

Matariki heralds rejuvenation

Groups busy planting

By ARIELLE MONK

CHRISTCHURCH GROUPS threw serious weight behind Matariki this year, as the seven stars twinkled into sight.

The celestial marker, heralding the Maori New Year, was celebrated with Whanau Day at Rehua Marae in St Albans. The event pulled crowds in their hundreds, with a market offering traditional Maori food and crafts, as well as international options.

Kapa haka groups put on shows throughout the day, and Maori healers proved popular. Traditional therapists from the North Island practiced mirimiri and romiromi massage in a workshop open to the public for a koha.

The Anzac Drive Reserve also attracted numbers in the east for a mass planting event.

Four hundred native plants were donated by the Department of Conservation, while helpers also worked to get a school garden and a fruit tree grove off the ground in the reserve.

The day was hosted by Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu and the Avon-Otakaro Network, and is part of the organisation's Mahinga Kai Exemplar joint project. Both groups are aiming to recultivate the red-zoned land

surrounding the Avon River.

Avon-Otakaro Network co-chairman Evan Smith said the successful replanting is just the beginning of the land restoration.

"As an ex-red zoner, this day heralds a momentous step in the healing process for me. It is history in the making and signals the end of a prolonged period of grieving.

"It is fitting that this work begins during Matariki – the traditional time for Maori to contemplate the past, plan for the future and plant for the new season," Smith said.

Ngai Tahu earthquake recovery spokesman Te Marino Lenihan said the iwi is keen to see the ecology restored to a glory of times much earlier than pre-quakes.

"We want a healthy and harvestable environment, where whitebait are the hero species, champions of the food web for all."

He said the planting will help develop "key kai habitats", to see the concept of mahinga kai (food gathering place) return.

The appearance of Matariki was used by early Maori as a signal to plant crops, and students from nearby Freeville School have followed suit. The children designed and built raised beds for their community garden in the reserve.



TILLING THE SOIL: Asaria Patrick, 2, wanders among the plantings with mum Janita, dad Michael, and new brother Mikaere, at Anzac Drive Reserve. Photo: DEAN KOZANIC