



Departing Ashburton MSA club general manager Kevin Kamat: "The club has to become a community hub."

PHOTO DARYL HOLDEN

MSA boss quits for family

But hopes his community hub strategy for the MSA proceeds

Departing Ashburton MSA club general manager Kevin Kamat insists he's set the organisation up to flourish and evolve into a community hub.

But Kamat will have to watch that vision unfold from afar, having announced his time in charge of the Ashburton Club and Mutual School of Arts will end on March 10 when he heads to the United States.

Kamat, who has been at the Ashburton club for just over 12 months, has resigned to join family in Pennsylvania. And he will leave satisfied with what he has achieved in his year-long stint in charge, while also knowing where the organisation needs to go to if it is to reach its potential as a true community enterprise to remain sustainable and relevant.

"The club has to become a community hub. Absolutely," Kamat said of the organisation that's been an Ashburton



Daryl Holden

institution since 1885.

"It's about creating a community feeling and understanding that the club is not a standalone (entity) by itself. The entire community and the club should benefit from each other. There are still so many opportunities for local businesses, local community groups, local organisations, and even national organisations to work with the MSA for the benefit of both."

Kamat said for the club to become the community's go-to facility and leading venue, and to cater for all ages and offer more services and opportunities, then his modernisation strategy needed

to continue under a new leader. And Kamat would play a role in deciding his successor, being part of the selection panel.

Apart from having some financial nous, Kamat said the new GM needed people skills to succeed.

"You have to be able to relate to all people of all ages and backgrounds in this role," he said. "That's so important."

The new GM would also join a club heading in the right direction thanks to Kamat's astute stewardship after the financial troubles from two years ago when there were fears the organisation could collapse. The club faced a reported \$2 million budget blowout from an extensive rebuild project, which included the establishment of the Noble 600 restaurant that then lost about \$30,000 a month from opening in June 2021. There were also worries

the club would be hit with a hefty Inland Revenue Department tax bill, all of which saw its executive committee dumped in a special general meeting.

Since then, and with Kamat's arrival, things had notably turned around. Noble 600 was now managed in a successful lease arrangement by established restaurateurs Tony Potts and Wendy Ritchie of Ashburton's Speight's Ale House fame, while Kamat believed there would be no five figure IRD penalty fee to pay.

"We have not been invoiced with any payment and I expect to have all that cleared up in a few days," he said.

The club's membership had also continued to improve under his reign with 3300 now registered, while the introduction of the Xero online accounting software programme and a new technology cash sorting and counting system

had modernised its trading and money flow practices.

Unfortunately, Kamat was now leaving just as some momentum had been gained. He acknowledged that could be unsettling for staff and the club, but said systems were in place to ensure a smooth transition and ongoing success.

But he felt that the ultimate reward would be the transformation of the club into a true community facility, which would require a complete refresh and makeover of its image to appeal to wider audiences, and external expertise to drive that strategy.

"I also really hope that, in the next couple of years, we can get at least 5000-plus members," he said.

"But to do that we have to become a community hub. We have to change."

Editorial: From exclusive to inclusive MSA, page 17.