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Whanaungatanga and friendship rule at IRONMAORI 2016

For the 65 IRONMAORI competitors that made the trek from Northland to the Hawkes Bay for the seventh Iron Maori half marathon this weekend, the months of training have reaped glory that will linger far beyond the event itself.

The IRONMAORI event, held in Napier on December 3 2016, attracted over 2000 competitors from around the country to participate in a 2km swim, 90km bike ride and 21.1km walk/run in an individual or team capacity.

A 65-strong Te Taitokerau contingent, supported by Te Rarawa Anga Mua, were a standout feature in striking black and yellow uniform. Forty members of the group were brand new to the event and 14 undertook an individual challenge.

For Blair Kapa (Te Rarawa, Te Aupouri), the 90km ride as part of the Toru Korus tested her inner strength and will to the limit: "There were times in the event I wanted to just quit – fall off my bike on purpose or pretend passing traffic spooked me. There were so many internal battles going on 'you can't do this, yes you can you've come this far'. But what I've learnt, is it really wasn't a race and the feeling of self-accomplishment is something much greater," she says.

She adds that she now has her sights on bringing in her family next year to undergo a team event.

Rawinia Delamere (Te Whanau a Apanui, Tuhoe), who lives in the Far North and was embraced by the roopu, says just completing her bike ride as part of Team Hippie was a crucial moment. She is also looking forward to stepping up to participating in Auckland next year for the IRONMAORI quarter marathon.

Likewise, Perry Hanara (Ngati Kahungunu), who has taken a lead role in mentoring the Te Taitokerau group throughout their journey in his experience as a former IRONMAORI and IRONMAN individual competitor, is rapt about the event's success.

"The journey for me is about witnessing the change in people from the inside out. Watching as their fears slowly fade away to be replaced with a belief within themselves



that they can achieve anything and then having the confirmation at the end when they cross that line with the most heart-melting, emotional smile that says 'yes, I did it!'," he says.

First-time individual competitor Pauline Blair-Namana (Te Rarawa) says her outstanding highlight was completing the swim "alive". She says she was mentally honed to complete her event in eight hours and 29 minutes, believing that participating in monthly events in the lead up to the half marathon and the "booming whanaungatanga" on the day kept her strong.

"It's a lonely swim, a lonely bike and then when you get back to do the run with people. It was so much fun and I just smiled and called out to everyone I saw because I believe you get back what you give out," she says.

And individual competitor Kaye-Maree Dunn (Te Rarawa, Ngapuhi, Ngati Kahungunu, Ngati Mahanga, Ngai Tamanuhiri) attributes her endurance capacity to her family: "I felt really supported by the iwi and my whanau, so I had so much riding on making it to the end. I have been led by fear and limitation when it comes to my physical wellbeing and I have underestimated my capability. I'm making a 360 degree turn around and making my physical wellbeing my number one priority," she says.

All of the group have been influential and inspirational beacons of change in their own lives and the lives of the family and friends they touch around them throughout their personal journeys to IRONMAORI, citing the embrace of healthy family lifestyles as a key motivation.

They are already preparing for the inaugural IRONMAORI quarter marathon to be held in Taupo next March 2017.

Ends

SIDE BAR: Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakapa-storyteller Erena Hodgkinson (Te Rarawa, Te Aupouri, Ngapuhi) is proud not only for undertaking the event as a first timer. She broke the mould by wearing a dress on a cast steel framed bike named Florence, carrying everything but the kitchen sink in her wicker basket, with flowers attached.

The swim: "Standing in a group of jiggling bodies being herded into the water at 6am in the morning is quite surreal. As I only started to learn to swim this year, this was going to



make or break it for me. But, aside from the odd jostle and chalky teeth from the salt water, I did it!"

The bike ride: "Florence is amazing. I knew that I was going to be right at the back of the pack but I just took my time over the 90km course working her six gears through the beautiful Hawkes Bay countryside, stopping every now and then to nibble on the handmade fudge, nuts or bananas that I had stockpiled in her basket. My highlight was rounding at the corner at Puketapu Tavern and being serenaded by a line of people singing 'Putiputi' to me. It brought me to tears!"

The walk: "I didn't get to complete the course as I ran over time. However, I thoroughly enjoyed taking a walk in the stunning Napier sunshine, listening to music and singing along. Coming in under the finishing arches escorted by my son was a wonderful moment."