

Firms sharing ideas

Stiff upper lips are being cast aside as Northland business grabs chances to achieve best practice and get into exporting.

An event last Thursday may prove that hard times are encouraging businesspeople to share experiences and learn from each other.

Representatives of a large number of city businesses attended the free private sector seminar advertised with the catchlines “the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts” and “Northlanders supporting Northlanders”.

The half-day seminar was organised by Ken Wilson, a former community project development officer with Enterprise Northland and now representing Advantage Business in Northland. The company provides business advice from experienced practitioners to owners and managers of growing businesses in the \$1 million to \$20 million size.



Ken Wilson

Speakers included Wilson, and Whangarei business owners like Mike Verkuylen of Wynn Fraser Paints, Kerry Martin of Airzone and Greg Currie of Coastline Roadmarkets.

The businesspeople talked candidly about their business practices and shared some of their formulas for success.

Other speakers were from Whangarei business support agencies, including Brett Sawyers of Vodafone and chair of the Whangarei Economic Development Group; Peter Gleeson, Economic Development Manager of the Whangarei District Council; Trisk Cutforth of Venture Group; and Calvin Green CEO of the Northland Business Development Trust.

Wilson says he asked if the group wanted to do it again. The answer had been a unanimous “yes”. A date is to be set for early next year.

He said getting together had shown there was real benefit to be had from sharing business experiences and that Northlanders do not spend enough time learning from each other to benefit the local economy.

“We found we all face very similar challenges on a daily basis and that if we were to take the best bits of each of the companies represented at this seminar and put those bits together, we would without a doubt have a ‘best practice’ company,” he said. He’s also a fan of team conferences within companies, which he has started running for the clients he works with in Northland.

The conferences bring everyone from the boss to the cleaners together at the same time, generating a surprising buzz and often beneficial change as people realise they are all paddling the same canoe, he says.

■ Calvin Green of the Northland Business Development Trust says a Northland “angel investment” group he has started has attracted enough support to soon start vetting applicants.

Angel investment is private funding by a wealthy businessperson who usually wants to play a supportive role of some sort within the company. The owner will usually be a young entrepreneur, faced with a rate of growth beyond his or her ability to manage without an injection of financial and other support.