

COLUMN FROM MAYOR TIM SHADBOLT

SOUTHLAND TIMES, 29 AUGUST 2009

It's great to see the Stags surging ahead and inspiring the entire province in a way not seen since the victories of the mighty Sting. Hosting an Oceania hockey tournament has also created a buzz around the city.

The Chairman of the Invercargill Licensing Trust, Alan Dennis, deserves a medal for courage under fire. Despite almost ripping his leg off during a deer hunting trip, he hobbled along on crutches to cut the ribbon on the new hockey pavilion and then returned to watch the first Kiwi/Aussie men's showdown.

A medal for bravery should also go to the Community Trust of Southland. After losing \$35 million they decided to front up and explain to a packed community hall at the St Andrew's Church exactly how it happened. In simplistic terms the Trust is riding the wild bronco of the international share market and they have little choice but to hang on grimly for dear life and pray for a swift end to the global recession.

My only criticism is that if you intend communicating with the masses, you need a really sharp sound system and a large clear screen for your PowerPoint presentation. The CEO, John Prendergast, tried to break the ice with a joke, "sorry there are not enough chairs – it must be the fault of our new chairman!" It was a very funny line but John is simply not a stand-up comedian. The large crowd were polite, but subdued throughout John's presentation. There were virtually no questions. I preferred the good old days of fire and brimstone when Ray Harper would bluntly tell the Trust to sell all their global shares and invest the money in the SBS. Then he'd tell the Trustees they should have to face an election like the Councillors and ILT Trustees had to do. At present the Trustees are selected by the Government. When Labour is in power they select their preferred Trustees and when National is in power they select their preferred Trustees.

Whether or not this system is ideal for a community owned trust with such power and influence is debatable. Free democratic elections can favour show ponies with high profiles (like me) but Government selections can favour bland, unknowns and party hacks. I believe half should be Government appointees and half should be elected by the local community. There are plenty of ports and airports around the country that are run with dual governance.

My only other reservation concerning the 21st Annual General Meeting of the Community Trust of Southland (which also includes parts of Otago) is that they appear to have an obsession with money. While I agree that investments and grants are vital to their core business, I think there should be at least some acknowledgement made of the non-financial contribution they make to our community. They act as a catalyst for innovative ideas; they educate our clubs and societies on keeping accounts, minutes and records and they analyse community assets. Sometimes their intellectual and scientific approach drives you nuts, but this is the downside of not having a mandate.

The Invercargill Licensing Trust and Council can have a more instinctive and inspirational approach to decision making because we know we have the backing of the majority of our community. The Community Trust is an entirely different beast, but at the end of the

day every single project of major significance that has happened in the city over the last 15 years has involved the big three. Splash Palace; Stadium Southland; Zero Fees; the Civic Theatre; the Inner City Upgrade; 'The World's Fastest Indian'; Rugby Park and the Velodrome. Few of these magnificent projects would have happened without the rock solid support of the Invercargill Licensing Trust, the Community Trust of Southland and the Invercargill City Council. The Southern Institute of Technology; the Southland Building Society; neighbouring Councils; the Richardson Group; Ngai Tahu and other organisations made wonderful contributions, but without the big three this city would have died.

The other big surprise in local government this month was the threat by Rodney Hide to resign. Under the last Labour Government we had five different Ministers of Local Government in 6 years and I was hoping this regime would be a little more stable. National MP, Tau Henare, then referred to the Minister as a "buffoon" and a "jerk off". It's not the sort of language I would tolerate at a Council Meeting and it certainly doesn't signal the love, peace and harmony you'd expect from a new political marriage that should still be at the honeymoon stage. It's just as well our Prime Minister is safely tucked away in Paris Hilton's hot seat on the David Letterman Show, or ringing bells on Wall Street. We certainly wouldn't want to see him embroiled in a slugfest with Rodney or Tau.

