo piper. His solo prizes include three NZ solo championships (the first on his 16th birthday), the NZ Gold Medal, the Silver Chanter, two clasps to the Silver Chanter, the Celtic Inn Targe,

five Claidheamhor titles and several A Grade titles. He has also won numerous prizes on the Scottish Highland Games circuit, placing in light music events at the Argyllshire Gathering and the MacAllan Trophy in Lorient.

During his late teens he was promoted to pipe sergeant under pipe majors Dennis Pierce and Greg Wilson, before taking over the reins as P/M in 1999 at the age of 24. A strong and inspirational leader, he has led the band to 11 Square Day titles, seven NZ Championships, two Australasian Championships, and qualified for the final of the World Pipe Band Championships on seven occasions achieving four top-10 placings. He has also been the driving force behind the bands two studio albums; 'The Calling' in 2003 and 'Twelve Thousand Miles' in 2009, which featured his own compositions and arrangements.

Referring to the band more 'as a family' than an organisation, he enjoys the positive team culture of the Tu and relishes the challenges that leadership presents. He also takes great satisfaction in helping young players develop into seasoned Grade 1 pros. He has made many lifelong friends through the band and wider movement, and loves the sharing of music and good times.

Please join us in congratulating Stewart on his life membership, and for all that he has done and continues to do for the band.
