

It is a lesson in humility and the power of the human spirit: however poor your background, if you want something badly enough it will happen...

Hutt Valley's

INSPIRATIONAL SEPTEMBER



Li Cunxin is 'prepared' to go into the ring at the Naena Boxing Academy by Billy Graham while the photographer from the *DominionPost* newspaper gets snapping. Once only a handful of people and few media ever came to support him, but these days the enlarged gymnasium is filled to capacity with supporters from all walks of life from Police and Justice, Rotarians to MPs and many media.

Mao's *Last Dancer* of book and film fame Li Cunxin and Professor Swee Tan are two men whose single-minded drive and passion have seen them rise from the humblest of beginnings to become two of the most inspirational people alive on the Planet today.

Thanks to two more inspirational people – Naena Boxing Academy founder Billy Graham and a 12-year-old Petone girl Hana Olds, the Hutt Valley has had the honour of celebrating these men in our own backyard.

Now Australian-based, Li Cunxin held the 500plus crowd spellbound as the motivational guest speaker at the recent biennial Black Tie Fundraising Dinner held by the Academy, while Lower Hutt resident Professor Swee Tan was the subject of a

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Turning boys into champion men: (From left to right) Troy Broad, Geoffrey Soe, Latu Talu and David Graham were young men to be proud of at the Black Tie Dinner.

book that has become the fastest selling local title in the Hutt during September. With all proceeds going to Professor Tan's Gillies McIndoe Research Institute, the first 600 copies sold out in just a week and it has already gone into a reprint.

For Lower Hutt Paper Plus owner John Vallely it has been quite a month. He has appeared on national television as a result Hana's book *If Persistence was a Person* and his other local "best seller" has been Billy Graham's own book *Making Champion Men*, written with Phil Gifford, which was launched at the Naenae Boxing Gym by New Zealand's Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft.

"It takes a special person, with rare gifts to engage with challenging young people. Billy Graham is such a person. His work is not for the fainthearted. Our disadvantaged and marginalised young people represent one of our country's biggest challenges. Every day Billy commits himself to answering this challenge with boundless energy and enthusiasm" wrote the Judge in a foreword to the book.

FAST-TALKER

Dancer Li Cunxin told how Billy Graham had rung him on his mobile phone and asked if he would speak at a fundraiser at the Wellington Town Hall for his Boxing Academy. "Who is this fast-talking kiwi

person?" he asked first; then, like the Judge, discovered the work the man was doing.

Requests to speak these days are many for Li Cunxin, born into poverty in Mao's China; so too are requests to Professor Tan, born into a poor rural Malaysian family, to allow people to write a book about him. But in both cases they were swayed by the arguments presented by two passionate New Zealanders, one working tirelessly to help young men from poor backgrounds



Phil Gifford at the book launch.

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break the cycle of hopelessness and make something of their lives; the other at the tender age of 12 wanting to raise money for the Gillies McIndoe Research Institute to help the man who became a surgeon and scientist and who wants to find a cure for cancer.

Writes Billy (who was just 12-years-old himself when he decided one day he would have his own gym to repay to others what his mentor the late Dick Dunn had done for him): "When I was younger, older people were forever trying to put me in my place because I seemed to be overconfident. Actually I wasn't confident. My mother and father didn't believe in me, and a lot of the people around me didn't either. So I was on a banana skin.

"Then I met someone, Dick Dunn, who did believe in me, or if he didn't he made me feel he did, and he was the only person I wanted to impress, no one else. Around him I was humble, and I was polite, and I didn't swear, and I wanted to win his good favour by doing what he expected of a young man."

Now Billy's own vision is in turn changing boys' lives.

Says Hana in her book: "We all know people affected by cancer. I hope this book can make a difference by contributing funds to the Gillies McIndoe Research Institute to support Professor Swee Tan's research into a cure for cancerous tumours. Swee believes he and the team can do it, and so do I. If you believe in yourself you can do anything. I hope this book inspires you to take action in the world."

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Billy's wife Kerri Graham (left) with Guest of Honour Li Cunxin and Kerri's sister Leah Davison at the Black Tie Dinner.



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Inspiring others: Hana Olds and Professor Swee Tan.



Proof positive – The beautiful child three-and-a half-year-old Heather Ward now is, pictured with her mother Karen at the book launch. Karen paid tribute to the wonderful skill of Professor Swee Tan when her child was born with this disfiguring birth mark. Baby “Heather was the 12th baby in New Zealand to trial the Propranolol drug and we are eternally grateful to Professor Swee Tan for his research and work in this field.”



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“Train to be the best with hard work, time and effort” – Olympic Rowing gold medalist Peter Taylor got on the Academy’s rowing machine to encourage the boys – it is mixing with successful athletes like this that can rub off on even the most disinterested youth and inspire them to become life’s winners.



Who it’s all about – Billy’s boys with rower Peter Taylor and his gold medal. The questions they asked were intelligent obviously most had watched the Olympic rowing themselves and seen what success looked like. There is a growing gallery of photographs with winning sportsmen and teams around the walls, all aimed to inspire.



Billy Graham with the widow of his mentor Dick Dunn – now in her 90s, she came from the Wairapa for the launch of his book.

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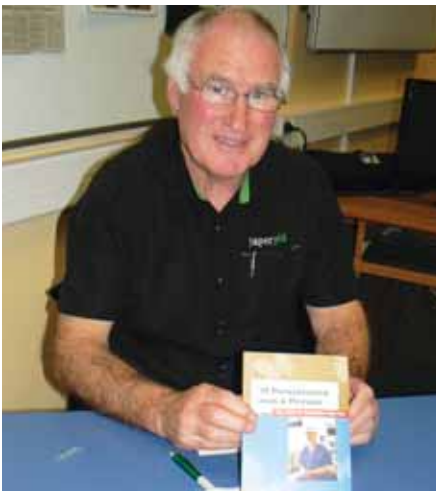
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Hana Olds and Professor Swee Tan cut the butterfly cake. This butterfly is the symbol of the Gillies McIndoe Research Institute fundraising campaign.



Lower Hutt Paper Plus owner John Vallely; both Hana Old's book *If Persistence was a Person and Making Champion Men* by Billy Graham with Phil Gifford are stocked at his High Street store.



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REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

BY PRUE LAMASON

What's the best local government arrangement for the Wellington region?

What we have now – or something different?

Local government reform is a hot-button issue and I think it's fair to say it is exercising most of the region's local government politicians at the moment. And so it should – because there are three important changes to New Zealand's governance landscape that will almost certainly have a considerable impact on the region's future.

First, the amalgamation of the Auckland region's city and district councils into one Auckland Council, giving Auckland a more powerful voice with the weight of the region behind it.

Second, the Canterbury earthquakes. Getting Christchurch back on its feet will require significant spending and is a top priority for the Government.

Third, local government reforms are in the works – these are likely to make it easier to change local government arrangements.

But what does all this mean for us? Well, with the government sharply focused on Auckland and Christchurch, we are in danger of being left behind – and not having a seat at the table. Add to that the continuing economic crisis, and the shrinking of the public service – an important employer for people throughout the region, and you can see how vulnerable our region is and why we should be looking at ways to make it stronger and more resilient.

And this is where the local government reforms come in – because they give us the opportunity to take our future into our own hands, and determine the local government arrangements that will work best for us.

I can understand why people are concerned about the local government debate, especially when the word "supercity" is thrown in. To some extent, the debate has indeed been hijacked by notions

of a supercity – and all the worrisome connotations of a monolithic bureaucracy making highhanded decisions without listening to local voices. But this is exactly why it is so important for people to engage. By doing so, you can help to ensure the local voice doesn't get lost and that, if there are changes to local government in the region, local decisions will still be made locally.

In May, Porirua City Council and the Greater Wellington Regional Council set up an independent panel to assess governance models for the Wellington region. The panel's review process has involved significant engagement with the people who are most affected by changes to local government – the region's residents and ratepayers.

Chaired by former Prime Minister, Sir Geoffrey Palmer, and with a strong Lower Hutt voice in businessman Bryan Jackson, the panel of four has, over the past few months, engaged with a range of the region's communities through online opportunities to give feedback, a formal submission process, and public meetings across the region, including a meeting attended by 60 people in Lower Hutt. The panel has also met with councils, residents' associations, community groups and other interested parties, and will report its findings to Porirua City Council and the Greater Wellington Regional Council in late October.

Make sure you have your say when other opportunities come up – because even if local government is something that usually makes your eyes glaze over, local government arrangements affect us all.

Prue Lamason represents the Lower Hutt constituency on the Greater Wellington Regional Council. She also chairs the regional council's Hutt Valley Flood Management Subcommittee. Contact Prue.Lamason@gw.govt.nz