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Key Appointments

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT MANAGER - DUNEDIN

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You will lead the Council's internal and external communications. Your challenge is to maximise the contribution that strategic communications can make to achieve the Otago Regional Council's vision of positive engagement with our community.

You will be expected to build communications and leadership capability, and provide high quality strategic communications advice. You will be focused on understanding the needs of stakeholders and delivering value to them.

Experience at senior level in all areas of the communications discipline is required, as is a tertiary qualification in public relations, communications or a related field. Preferably, you will have established networks with the local government sector and with other key groups.

Otago Regional Council
For further information and application details visit www.orc.govt.nz job vacancies. Applications close on Monday 18 April 2016.

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As the chief financial officer for Wellington tech company IKEGPS Gael Hargreaves keeps an eye on the books of the rapidly-growing company.

Photos: JOHN NICHOLSON/FAIRFAX NZ



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Making sure everything adds up

Gael Hargreaves is a dab hand in the numbers game.

GAEL HARGREAVES, chief financial officer at high-tech firm IKEGPS, says she's always had a bit of a thing for numbers, even to the point of being annoyed when computers took away the fun aspects of her first job in insurance.

"I was working in the actuary area and I loved it," she says.

"There were lots of numbers, lots of formulas – a fun day was when we could do our calculations faster!"

And then computers came along and ruined everything, she says.

"Instead of us doing all the nice mathematics the computers were doing it, and we were just checking – so it wasn't too long after that I started thinking I better get some formal qualifications and get in front of these computers."

Hargreaves had done well at school, coming top in bookkeeping and commercial practice at Tawa College each year but she found there that her career options were limited.

"I was at school in the 70s and women generally didn't go to university and do careers – they went to secretarial school," she says.

"That was the advice I'd had and what I'd seen – you worked for two or three years before you got married and had babies."

She went to secretarial school but didn't last. "I got half way through it and knew something was wrong – it wasn't me, and I knew I wouldn't be able to sustain all the typing and shorthand every day. I wanted to do something with numbers."

That led to her first job – the one where she came up against the computers and decided to go to polytech. It was, she says, a defining moment.

"One of the tutors told me I was wasting my time there, that I should go to university and get a proper degree," she says. "I only had School Certificate but by this time I was over 21, and he said I could go as a mature student."

Getting into the accounting course wasn't easy.

"I got a few doors slammed in my face, as you would with only school cert," Hargreaves says.

"They didn't think I could do the distance. It made me more determined."

Fortunately she met some other people who were much more helpful and she enrolled in some economics classes. "I knew I had to get really good marks and then I could cross to accounting, which is what I did."

At university Hargreaves went from strength to strength.

"I did well because I was so determined," she says. "And I'd had a life before university whereas some of the others had just come from school and had been studying and couldn't see the end of it."

Hargreaves became a sort of mother-figure to many of the students. "I had a bit of a reputation – when students were suffering from the mid-term blues, they'd say 'You go and see Gael and she'll remotivate you!'"

Following graduation, Hargreaves had a short stint at auditing – "I realised it wasn't for me" – before joining footwear manufacturer Hannah's, where she stayed for a good length of time.

"I put my hand up for everything," she says. "I was sort of 'Pick Me Gael', and it was a really good time – the Labour Government had just come in and we were restructuring, and there was GST, and import licensing had just changed – and we put in a big IT system so I got involved in that – I didn't do much accounting!"

After Hannah's, Hargreaves moved to Wellington manufacturer Interlock, spent some time in IT, worked for MAF and worked in Auckland and Sydney before coming back to Wellington to take on the CFO role at IKEGPS.

The company's board had decided to raise capital with an IPO (initial public offering) and Hargreaves relished the idea of



being part of the new venture.

"I joined in January 2014 just as the board had approved the IPO, and that was my initial focus – working with a team on the IPO on several fronts, doing the due diligence, finishing the audit and bringing the systems up to scratch as we progressed the whole IPO – it was quite a big process."

IKE is an industrial laser measuring system, using photogrammetry (which is the science of making measurements from photographs) for the asset management of utilities such as power poles. The company has recently brought out a product that works on smartphones – SPIKE (the sp is for smart phone) – and has developed a version for Stanley Black & Decker.

IKE was a finalist in last year's Gold Awards for Wellington businesses in the Discovering Gold category. Hargreaves is a seasoned awards campaigner – during her time at Interlock, the company won their category as well.

"And our neighbour Weta took out the supreme award – so we did OK for Miramar!"

IKE's sales and marketing wing is now US-based with the back office, accounting and HR, research and developing and manufacturing remaining in Wellington, which keeps Hargreaves busy.

"On a day to day basis I'm dealing with our people in the States," Hargreaves says. "Because we've grown quite rapidly, there's always something that they need, or are planning."

"I manage NZX compliance as well, scheduled around accounting board meetings generally once a month, banking, tax and all those normal things – but we have two sides – a NZ side and a US side – so we've learnt a lot really fast."

"I hadn't really worked for a public company before so I was used to being able to do things in a private company way, but there's a lot of ramifications now with the NZX – something that you think will be simple is actually quite

procedural now because it's an open market free trading environment, and quality of information is the backbone of it."

Fortunately, developing systems is something Hargreaves enjoys.

"I like to focus on integrated systems so the information is always going to be right," she says.

"Typically as a small company grows it outgrows its systems – no one here had worked with an integrated system before – they love it now."

"The best part has been as we've grown – and this has been really big in terms of projects and developing products – not only have the information systems and the administration continued to get better and faster and more accurate, but we've done it with the same resources."

"And that flies against what people say: 'We could do more if only we had more resources.'"

"That's the part I like – constantly pushing what we do in a smarter way."

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Q+A

QUICK QUESTIONS

NAME: Gael Hargreaves
BORN: Porirua.
FIRST JOB: Norwich Union Superannuation.
FAVOURITE MOVIE: *Flying High* still makes me laugh.
FAVOURITE SONGS: *Angie* by the Rolling Stones and *My Sweet Lord* by George Harrison.
FAVOURITE FOOD: Roast lamb cooked the old fashioned way with garlic and rosemary.

'The first two letters of the word goal are GO' S.P. SAUSAN

