MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL
Only Marlborough
Sounds **News**
He kōrero nō te Kaunihera o Wairau

New harbourmaster takes the helm

Marlborough's new harbourmaster Jake Oliver has never regretted trading life at sea for a career shoreside.

Now resident in Picton with his wife and young son, Jake's journeys around the world, mostly at the helm of cruise ships, have come full circle with his arrival to a town readying itself to welcome them again.

When Covid-19 struck, Jake was working for P&O Australia in Australia and the Pacific Islands. Fortunately, he never experienced Covid-19 on a vessel under his watch, but was left with the responsibility of returning 700 crew home from Manila when the Australian Government banned cruise ships from docking.

In August last year, Jake finally decided to "come ashore", accepting a position as Deputy Harbourmaster in Hawkes Bay. This role came after 13 years of an ocean-going career during which he achieved Master Mariner, the highest certification obtainable.

Jake says it has been an enjoyable challenge trading "sea-going life for shoreside".

Originally from Devon in England, from a small town only a little bit bigger than Picton called Barnstaple, you could say the sea runs in Jake's veins. His family have for generations been sailing off the south coast, across to France and the Channel Islands.

He met his wife, originally from Christchurch, on the Pacific Princess in 2013 where she was working as a gym instructor. "It's known as the love boat!" Jake says, and for them it was.

Jake sees the biggest opportunity and challenge facing Marlborough's harbours as the future development of the port of Picton, commercial shipping and ensuring ongoing safe operations.

"The Sounds is a precious area and there are lots of interested people - iwi, the community, recreational boaties, commercial interests, Port Marlborough, coastguard - and all feel very strongly about this place," he said.

"I am keen to continue the excellent work done to date to build on existing systems to safeguard this place, and continue to build relationships and connections with everyone who has an interest to understand what their goals and desires are."

Jake said he had had a thorough handover with former harbourmaster Luke Grogan to ensure as much continuity as possible.

The authority of Marlborough's Harbourmaster is vast with 4,000 square miles, or 18 per cent of New Zealand's coastline, involved including the ports of Picton and Havelock, the wider Sounds, and the eastern coast.

Now known as the Nautical and Coastal Team, the Council's Harbours unit includes two coastal scientists, Oliver Wade, and newly appointed Pauline Mitterwallner. "This ensures this expertise is on hand to help inform decision-making," Jake said.

He has a strong interest and background in industry-leading cruise standards which will be of benefit to the harbourmaster role, particularly as New Zealand's borders open and cruise ships return.

Jake also has a keen interest and background in industry best practice in navigation and is keen to roll out safe boating programmes targeted at recreational users of the Sounds prior to next summer. "This is about having a two-way conversation with boaties and being present in the recreational fraternity," he said.

Jake confesses he did not really know what to do when he left school so he "Googled' merchant navy and that charted a course for his working career when at 18, fresh out of high school, he signed up.

After a three-year cadetship with a large shipping container company plying the North Atlantic during the "ice season" as well as the seas of the Pacific, China, Taiwan and California, new horizons beckoned.

In 2011 Jake joined Princess Cruises as a third officer. "My first contract was ironically around New Zealand out of Sydney and Melbourne. I loved New Zealand - it was so pretty. And I loved Fiordland. It was different to anywhere I had ever been before."

Jake's cruising duties have taken him all over the world - to the Far East, Japan, the Amazon and North America.

However, Picton is his new home port and he and his family could not be happier.

Marlborough's new harbourmaster Jake Oliver at his new home port of Picton

Council's Harbours team - working to ensure our waterways are safe for everyone to enjoy.

Contact the Harbourmaster's Office if you need advice or information about Marlborough's harbours.

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