
TRACY JOHNSON



Executive Director of the Porirua
Chamber of Commerce

Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Rārua,
Ngāti Koata, Ngāti Tama
Ngāti Kuia

IDENTITY OF PORIRUA IN KEY WORDS

- Relaxed work environment- while still being focussed
- Innovation
- Exciting and fun place to be while allowing for a healthy lifestyle

WHO AM I AND WHAT IS MY CONNECTION TO PORIRUA

Tracy moved from Wellington to Porirua 26 years ago and despite initial hesitations she has embraced living in Porirua and loves the city. She has had her family there and has worked in a variety of roles including fundraising, working within council and community event organisation. “So always my passion out here has been around community”. Her current role as the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce allows her to once again be involved in the community and she works to “promote business and encourage easy pathways for business to be successful”.

WHAT I LIKE OR VALUE IN PORIRUA CITY

She said in relation to Porirua, “look, seriously it's a bit of a taonga or treasure that gets missed.” Tracy details the opportunities for a healthy lifestyle in Porirua City, a wonderful range of friends, the slighter warmer climate in comparison to Wellington City, the accessibility to the outdoors and opportunities for sports and proximity to the sea.

HOW PORIRUA INFORMS MY IDENTITY

Originally from a conservative King Country upbringing, Tracy feels that Porirua has been significant in shaping her. “I actually feel I am a better person than before it. I am far more liberal in my thinking.” She has become more engaged in Māori and Pasifika culture, and learnt about her own heritage where she ‘whakapapas’ to Ngāti Toa.

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

“I love Whitireia Park. I take my dogs walking out there. It's by the sea, it's peaceful and soothing I love it out there.”

WHY I AM EXCITED TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT

Tracy was excited to be involved in this project as she believes there is a wealth of opportunities for the city of Porirua and Ngāti Toa in the future. She is particularly interested in the diverse feedback particularly from the younger generations about what they would like to see in the city.

CHALLENGES FOR PORIRUA

Tracy highlighted a number of challenges that Porirua currently faces. One of these is outsider's perceptions of Porirua City. She explained that if a crime happens in Porirua the media has a tendency to sensationalise it, despite these events typically being part of a national trend. "The actual statistics here that that Porirua is an incredibly safe place to be, but the understanding of many people, particularly from outside is that that's not so." This perception can impact on business growth and also visitor attraction to Porirua City, yet Tracy mentions that when business people do come to Porirua they are "pleasantly surprised and excited by what is out here".

Another challenge Porirua faces is its small rating base. This means that a lot of the costs of running the city are placed on residential ratepayers making rates expensive. We need to grow dynamic business in the city.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PORIRUA

Tracy believes "there is potential for us to be a visitor attraction at a number of levels." This relates to the contributions that Pātaka currently makes to the city, and the nature of the city itself with its rich heritage and Māori history. She stated that there could be large opportunities for Porirua City due to it being the 'home of the haka' and the city itself could provide an authentic cultural experience. However she stressed that these ideas must come from the iwi itself.

In terms of business, she believes there are many opportunities for high value manufacturing and tech. The relocation of government departments into Porirua has also brought growth for the city.

HOW TO MAKE THESE OPPORTUNITIES HAPPEN

Tracy mentioned the multitude of thriving communities in the city but added that there is a missing link between these and broader political actors. This needs to occur in order to create large scale change where the ideas and initiatives are coming from the communities themselves. "It's got to be more than me sitting here saying 'that's a great idea'."

WHAT SHOULD COMPETITION ENTRANTS KEEP IN MIND?

In terms of physical design, Tracy believes Wellington is an example of a city which now works well with the harbour connecting different spaces. Mobile elements such as food trucks have contributed to this.

She acknowledges the dated urban form in Porirua such as the missed opportunity to make a feature of the harbour, but looks to the future to see these things changed. Tracy was concerned with connection and how important it is that anyone who engages with the city is able to connect with it when they walk through the city or visit. Tracy also emphasised the role that innovation plays in the city, and while she states it is necessary to acknowledge the culture, people and elements of the past she stresses that Porirua is and has for a long time been an evolving city.

