

COLUMN FROM MAYOR TIM SHADBOLT

SOUTHLAND TIMES, 10 OCTOBER 2009

THE HOTSEAT

Well finally the race to cure diabetes is officially underway. A 47-year-old business executive has received the first implant and was back home from Middlemore Hospital within 48 hours. After spending 20 years in misery trying to inject himself with the correct levels of insulin, he could be cured within a couple of months. The reason I'm so confident about the results is that a Russian lady was injected nine months ago and she has now been off insulin injections for eight months, and is in excellent health. Unfortunately Russia's medical research infrastructure is not considered to be of world standards so the result is unofficial. In my view however the human results are significant and even if Russian laboratories are considered to have primitive technology, that shouldn't completely nullify the experiment.

I believe the two big developments of the next decade will be energy and bio-technology. Energy is easy to sell in Southland. We all know the value of oil, coal, gas and hydro energy. The Manapouri Power Project; the Smelter and more recently coal around Mataura are of obvious benefits to our community. They are solid industries with long histories in the south. Bio-technology is on an almost opposite tangent to energy. Instead of harnessing the power of stored water or coal, we are trying to harness the power of the intellect. I know that sounds abstract and obscure. There are no fit, tough, hard, rock miners or smelter workers needed for bio-technology. Delicate scientists, laboratory assistants and sensitive students in animal husbandry will be required for this industry. It's not part of Southland's traditions. It's difficult to understand the enormity of the health industry and it's even more difficult to believe that Invercargill could play a major role in one of the great miracles of modern medical science. Diabetes 1; Parkinsons and Huntington's disease are some of the most incurable sicknesses on this Earth. Is it really possible that little ole Invercargill has provided the missing link in the search for cures? You bet! Invercargill has a proud history of incredible achievements and there's no reason to stop now.

Yesterday was the 25th anniversary of the 1984 Southland floods. Although this was a huge natural disaster, in some way it was a triumph and we should celebrate our resilience. Regardless of Civil Defence systems in place at the time, when the proverbial hits the fan it is how individuals respond that is often a critical factor in an emergency. Those on the spot are forced to make a series of judgement calls. Time is often more crucial than following correct procedure. In a crisis you protect your family and help your neighbours.

Generally speaking there was little panic in 1984. People coped with outrageous fortune, repaired the damage and then got on with their lives. As for healing the wounds? There are really only two options. Engage a psychiatrist or engage in humour. Laugh at your misfortune; "Hi honey, I've just lost the house and our shop is under water, but there's no need to panic. The cat's okay."

Speaking of disasters, our Prime Minister has had a few PR disasters of late. His sensational media coup in getting on the Letterman Show has been rather soiled with the blackmail/sex with the crew revelations. His \$50 million cycling track has proven to be rather a “rush of blood to the head” proposal, just as the rather more practical Bill English predicted it would be. I welcomed Geoff Chapple to Bluff when he finished tramping over land from North Cape, but tramping is completely different to cycling which requires fencing and reasonably flat land. Farmers are bemused but usually quite generous about public cycle-ways so long as the proposer pays for putting in the required fencing. I know \$50 million sounds like a lot of money but it’s barely enough to pay for a quarter of the fencing required in the South Island. So now we are reduced to 7 cycle loops for \$50 million.

In PR terms Southland has had a ball. The “South” programme with Marcus Lush was absolutely stunningly brilliant; we’ve been saturated with hockey tournaments; the Stags are still roaring; the nurses are arriving in town for a national conference and winter is almost over. Yes!