

Hunt in Pt Chevalier Finds More than Just Treasure

The story of the Pt Chevalier Transition Town Community Treasure Hunt

As told to Alex Sorenson and others, July 2010

It began with the aim of getting more residents involved in their local Transition Town initiative. The end result was a community building event that inspired Pt Chevalier residents to connect to each other as well as their local environment, and has already inspired spin off events.



In November 2009, a Treasure Hunt in Auckland's Point Chevalier brought together 350 people on scooters, skateboards, bikes, in prams and on foot for some fun in the Sunday afternoon sun. But, as the organisers had hoped, while hunting, the locals found something else – each other and the community they live in. They networked, built stronger ties, and opened up to what Pt Chevalier has to offer.

People of all ages got involved in the Hunt including families, teenagers and small groups, making the most of what the event offered. Some launched from the starting lines in a bid to finish first, while others were content to enjoy a casual stroll. Participants were guided by a map and passport to stations within walking distance, with various activities to complete at each. These stations were more than just random locations with a fun factor; they took participants on a journey, visiting places they had never been, and thinking about Pt Chevalier in ways they had never considered.



Finn Mackesy, key organiser of this first Treasure Hunt, says the idea came from wanting to have more people involved in the community action group, Transition Town Pt Chevalier (TTPC). The group works to promote community resilience and local forward planning but it was hard to get people to come to meetings. So members of TTPC decided on a creative approach to

engage locals in thinking about their community – hence the Treasure Hunt was born.

It was soon decided the focus of the event should be to bring local people together, whilst learning about Pt Chevalier. The project team wanted to show-case the natural, social and built capital of Pt Chevalier while getting people talking about the future of the community they live in. This focus meant giving up potential TT marketing opportunities, but organisers didn't want the day directed by their agenda. "We felt it was more important people enjoy themselves and feel part of their community," said Finn.

Many different groups, businesses and organisations were involved in making the Treasure Hunt a success and it became for them an opportunity to engage with the local community. Some offered prizes, promotional support, and locations for Hunt stations. The collaborative effort made the event what it was, something really enjoyed by all.



One of the participants, Megan Courtney said, "My family and I had a fabulous afternoon, we walked to around half the stations (enough for our kids on foot) and saw lots of people we knew, it felt safe, fun and we learnt new things about our community. I liked the way we could do this together as a family. And it was FREE!" Megan, along with others she talked to, came away proud to be a resident of Pt Chevalier.



The project team really feels like they achieved their aims and then some. Because of the event, a greater sense of belonging and a stronger local identity were created. Community capital has increased with higher public awareness and willingness to be part of what goes on. And all this happened while everyone had fun, a truly win win win situation.

Getting the hunt off the ground

From an early stage, Finn attempted to get the community involved in organising the event, which did prove difficult with a first time event. In

the end it was a small team from TTPC who each dedicated between 40 – 60 hours over five months leading into the Hunt.

The project team wrote to various local clubs and organisations for their assistance but found that while many were interested, only those with lots of organisational capacity came on board. For those that became Hunt stations, the team used a flexible framework which allowed these organisations to do what they could to welcome the community when they came through their doors. This then freed the project team from concerning themselves with the finer details of every station and increased buy-in and creative contribution from organisations involved.

Two public meetings were held early in the planning process to involve the community in event organisation, help generate ideas and act as a sounding board which the team found really valuable. The Council was also well involved in the project and their support was a key factor in the Hunt's organisational success. Having Council help in navigating the myriad of Council systems, plans and regulations was extremely beneficial – along with waiving many of the consent fees required for an event of this kind.

With a very small budget, event promotion was done creatively, using hand painted signs on Meola and Pt Chevalier Roads (main roads). The signs stood out as genuinely local, counting down the weeks and then days until the Hunt was on. Changing numbers keeping the sign active and increased the interest of curious local residents in what the Treasure Hunt was all about. The Hunt was also advertised in school newsletters, community facilities and in local shop windows.

By using local resources and being savvy about what and how money was spent, the whole event cost less than \$500 to organise and run. The Pt Chevalier Treasure Hunt is a great example of how a local event can impact on a community in a big way - and it doesn't take big money. It also shows that with some good planning, a fun summer's activity can have multiple outcomes for the whole community.

Says Finn, we hope the event will run again – this time with a new bunch of community leaders at the helm. Communities can't rely on the same five people to make things always happen, it will be up to others to stand up and make sure the Treasure Hunt is even better next time round.

Ready, set go!

Finn says he had no idea what to expect but the weather was good and people just kept arriving outside the Pt Chevalier Library at the start time of 2pm on Sunday November 9th 2009. After an initial welcome and briefing, 350 excited participants received their passports and maps and headed off towards the 23

stations on the map. The ultimate destination was Coyle Park for a celebration complete with BBQ, music, story readings, bubble blowing, spot prizes and a way to sign up to the Transition Town Pt Chevalier group.

Many of the organisers had dressed up in costume and helped set up the day and marshal participants. Water stops and snacks along the way ensured participants survived the fine weather.

People received a stamp on their passport for every station they visited but there was no obligation to visit them all. Stations were a mix of active (make or do something) and passive (answer a question). Each had a unique task for participants to complete.

For example, one of the first stations was a wishing tree where participants could write down what they wanted for a future Pt Chevalier and hang it up on a tree.



Other activities included frisbee throwing (disk golf), making letters out of sticks and wool, answering questions about the environment and playing a Maori version of scissors-paper-rock, to re-enact the battle between Ngati Whatua and Ngati Paoa in 1793 at Rangi-mata-rau (Pt. Chevalier Beach).



Activities had to be easy to complete with little instruction and of a format which could cope with many people arriving at different times. Through some clever strategic thinking, organisers used the activities not only for fun purposes, but to get participants engaging at a deeper level in what Pt Chevalier means to them.

One of the most popular stations was Pt Chev's most productive urban garden which is, incidentally, on private property. Participants were able to enjoy the wonders of personal backyard food production, including chickens, beehives and an array of vegetables to rival any good grocer.



Another location was the Lion's Club where Club members opened their history books to find some amazing things. Like the fruit collections of the 1970s, where they gave away over 70 tonnes of free local citrus to communities in need. As the Lion's Club had grown away somewhat from its local community roots, being on the Treasure Hunt map enabled the Club to reconnect with the community and open possibilities for new future relationships.



Te Mahurehure Marae was another hugely popular station on the map. Bringing the local community right inside gave the Marae the opportunity to show off major renovations and explain how the Marae is a place for

the whole community. The Marae were crowd savers later in the afternoon when the first 300 BBQ sausages ran out at Coyle Park – a quick trip back to the well stocked Marae freezers brought another 200 sausages to ensure that hungry treasure hunters were well fed. The Marae's generosity was an example of the event's immediate impact upon growing community spirit and support.



Inspiring Ideas Spread Fast

The Pt Chevalier Treasure Hunt experience has moved beyond Pt Chevalier already! The event inspired members of the Violence Free Waitakere team - one of whom is a member of the Pt Chevalier Transition Towns organising group, who could see the potential for the Treasure Hunt idea to really make a difference in Waitakere, especially with the potential loss of local identity from the coming 'super city'. As a pilot to try out the process, Violence Free Waitakere are partnering with Community Waitakere and with the McLaren Park/ Henderson South (MPHS) Community Development project to co-organise a similar but expanded event on November 13th 2010.

The excitement and success of networking across businesses, schools and community organisations that has typified MPHS event planning so far bode well for a hugely successful November event. All going well, Violence Free Waitakere and Community Waitakere plan to take the 'Our Amazing Place Treasure Hunt' out to other communities over the next few years. An operations manual is being developed to bring the learnings from both Pt Chevalier and Waitakere events together, and to support other local iterations of this great idea!

For more information

Finn Mackesy and his team are happy to share their event templates, ideas and learning, and invite others to use their basic model and adapt it to suit different community contexts.

- *Transition Town Pt Chevalier can be contacted on tptchev@gmail.com.*
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Acknowledgements: all photos from the Transition Town Pt Chevalier Treasure Hunt Team.