

NORTHERN REGION



JP Singh (second from left) with (left to right) Rukshana Kapadia, Narissa Daud and Kuljeet Singh from Piccolo Park Childcare in front of the fire-damaged walls of Guy's Homestead. (CREDIT: NZHPT)

Bright future for historic homestead

A historic landmark in Auckland's East Tamaki – almost gutted by fire over a year ago – is set to enjoy a bright future thanks to the vision of an Auckland businessman.

JP SINGH has bought the 116-year-old Guy's Homestead, and plans to largely restore the Category 2 historic building and develop it as an Early Childhood Education Centre with a difference.

"The new centre which will include a barn-type ancillary building, will strongly reflect the homestead's agricultural heritage. We believe this will be a fitting tribute to the Guy family," says Mr Singh.

"The centre will incorporate an agricultural theme and will be a kind of 'working farm' for the children, where growing organic produce

and other farm-type activities will form part of the daily routine.

Also known as Saidia House, Guy's Homestead was built in 1898 by Andrew and Rose Guy on an orchard and dairy farm they had bought. Over the years the farm was divided into small farms with dairy farming ceasing in 1986. The homestead is a prominent feature and a rare historic survivor in a landscape that has been much changed over the years.

As well as providing daycare facilities, the farm-themed child care centre will also help

give city children a greater understanding of growing food and other aspects of rural life.

"Botany has become home to people from many different parts of the world and it would be great to see children from multiple ethnic backgrounds together in a rural themed Kiwi environment right in the heart of the suburb," says JP.

Apart from getting a first hand feel for the rural life, children will also benefit from getting to know about traditional Maori values and beliefs, which the local Iwi has kindly consented to help with.

Not surprisingly, working with a fire-damaged historic building – which is both registered and scheduled on Auckland Council's district plan – presented its own set of challenges, though JP's passion for the project kept him going.

"Despite having to go through quite a few hoops everything came together nicely in the end," he says.

JP first saw the potential of the homestead and the property 12 years ago when he built the area's first bowling alley, Xtreme Entertainment, down the road from the homestead.

Over the major part of last year, he engaged in prolonged negotiations with the off-shore owners and various other stakeholders in the process of acquiring and gaining different consents to restore and develop the property.

"The homestead's agricultural heritage values are the property's best asset and in some ways it will give the development a distinct point of difference," says JP.

The NZHPT's Mid Northern Heritage Advisor Architecture, Robin Byron, is very pleased that the homestead is about to enjoy a new lease on life.

"We're delighted that it is to be restored and meaningfully adaptively reused. We're also happy that Guy's Homestead will continue to be a local visual landmark and its historic presence and significance to the local community will be maintained," she says.

Construction work is due to begin in mid-March. ■

