

Don't be silly this season

In the days when I managed newspaper newsrooms, this time of year was called the silly season, not because anything particularly silly happens, in fact the opposite given the road deaths, drownings, drunken parties that get out of hand and other awful things that happen when we go on holiday.

It has to do with the sudden absence of structure in the country's everyday functioning, the shutdown of institutions of government, whose routine actions and screwups feed the news cycle for the rest of the year.

Given some of the things that occur when governments central and local are up and running, the "silly" sobriquet would be more accurately applied then rather than to mid-summer.

Nevertheless, it's a season that news organisations must plan for. The paradox is that during this time when politicians and bureaucrats are at the beach, they and everybody else on annual leave have more time to consume the very news they are not supplying.

So we reverted each year to what was called the silly season list. It had predictable items such as the first baby born in the new year, the most popular names given to babies the previous year, tips for avoiding food poisoning while camping, the dangers of surf beaches, the Boxing Day sales, people who still had to work over the break, camping visitors from other places, unusual sports events, and so on.

There must have been at least 30 things on the schedule, which grew from experiencing a time when advertising was scarce and so news space expanded and had to be filled with something. That usually included holiday reading and stories that revisited big news events of the year just ended, plus predictions about what the next year might hold.

Having explained that, what follows is my own version, a silly season column on things I covered in 2019. Well, only a few, actually, because I've used a lot of space already.

Yarrow Stadium was the biggie, and I might as well have ignored it for all the good my opposition did. No hard feelings, TRC. Just make sure you do a good job, and let's hope it helps restore Taranaki rugby to the status we've come to expect.

My views on the airport job were equally ignored. I wonder how the palace will go now Jetstar has pulled out (predictably) and one of the big air travel generators, the oil industry, winds down.

The Mt Messenger job was another thing I opined on and I'm still wedded to the thought it's a colossal waste of money designed to allow even bigger trucks on the road to wreak even more damage to the surfaces the rest of us try to drive on. You could do a lot more good with that \$200 million.

But let's end on a positive note. For me, highlights of the year have been the injection of new talent to New Plymouth District Council and the promise of stability from mayor Neil Holdom being returned for a second term.

Holdom and I have had our moments, but his combativeness is exactly what we need at a time the geniuses in Wellington are bent on wrecking our economy. He's made it plain they won't get a free hand and we should all stand behind his efforts to ensure we don't feel any more of the cold shaft.

In particular, I'm outraged at the lack of government support for our local wave energy company, and I'm worried about what the fart tax will do to what has become the province's main economic powerhouse again, dairy farming. All power to TRC's arm in fighting that one.

Best thing of all, though, is what's happening to one of the province's prime attractions, Pukekura Park. Not only is the council spending some real money (albeit without a lot of consultation) on the place, but it's new manager, Kristian Davies, has emerged as a diligent and progressive guardian of what has been built up over a long time.

I haven't seen the place look so good since I came home in 2013. I know the weed in the main lake is getting thick enough to walk on, but that will be addressed soon by a multi-million dredging initiative that looked from its trial to be right for the job.

Happy New Year, everyone, and an apology to Sharp Sheet Metal: I didn't ignore your invitation to celebrate Xmas – but I turned up a month late.