

Taratahi alumni come from far and wide for 90th reunion



EX-PAT KIWI Warren Sutherland, left, travelled the farthest - from his home in Texas - to don his old gumboots again alongside 120 other alumni for the Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre 90th Reunion at the weekend. He was joined for the two-day event by his wife Barbara, to his immediate right, and the rest of his fellow "Class of '61" graduates, who travelled from throughout New Zealand to attend. Also pictured rediscovering the Taratahi facility on Saturday is Ruth Andersen, third from left, the wife of former centre manager of nine years, Ray Andersen. PHOTO: NATHAN CROMBIE

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Alumni from across New Zealand - and as far away as Texas - gathered for the Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre 90th reunion at the weekend.

Centre liaison officer Natalie Bowie said 120 old boys and girls of the centre had registered for the reunion with one graduate of the class of 1940 the eldest of all alumni in attendance.

Ms Bowie said there were several fathers and sons at the reunion, who had each attended the centre in their day, and it was especially warming to see old friends greet each other after what has been for some almost a lifetime apart.

Also at the reunion on Saturday was Ruth Andersen, wife of former centre manager of nine years Ray Andersen, and Class of 1961 graduate Warren Sutherland, who travelled from Texas for the reunion alongside his wife, Barbara.

"The Class of '61 were out the back and running the pens at the first Golden Shears. That was us, and it was hard work but it was great."

Included in the reunion agenda were tours departing every half-hour from the centre to their new dairy unit, their Glenside farming property, and to their latest sheep and beef farm located 8km north of Masterton, Mangarata.

"The reunion was planned with the idea of starting an alumni association ahead of our centenary year and to celebrate the newer directions the centre is taking like the dairy unit, new workshops and accommodation blocks."

Ms Bowie said construction began earlier this year on the accommodation blocks and new technical workshops and dairy storage shed, which is all part of a development plan to ensure first-rate resources and accommodation for students.

Also held over the weekend was a

Tall Tales section to entice alumni on a walk down memory lane and an agrisports contest that ran them through their paces in fencing, trough work, chainsaws, animal anatomy, and ATV and trailer use.

Participants also enjoyed a reunion dinner at the Copthorne Hotel and Resort Solway Park with reigning Young Farmer of the Year David Skiffington as guest speaker.

The weekend ended yesterday with a tour and barbecue lunch at Glenburn Station.

The centre, which today boasts about 40 fulltime staff and 70 students, started life as the Wairarapa Cadet Training Farm and was established in central Wairarapa in 1919 as a training farm for men returning from World War I.

According to the centre website, the original facility gave practical farm training to 60 men and was only later used for more varied purposes related to agricultural skills training.