

# Couple turns land into a native haven

## Early work on rail link

By DELWYN DICKEY

Plans by a Pt Chevalier couple to transform their former Kaipara dairy farm into a native forest park have been given a boost with a \$10,000 grant from the Auckland Council Environmental Initiatives Fund to buy native trees.

What makes Thomas and Mahrukh Stazyk's plans so noteworthy is they aim to eventually gift their land to the people of Auckland.

Their intent when they bought the land in 2003 was to create a retreat for people wanting to exchange ideas and work together to make positive changes.

But with both working toward degrees they found there wasn't the time to get the centre going.

As time went by they became more aware of the impact their cattle were having on the land – particularly the wetlands – along with the loss of big blocks of land in the area to subdivision.

"We decided to put a stake in the ground and keep at least one property free of development," Mr Stazyk says.

Cue Haven was the end result. Over the past four years, the couple has been revegetating the 24 hectares in Araparera with native



**Kaipara dream:** Plans by Pt Chevalier couple Thomas and Mahrukh Stazyk to turn their Kaipara farm into a native forest and gift it to the community got a boost with a \$10,000 grant for native plants.

bush. Mr Stazyk says the initial planting took place in the wetlands.

"That was the priority because cattle runoff had adversely affected the water quality and the streams on the property flow out to the Kaipara Harbour."

With the help of the Trees

For Survival programme and St Kentigern Primary School students they planted 500 trees that first year.

Last year, they planted about 24,000 native trees and converted an old milking shed into a nursery. Walking tracks are going in too.

Schools, corporate groups

and local and international volunteers have all become involved.

The couple aims to have the initial planting completed by 2017.

By then, nearly 200,000 trees will have been planted and they will apply for QEII status to protect the land

from future redevelopment.

"Our long-term goal is to gift it to the community to enjoy as a park or reserve," Mrs Stazyk says.

"We are still creating positive change, and by doing it this way we have been able to get more of the community involved."

A reshuffling of budgets by Auckland Council means preparation work on the city rail link will go ahead sooner than expected.

The \$2.4 billion project involves constructing a 3.5km underground electrified rail line which will run around 45m below the city centre from Britomart to the Mt Eden train station.

Britomart would become a thoroughfare and up to three new stations could be built near Aotea Centre, Karanga-hape Rd and Newton.

Around \$8 million that was due to be spent on other transport projects in this financial year will now be spent on preparatory work for the link including geotechnical investigations and preparation of a revised business case that has been requested by the government.

The money has become available because other projects have stalled and reasons include delays in securing land for them.

Chairwoman of the council's strategy and finance committee Penny Webster says the council had planned to spend the funds on the link project anyway in the next financial year and is being brought forward to assist in achieving important project milestones, such as surveying.