

Candidates' criminal records revealed

by Mike Diasdale

From a few parking fines and seed collecting to assault and injuring with intent to cause grievous bodily harm — the criminal histories of some of Whangarei's mayoral candidates make interesting reading.

Last week the *Northern Advocate* reported that one mayoral candidate, Don Hedges, had a conviction for a knife attack quashed after 24 years because the court that heard his case had no jurisdiction to do so.

In the High Court at Auckland this month, Justice Douglas White also quashed the 18-month prison term handed down to Mr Hedges in 1986.

But Mr Hedges revealed he has a long list of previous convictions — over 40 years — including injuring with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, injuring with intent to injure, assaulting police, inciting violence, threatening behaviour, common assaults, assaulting a female, wilful damage, theft and possessing an offensive weapon.

His criminal history began in 1970 when he was convicted of theft in the Auckland District Court — he was sentenced to come up for sentence if called upon within the next 12 months — and his last convictions were in 2008 for driving under the influence, and aggravated cruelty to an animal after he left his dog in his car boot for 10 minutes.

Mr Hedges has also been sentenced to prison 10 times, although several of them were concurrent terms.

He said being born with a fungal infection in his brain was behind many of his problems and while he had made mistakes over the years he had largely put those issues behind him now.

"It's a very long criminal history. I learned more through that than anybody ever learned in a university," Mr Hedges said.

He said his past had given him a good insight into people and he could see things from all perspectives, particularly from the underdog's view.

Mr Hedges' revelations prompted the *Advocate* to ask the other Whangarei mayoral candidates — Terry Burkhardt, Vince Cocurullo, Morris Cutforth, Paul Jeeves, Isopo Samu, Stan

Semenoff, Warren Slater and Simon Vallings — for details of any past criminal convictions they may have or any pending criminal prosecutions.

All bar Mr Ruri responded, and other than Mr Hedges' long list, the rest have been virtual saints.

■ Mr Burkhardt: "No criminal convictions for me sorry."

■ Mr Cocurullo: "I have no criminal convictions, but I have had a few traffic offences: a speeding fine, not wearing seat belt, and repeated parking tickets, and all of these were reported in the *Northern Advocate*."

■ Mr Cutforth: "Only one that I know of. I am a really boring person too with not even a drunk in charge. But I was convicted in 1990 for careless driving when I was driving to work and was blindsided by another vehicle. No pending convictions."

■ Mr Jeeves: "I have no criminal convictions; past, present and hopefully future."

■ Mr Samu: "I have no convictions or any charges pending."

■ Mr Semenoff: "No, I don't have any criminal convictions and there are no charges pending. The closest I have been to prison has been to supply aggregate during the building of Ngawha prison."

■ Mr Slater: "In my teens [1970] I faced theft and nuisance charges. I was fined and did probation, as at the time I needed some guidance. I learned from these foolish mistakes."

He also has been fined for speeding, failing to display a learners' sign, failing to comply with traffic signals and failing to comply with directions deemed to be given, between 1968 and 2001.

■ Mr Vallings: "Yes I have a criminal conviction for taking plants from the conservation estate [kauri seeds], [convicted and fined \$650 plus \$200 court costs in December 2006] and I am very proud of it."

As far as I know I am the only one in NZ to get prosecuted by DoC for trying to grow more trees.

As far as I know I have not yet been caught seed collecting again but I still do it regularly and hope I get caught again as next time I have a much better defence."