

Amazing fund-raising effort for the Rescue Helicopter Trust



The Horticulture team from left to right: Julie Saulue – Technical Marketing Co-ordinator, Chris Binns – TasmanCrop Business Manager, Team captain Laura van Diepen – Accounts Payable, Charlotte Millyn, Vena Ulae – Assistant Branch Manager and Brendan Ellmers – Customer Service.
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With over \$145,000 raised, the Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust can say the Rescue Run event has been one of its most successful fund-raising events ever held.

Rescue Run featured 44 teams competing in a gruelling 16 km adventure race that was designed to replicate the challenges of rescuing patients in disaster scenarios such as floods, earthquakes, mud slides, multiple car crashes and, to keep things interesting, across terrain consisting of sand hills, forests and farmland.

“The Horticulture Group has been a corporate sponsor of ARHT for ten years and, when the opportunity arose to participate in Rescue Run 2016, it was a matter of we were in ‘boots and all’” says Brendan van Diepen, General

Manager of the Horticulture Group. “For a very simple reason: horticulturists work in a sector that can be remote and hazardous at times, so rapid response to injuries is critical. The idea was floated to the group’s regional teams based in the north and south islands and within 24 hours, a six person team was formed, representing TasmanCrop and Horticulture.”

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Not over-thinking the challenge before registration was probably a good thing

as the team of six soon discovered the huge task ahead: not only would they have to complete a crazy 16 km mud race, negotiating their way through simulated disaster zones, but they would also have to raise at least \$5,000 for this worthy cause! “Why \$5,000? Because this is the average cost of a helicopter rescue, so every \$5,000 saves a life” explains Julie Saulue, Marketing Co-ordinator at Horticulture and one of the six team members.

The next eight weeks were filled with exhausting team training sessions and runs. As none of the participants had much experience with running, injury soon arose, with one team member withdrawing from the event. A replacement runner was coaxed in to join the team and the rest is history, as the three male / three female team got the job done.

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Team captain Laura van Diepen took the lead on fund-raising: "this looked quite overwhelming at first, but we got such great support from our suppliers, with over 40 of them donating funds or products to support the cause. Support from our staff was also amazing with everyone donating at least \$10 with Horticulture matching dollar for dollar. We were so pleased with the final result: with \$10,417 raised, we won the prize for the best individual fund raising effort, and most importantly, we can say that effort will help save two lives!" Julie adds: "we are very grateful for the support we received. It is heart-warming to know that we work in a sector where people are so generous, and look after each other".

What about the race itself? "Five team members started from the starting line, in the Woodhill Forest, and had to use a GPS to find me, about 2 km down the track" says Julie. "I was playing the patient to be rescued, with injuries on my arm, leg and chest painted in red by St Johns volunteers. I also had to pretend to have neck pain and difficulty breathing. The rest of the team had to assess my injuries and treat them before we could carry on with the rest of the race. They then had to carry me in a stretcher for several hundred metres and through multiple obstacles."

The team then had to build a sandbag wall, go through an earthquake zone, a flood zone, a very impressive mudslide,

a land search challenge, a car pile-up rescue, a memory recall challenge and a fire challenge. "The hardest thing was to do all this while carrying an empty gurney, which still weighs 12 kg. Four people were needed to carry it so we took turns" says Julie. "Overall, it was well worthwhile, a great race, with lots of fun, even if my calves were close to cramping for the last few kilometres" adds Vena Ulae, Assistant Branch Manager at the Drury branch.

Hard training did pay off as the team finished in 29th place, completing the event in 4 hours and 18 minutes... and they are already talking about doing it all over again next year!

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