

COLUMN FROM MAYOR TIM SHADBOLT

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The fantastic southern victory over the Rugby World Cup allocations is still causing euphoria throughout Southland and Otago. It's a little sad that Queenstown missed out on the one match it had applied for, but I can assure our good friends in the Lakes District that both Dunedin and Invercargill will take every opportunity to encourage visitors in our cities to go and visit our 'jewel'.

Dunedin, Invercargill and Queenstown made a joint application for World Cup Rugby and as far as I'm concerned the alliance is still firmly in place. We are too small to quibble over our differences. When it comes to major international events, energy or water, we should work as a team.

I was first elected as Mayor in 1993 and in all that time I have never witnessed such enthusiastic co-operation. It took the power of the Rugby World Cup to bring us together. It was only a short step then for Frana Cardno and myself to sign a letter of support to the Government for Dunedin's new stadium. My view is that if Dunedin want to build a new world class international stadium we should support them. If major international events are attracted to Dunedin I'm sure many visitors will take the opportunity to tour around the region. Many will visit Queenstown, others Milford Sound, or the bolder may even go to Stewart Island. It doesn't really matter where they go. We will benefit from the stadium and it's not costing us anything. Why shouldn't we support it? My hope is that many patrons could travel safely on chartered trains to major sporting or cultural events held in Dunedin's new stadium.

The news that Invercargill will host games involving Scotland and Argentina was the icing on the cake after a great 10 days in Southland. During that time we've hosted the third consecutive National Cycling Championships; our 141st A & P Show; two huge golf tournaments run by SBS and the Invercargill Workingmen's Club; the highly entertaining 'Out of Africa' Loritz Circus; 'O Week' at the Southern Institute of Technology and the Ascot Park Hotel Cup Day. It's all created a whirlwind of activity as thousands of visitors flooded into the city.

But despite all the euphoria and drama of World Cup Rugby, our Council will be focused on the economy. Most economists are predicting that this will be a hard winter and the question of how local government will respond is yet to be determined. We look forward to your submissions on the Long Term Council Community Plan.

Southland is having its own Regional Economic Summit next month and it will be interesting to hear the views of local business leaders. As a community we have three options. Either we tighten our belts, pull up the drawbridge, close our wallets and launch a new era of restraint and austerity knowing that this reaction only deepens the recession; or instead should we refuse to panic? In a gesture of defiance should we express great confidence in our city's future? We could adopt an uncompromising 'business as usual' policy. The third option is to hide. We accept that regardless of whether the great threat to humanity is an economic meltdown or global warming, there is very little we can do about it. We can't stop climate change and our entire economy is pathetically insignificant by world standards. We should be selfish and prepare for our own survival.

Just sit back while we can and enjoy the southern lifestyle. What's the point of being thrifty and frugal when World Cup Rugby is on the way. Yes!