

Passion for outer space

DEAN TAYLOR

Space, the final frontier. In the same year those immortal words first hit television screens one Dave Owen was born.

In the following years young Dave became a Star Trek fan and a life-long passion for everything to do with space travel, astronomy and science fiction was born.

Nearly 50 years later Mr Owen has combined all his passions into the Te Awamutu Space Centre.

He was running the Centre from his home, but his dream was to turn his passion into a proper business.

The new Te Awamutu Space Centre is now in the Kihikihi Presbyterian Church Hall on the corner of Lyon and Whitmore Streets.

Mr Owen says he didn't want to die wondering so, with the support of his family, the commitment was made to focus on the new venture.

To understand what will be on display, and what interactive activities there are, we have to go back to the beginning.

Young Dave was only 3 years old when man walked on the moon, but once he was old enough to discover Star Trek, and other popular space-based TV shows such as Space 1999, Battlestar Galactica and Dr Who, along with movies such as the Star Wars trilogy, he was hooked.

In those pre-internet days getting information was difficult.

Schools weren't teaching much and library books were behind the times.

He does recall some of the American comics of the time having Space Facts — but to get himself started he wrote to the US Embassy in Wellington and asked if they had any information about space.

They did — he received a pack full of information and photos, mostly about NASA's Apollo missions. It was gold.

Dave was hooked, and he continued to learn as much as he would and collect information.

The advent of computing, and especially the internet, was made for Mr Owen.

He has built his other businesses and community involvement around the internet.

He also used it to feed his passion for astronomy and did online courses through recognised teaching institutions so he could keep learning.

The hobby went on the backburner for a few years while family and career took over — but it never went



SPACE DAVE (Dave Owen) at his 'mission control' from where he can control all of his simulations and presentations related to space travel and astronomy.

away.

When the family moved back to Te Awamutu in 2000 Mr Owen got serious again — doing more online courses and joining the Hamilton Astronomical Society.

He was president for a period and worked tirelessly to promote their work and improve the facilities and equipment.

In 2004 the decision was made to have a Space Centre.

Mr Owen says the Te Awamutu Space Centre and Hamilton Observatory complement each other.

What sets the Space Centre apart is the collection of artefacts and memorabilia, and the technological presentations — some specially developed by Mr Owen.

The Centre has seven sections: Chronological history of space flight and exploration; The future of space flight and exploration; Our place in the Universe; Astronomy Wall of Fame; Telescope design and use; Shop/souvenirs; Seminar Centre.

Artefacts include clothing, helmets, sleeping bags etc that have been used in space missions, plus lots of reports from newspapers etc. at the time of major missions.

There is a live feed of the view of Earth from the International Space Station.

Computers run continuous data, some is open source material that is readily available, but some is unique. Mr Owen has used his programming skills to write programmes that take data and present it in a more graphic and understandable manner.

Mr Owen is especially proud of his Solar System Explorer, a programme he developed which anyone can operate to view any element of our solar system as if they were flying their own spacecraft — but at unheard of speeds.

And everything is completely relative to actual time and distance.

The large screen and 'mission control' system in the Seminar Centre can be used for a myriad of presentations and displays Mr Owen has collected.

He also uses it for question and answer sessions — as well as verbally answering questions, he has the collection available at his fingertips to enhance his answers.

The big screen is also used for live viewing of significant events, such as launches, landings etc.

Cohen ready for more in round two

Riders competing in the New Zealand Motocross Championships head to Pleasant point, near Timaru, for round two of the JT Racing-sponsored series this weekend with all bets off and anything still possible, particularly following the upsets and surprises that punctuated round one near New Plymouth two weeks ago.

None of the riders who had been widely tipped as title favourites ended up on the top steps of their respective podiums at round one, although there is no doubt that highly-fancied defending champions Cody Cooper, the MX1 class No.1 from Mount Maunganui, and Josiah Natzke (KTM), the 125cc class No.1 from Hamilton, will be seeking to redress that.

Josiah Natzke (KTM), the 125cc class number 1 from Hamilton, will be seeking to win back his top spot in the 125cc class after Taupō's Cohen Chase won the first round.

Natzke convincingly won the first two 125cc races at New Plymouth, but a massive crash at the start of the day's third and final race drove him head-first into the ground.

He took some time to shake off fuzziness and rejoined the race a long way behind the fast-disappearing pack, but still managed to claw his



ON TRACK: Taupō rider Cohen Chase in action on the dirt.

PICTURE: ANDY MCGEECHAN/BIKESPORTNZ.COM.

way back to finish eighth and salvage overall runner-up spot for the day.

Natzke will be hoping that's the only dose of bad luck he has to deal with in this campaign and, if that is the case, the smart money will possibly still be on Natzke to successfully defend his crown. He is just four points behind Chase and there are still a maximum 225 points

available.

Third best on the day at New Plymouth was Ngatea's Ben Broad (KTM) who is just one point behind Natzke.

Round three of the New Zealand Motocross Championships is set for Rotorua on March 8, with the fourth and final round at Pukekohe on March 15.

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