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CUE Haven planting for the future

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Thomas and Mahrukh Stazyk are gearing up for another busy season of tree planting on the property they plan to one day gift to the Auckland region.

The Point Chevalier couple have received a \$10,000 grant from Auckland Council's Environmental Initiatives Fund to buy native trees for their Kaipara Coast property.

For the past four years, Tom and Mahrukh have been working to re-vegetate their 24-hectare property in Araparera with native bush.

They bought the land in 2003 with the intention of creating a retreat where people could meet to exchange ideas. Mahrukh says their vision was to get people together to work towards creating positive change.

But with the pair studying for degrees – she in psychology and Thomas in English - there wasn't any time to create a centre.

Over the years, however, they observed the affect the cows were having on the property and, at the same time, they saw more and more properties being divided for lifestyle blocks.

That was the impetus they needed to decide to restore the former dairy farm, step by step, to a native New Zealand forest.

"We decided to put a stake in the ground and keep at least one property free of development," says Thomas. The couple started their project, called CUE Haven, in 2008.

Thomas says the initial planting work 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 students from St Kentigern Primary they planted 500 trees that first year.

Last year, they planted about 24,000 native trees on the property, including Manuka, Kanuka, Karamu, Mapou and Mahoe.

The couple has also converted an old milking shed into a nursery and they are putting in walking tracks. Schools, corporate groups and local and international volunteers have all become involved at CUE Haven.

Their aim is to have the initial planting completed by 2017. By then, nearly 200,000 trees will have been planted and the couple will apply for QEII status to protect the land from future re-development.

"Our long-term goal is to gift it to the community to enjoy as a park or reserve," Mahrukh says. "We are still creating positive change, and by doing it this way we have been able to get more of the community involved. "This has given us so much joy."