

# Supporting Otago

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## Otago alumnus donates surgical masks to help University fight pandemic

In a unique move, University of Otago alumnus Mark Brosnan is gifting \$10,000 worth of surgical masks to the University's Dunedin Department of Medicine.



From left: Brad, Jan, and Mark Brosnan, Roger Ascroft, Professor Michael Schultz, and Jan Cowan. Photo: Sharron Bennett

Mark, who attended the University in the early eighties and distributes cherries from Cromwell orchard, CherryCorp, was in China in January when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Seeing how businesses needed to operate during these challenging times, he began sourcing masks and worked with New Zealand manufacturer Dowco Associates to distribute Lotus hand sanitiser.

As the COVID-19 pandemic grew and demand for the much-needed supplies soared, Mark became a busy distributor, supplying to more than 400 NZ businesses. He discovered he had a \$10,000 surplus of surgical masks and contacted Otago University about donating them to the Medical School, where he believed they would be needed and appreciated.

The weekend before he was due to donate the masks he slipped and broke his wrist at his Christchurch

home. Mark says he received excellent care from two young Otago graduate A & E doctors. "I was so excited about what we're doing, in terms of donating the surgical masks, that I blurted out how important education is and how important medicine is and how important healthcare is."

Dunedin Department of Medicine Head Professor Michael Schultz says that the thanks for the surgical masks should also go to Research Manager Jan Cowan. "She's the Department of Medicine's health and safety officer, she's doing a great job during these difficult times and outlined to me what we are planning to do to keep the Department safe."

He added, "Contact with often vulnerable patients is our bread and butter, we are a medical department, we have lots of traffic and we can't thank you enough for this generous gift (Mark). As the recent surge in COVID-19 cases shows, this pandemic is not going away any time soon. We will have a lasting memory of this gift that is really appreciated," Professor Schultz says.

Mark's son Brad Brosnan, a PhD research student in the Department of Medicine, noted the importance of the donation. "The Department has a lot of local whānau and children involved with health research both on the ninth floor of the Dunedin Hospital and in their homes, and access to these masks will be very important during the COVID-19 pandemic."

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## Helping others get an Otago education

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A passion for her old University and a desire to help future generations of students receive an Otago education is the foundation of the Priscilla Sandys Wunsch (PSW) Trust.

At the end of August, four of the five PSW Trustees spent a day at the Dunedin campus, meeting key University staff and viewing some of its newer residential colleges.



Trustees, Margaret Harrop, Miaana Patene, MaryAnne Costelloe (Chair), and Kelsi Freer. Photo: Sharron Bennett

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The Trust began operating after Miss Wunsch's death in 2000. It has \$10 million in funds and about \$300,000 of its investment income is spent annually supporting around 30 Taranaki students with financial hardship who are in their first or second year of study at Otago.

Miss Wunsch was an only child who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University in 1946 and maintained a strong fondness for the institution and the skills that it gave her.

Trust Chairperson MaryAnne Costelloe says the Trust aims to make all Taranaki students who wish to study at Otago aware of the support available. Hundreds of Taranaki students have received a PSW Trust scholarship over the last 20 years.

"It's all about communicating with the students, we have set up a Facebook page and website and we love to receive feedback from the students."

In addition to generous funding the Trust employs a Dunedin-based mentor to support the scholarship recipients during their time at the University.

MaryAnne says the Trustees were impressed with current developments within the University particularly the in-house pastoral care from the residential colleges for which the University is renowned for.

"The arrival of COVID 19 has meant many changes which seem to be working well but have made the year incredibly hard," she says.

All of the Trustees are Otago alumni and both Miaana Patene and Kelsi Freer, who also travelled down to Dunedin, are former PSW scholarship recipients.

"The Trust has grown over 20 years under the stewardship of former Chairman Dr Paul Veitch and long serving Secretary/Treasurer John Pickering. It hopes to continue this strong collaboration with the University for future scholarship recipients.

"The Trustees welcome the opportunity to assist additional students to Otago, but wish to ensure that PSW scholarship recipients' pathway through Otago is as smooth as possible. The Office of Student Success with its continuing evaluation of student teaching and learning methods seems a good innovation and helpful resource," she says.

She says the collaboration and programmes that the University uses within New Zealand's high schools in attracting new students with evolving new and current courses is also impressive. "At meetings with local high schools the Trust has noted that Otago University programmes, staff and interactions with local high school students are highly regarded and valued."



From left: Professor Helen Nicholson, Trustees Kelsi Freer, MaryAnne Costelloe, Miaana Patene, Margaret Harrop, and Schools' Liaison Officer Prajesh Chhanabhai.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor External Engagement Professor Helen Nicholson told the Trustees that the University is thankful for the continued support the Trust brought to the University and many of its Taranaki students.

Director of Development and Alumni Relations Shelagh Murray says the PSW Trust is currently one of the largest endowment funds that supports students to attend the University.

"It's wonderful to see the opportunities this scholarship has brought for hundreds of Taranaki students to receive an Otago education," Ms Murray says.

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