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From Local To Global

Jenny McLeod goes behind the scenes at Heliworks

The Queenstown and Southern Lakes helicopter world is a competitive business with several companies in the region clamouring for a slice of the action.

Well respected and established operators, Heliworks are at the forefront of the industry and with the recent appointment of highly experienced pilot Dave Kershaw as general manager, fresh plans are in place to develop the business further.

Dave began his flying career locally in the 1970s working with Alpine Helicopters on deer recovery. He later set up Southern Lakes Helicopters in Queenstown.

During the last seven years he has been working off shore for Hevi Lift Helicopters which operates around the South Pacific. As chief pilot for four years in Papua New Guinea his main role involved supplying the mineral and oil industries in places such as Cambodia, Bangladesh and East Timor.

He was later based in Cairns in Australia as contracts manager organising flying work in Taiwan, China, Sudan, the Solomon Islands and Indonesia. Hevi Lift played a big role in Indonesia after the tsunami last January, and carried out significant work for relief agencies, in and around the South Pacific.

Dave's return to Queenstown to head Heliworks is seen as a coup by the company. He is now focused on new contracts both offshore and in New Zealand.

"What we have to do is secure our present business and grow from there. While locally we are building up our tourism work, which is pitched at the high end of the market, we are also looking to the South Pacific for new contracts. The Antarctic is another focus. There are already half a dozen New Zealand helicopters working down there and there are definitely some future opportunities to act in a support role there."

Contracts for frost fighting at vineyards in Marlborough are also being finalised.

"This has been an ongoing contract and sometimes during the frost season we would send as many as four machines a night to the region."

Heliworks operates sophisticated filming technology in association with Peter

Thompson of Aeroptics Ltd. There is increasing demand from the film industry worldwide to take advantage of the latest aerial filming camera equipment.

“To have the equipment based here makes it very easy for film companies. There is no down time and it is simply a matter of fitting the equipment and doing the job.”

Heliworks pilots are well known for their flying skills on movie projects. Alfie Speight was appointed principal pilot for the filming of the internationally famous Lord of the Rings trilogy. The company was contracted exclusively by director Peter Jackson for aerial filming and transport of the cast and clocked 400 hours working on the three films.

It was logical that Heliworks would set up a Lord of the Rings tour which is popular particularly with overseas J.R.R.Tolkien enthusiasts. Together with Lord of the Rings Locations Guide Book author, Ian Brodie of Wanaka , the company has designed three unique Middle Earth packages – Flight to the Ford, The Great Forests and the Middle Earth Explorer.

The tours take in the dramatic Southern Lakes scenery featuring a range of sites and locations used as a backdrop for the trilogy.

Heliworks has an enviable image in the tourist and commercial helicopter industry which is largely due to the professionalism of its staff.

“The strength of Heliworks lies in the commitment of its directors and the outstanding skills of the company pilots,” says Dave. “Our close connection with Southern Lakes Helicopters in Te Anau is an added advantage and we are proud of the standard of our modern helicopter fleet which is the equal of any in the country.”

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