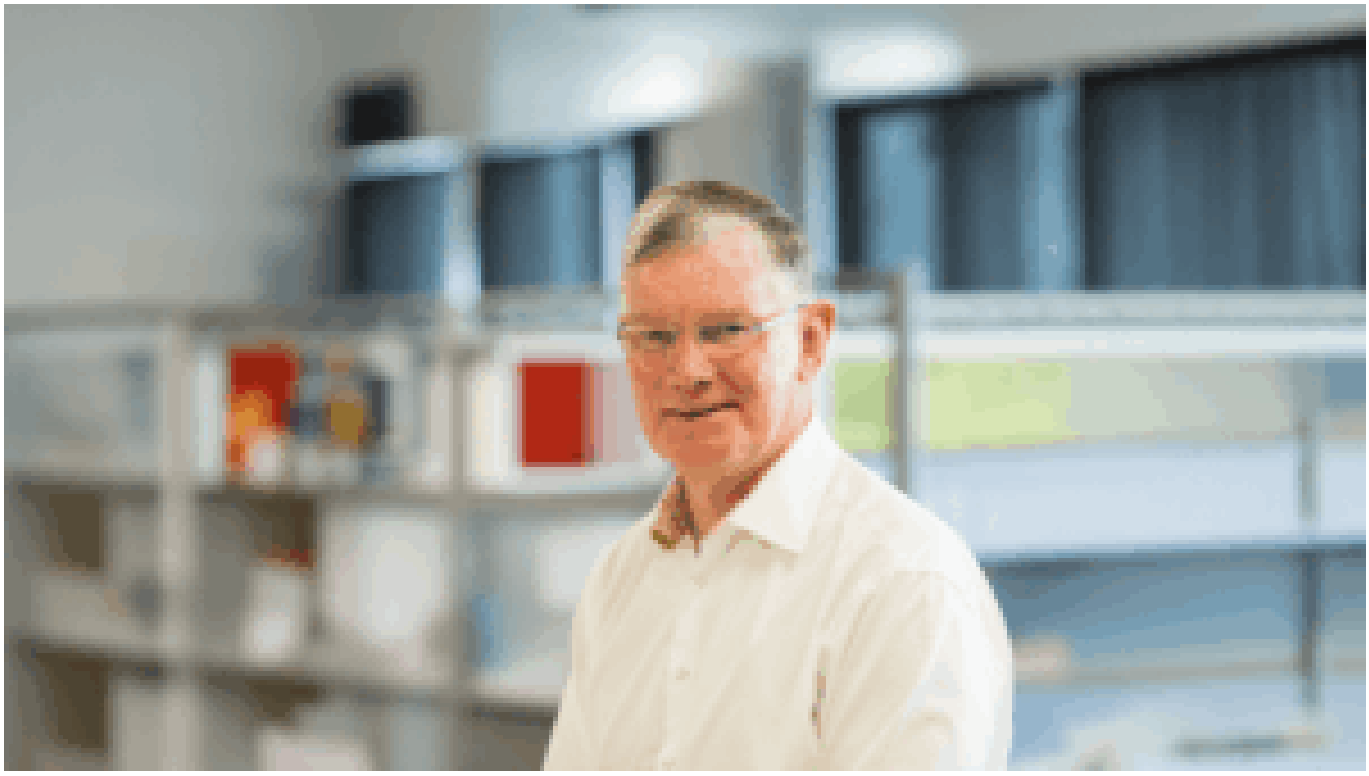


Michael Cooney Retires After Nearly 50 Years Service

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After a stellar career at Tauranga law firm Cooney Lees Morgan (a leading Bay of Plenty law firm founded 100 years ago by his grandfather), Michael has now officially retired.

During that time he has served as Tauranga's Coroner, overseen the establishment of Aquinas College, and chaired Tauranga Energy Consumer Trust (TECT) which provided pivotal funding for Waipuna Hospice, Trustpower Arena, Baywave Aquatic and Leisure Centre and the TECT All Terrain Park, among other high-profile community assets.

“Whatever Michael decides to turn his mind to, he gives it 100 per cent, excelling at whatever it is, whether it be work, community or family matters,” explains his cousin and law firm Partner Owen Cooney.

In recognition of Michael’s immense service to the community, he was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2013 and was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship by Rotary International.

“The partners of Cooney Lees Morgan have always made strong contributions to our community,” Owen says. “Michael’s grandfather, HO Cooney, had a hand in establishing the Port of Tauranga, and Lionel Lees was involved in the power generation scheme which was the forerunner of Trustpower. Our firm’s other name Partner, Ed Morgan, earned an MBE for championing Maori interests. He helped set up the Tauranga Moana Maori Trust Board, was involved in the return of Mt Taranaki and helped iwi obtain some control of the Whanganui River.

“Michael is right up there in terms of his massive contribution to the community and has really set the bar very high for the younger partners of Cooney Lees Morgan to step up to.”

Owen says a love of the law, strong work ethic and a commitment to helping others seem to be traits that run in the Cooney family. “The old Irish blood is in there, that determination and pioneering spirit. But Michael has certainly taken that to the next level.”

After graduating from Auckland University and being admitted to the Bar in 1966, Michael moved home to Tauranga to join the family firm in 1970 alongside his father, uncle and brother. He became a Partner two years’ later. Property and contract law became his areas of expertise, and current CLM Partner Sally Powdrell says Michael is known as an astute and tough negotiator who fights hard to advance his clients’ best interests.

“He has been a real devotee of the law,” Sally says. “He has always been respected by the legal community both locally and nationally as a lawyer of high standing.

“The biggest compliment, really, now that he is retiring, is that the transition of his client base to others in the law firm has been quite a major undertaking. He has acted for two or three generations of many families and his client base is almost a law practice in its own right.”

Owen says it is particularly fitting that Michael chose to retire on 1st June. “He has always had a large number of dairy farming clients, and of course, 1st June is what is known as Gypsy Day. I recall as a younger Partner back in the day, that Michael would be up to his ears in dairy farm settlements come 1st June, and it was always a very big part of our firm’s business at that time of year.”

While Michael has played an immense leadership role within the firm for many decades, it is his work in the community that has undoubtedly had the greatest impact. He is a self-proclaimed ‘passionate Bay boy’ and has served in many high-profile roles, including 13 years as chairman of TECT, where he oversaw the distribution of millions of dollars to fund community projects, including sponsorship of the Trustpower TECT Rescue Helicopter and Tauranga Coastguard’s rescue vessel.

For 30 years, he presided over thousands of inquests as Tauranga’s Coroner and was a founding member of the Life Education Trust in the Western Bay of Plenty in 1987, for which he was later awarded life membership.

However, he counts his role in helping to establish Tauranga’s Aquinas College among his most satisfying contributions. “The opportunity to work with young people and advance their careers is a wonderful thing to take part in,” he said at the time. He went on to serve as a Board of Trustees member at Aquinas and Tauranga’s St Mary’s Catholic School, and acted as solicitor to the Bishop for the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton.

Other notable achievements include serving as a Director of Trustpower for 12 years and Chairman of Equality Bay of Plenty – a charitable trust offering support for people with disabilities. The keen sportsman also managed to squeeze in many years of coaching junior netball and tennis.

The man himself is looking forward to the next phase in life, and plans to travel to Ireland with his wife, Sandra, to re-trace the Cooney family’s roots.

“I feel that the business is in good hands, and I am confident that my clients will continue to be well looked after following my retirement,” Michael says.

Former CLM Partner and current consultant, Peter Washer, says he and his colleagues have long admired Michael’s vision and commitment to drive Tauranga’s community forward, and they are sure many more adventures await him in retirement.

“Michael’s departure is the end of an era for our firm, and we would like to sincerely thank him for his leadership and the enormous contribution he has made to our entire community throughout his career.”